



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA



University of Zagreb



Impressions about the

8th Student Symposium: Research Topics and Intercultural Learning in the International Context

June 15th – 25th 2018

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Impressions about the symposium

This symposium was extraordinarily valuable in terms of promoting and understanding intercultural values. The structure of the symposium facilitated learning about interdisciplinary research being conducted in different locations within the United States and Croatia.

Which values are part of the 8th Symposium

Many values are represented in the 8th Symposium, including the value of intercultural exchange of information and the development of intercultural relationships. The symposium was very well organized to include scientific presentations and opportunities for meaningful dialogue with small and large groups. Many of the presentations shared research that emphasized values of community psychology and social justice, addressing social problems, and improving the health and well-being of people. The importance of collaboration was highlighted, as well as using technology and science to improve services for people around the world. In addition, there were opportunities to engage in experiential learning that facilitated helping the community. For example, we volunteered briefly with the Food Bank – Social Supermarket – in which we were able to stock shelves with supplies, and we organized three blankets for children in South Africa through the “Knit a Square” project. We also visited a kindergarten and technology park to learn more about life in Croatia. We sincerely thank Associate Professor Violeta Vidaček-Hainš, Nina Begičević Ređep, Vice-dean for Scientific Research and International Cooperation, and Izabela Oletić Tušek, FOI International Relations Office for their coordination and hosting of this important event.

Is the symposium related to the transfer of knowledge or transfer of skills?

The symposium focuses on transfer of knowledge yet it also facilitates skill development. It provides a rich opportunity to learn about different cultures, disciplines, and research. Students were able to develop skills through preparing for and delivering presentations to people from different disciplines, as well as interacting with people with different cultural heritages. One’s worldview is enhanced by learning about different cultures, and disciplinary knowledge is enhanced by learning about different perspectives.

What do students exactly exchange during the symposium?

Students are involved in many ways in the symposium. First, they give research presentations that they have prepared over a period of several months; preparing for and delivering these presentations gives them experience and skills that help them develop as young professionals. Second, students learn about others’ research through listening and participating in sessions. Third, students are building relationships with other students and with faculty from both the United States and Croatia. These professional networks are invaluable in preparing students to enter the global workforce.

When do you start with the preparation process?

As a faculty presenter and mentor, my preparation for the symposium began in April. Participation in the symposium was based on the match between McNair Scholar students and faculty mentors. Our McNair Scholar students apply for and participate in many different summer research experiences, and the process of matching begins in February and decisions are made in March. Once it is determined where our McNair Scholar students will conduct their research, selection and planning for participating in symposium begins. My preparation for the symposium involved identifying the specific project goals that would be a good fit with my McNair Scholar student, creating a plan regarding conducting the project, integrating the McNair Scholar into my research team of undergraduate and graduate students, meeting weekly to discuss the project, collaborating on drafting the presentation, providing feedback on each draft, and discussing roles in delivering the content.

**Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar, Professor and Head, Department of Occupational Therapy, Affiliate Faculty, Department of Disability and Human Development and Department of Psychology.
University of Illinois at Chicago**



I enjoyed learning about FOI, student life, volunteer opportunities and research on technology and specifically, research on assistive devices for the blind. I think that this type of development has much potential for cross cultural collaborations between Croatia and the US. I also enjoyed interacting with FOI students and having them in the symposium. I was very impressed with the student government dedicated to supporting students and creating a social and learning climate supportive of students' wellbeing and adjustment to college. I truly enjoyed the visit to the food bank and learning about the efforts to provide needy families with food items.

Some of the values that I appreciated during the symposium included the value of social justice (food bank and quilts/squares that are sent to Africa), the values of cultural immersion (US. And Croatia), cooperative and reciprocal learning, and the value of the common good. I came to appreciate how Croatians reflect a life that is centered around the common good, community and personal harmony and wellbeing. They seem to truly enjoy being with other people, taking time to have a meal, enjoy nature and the outdoors and seem to enjoy a good quality of life. These values came clear not only during symposium--presentations about student life at FOI--but through my interactions with Croatians during the symposium and observations throughout the experience. I also appreciated Croatians love for music.

Throughout the experience in Croatia I came to appreciate the warm, hospitality, and friendliness of our Croatian hosts and in particular of Violeta.

To some degree, I think Symposium relates more to transfer of knowledge as we exchanged ideas and different research projects that have implications for both countries to learn from one another. There is a need to follow up and see what aspects of the learning experience can be transferred. There are implications for future research collaborations and for practice.

Students might have learned about life in FOI and in the city of Vrazdina, the value of volunteering in the community, the value of collaborative work and team work.

Preparation process started in May. I also conducted a training to students on cultural immersion and cultural relevance and had the opportunity to meet several times with one of the US students (Grisel Lopez) before the trip.

**Elliot Vittes, Ph.D. Executive Vice Chancellor, Palmetto College,
University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208**



The Symposium is a great opportunity for students to expand their understanding of cultures and appreciate the skills, customs, wisdom, and friendliness of the Croatian educational system and people.

The bringing together of two groups of students from the United States and students from FOI expanded international understanding and the potential for international cooperation and research. The faculty and staff also made connections that will expand and endure.

Knowledge and skills are not mutually exclusive. As your skill as a learner increases, your capacity to increase knowledge increases. Interpersonal skills of communication and continued contact lead to greater and more meaningful knowledge. Knowledge of cultures broadens your ability to apply appropriate skills to any situation.

Knowledge about another culture and how to communicate across the world. They also exchange world views among themselves, both the tangible and intangible things about social existence and life in Croatia.

I think one prepares for the Symposium by being an active and interested student, whether in formal training earning a degree or as a faculty member who is still learning about the world. I met a professor working on apps for improving student performance, and my background in the United States as an administrator allowed us to have an extended conversation about the usefulness of his application

**Fabricio Balcazar, Ph.D. Professor, Department of Disability &
Human Development, University of Illinois at Chicago**



This is a great opportunity to interact with the faculty and students at FOI, learn from each other's work and explore possibilities for future collaborations.

Values of the Symposium are mutual respect, engagement and collaboration. It provides opportunities for learning about the work that the participating teams are conducting at their respective institutions.

Students had an opportunity to share their research work and learn from the work being conducted at the other research teams. We started with preparations about a month before coming to FOI



Prof Enrique Mu, Carlow University Pittsburg

The proper combination of research topics with inter-cultural experiences allowed my students to learn beyond academics, make new friends and learn about a different way of living. In my case, this trip allowed me not only to meet again my FOI friends and colleagues but also to bond more closely with my students and getting to know them much better.

Sarah Snyder (Carlow's MBA student):

In June 2018, two of my classmates, our professor and myself had the privilege of presenting our graduate research for FOI at the University of Zagreb. The faculty and students of FOI were so warm and welcoming! Not only did we thoroughly enjoy the symposium, but we absolutely fell in love with the country and its people over the course of our travels. The sites, food and culture were truly incredible. We didn't want to leave. This was a trip that we will never forget and that we are eternally grateful for; all thanks to our friends at FOI.