

Conference Feature

Transylvanian International Conference in Public Administration

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In early November, Yuliya Brel, Benjamin Chun, Cristina Stanica, Dr. Arno Loessner and Director Maria Aristigueta travelled to Babes-Bolyai University (BBU) in Cluj-Napoca, Romania to attend the 2017 Annual Transylvanian International Conference in Public Administration hosted by the Department of Public Administration and Management, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communications Studies at BBU. The main goal of the conference was to bring together public administration academics, researchers and practitioners from around the world to create a platform on which they could exchange ideas, share best practices and develop networking opportunities for future teaching and research collaborations.

In addition to the University of Delaware, there were representatives from several other universities around the globe, including Belgium, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, the UK, Romania, Germany, Hungary, Austria, China, as well as several universities from across the United States.

The itinerary consisted of five themed panels with presentations given throughout the three-day conference on topics related to Innovation and Technology as drivers for Community Development; Strategic Planning, Management and Communication in Governance; Public Administration Education; Public Law & Public Health.

The main purpose of our presentation, under the Public Administration Education panel, was to emphasize the importance of exposing students to collaborative study abroad programs like the one conducted between the University of Delaware and Babes-Bolyai University. This model paired UD and BBU students in teams of two or three to work together on a research project. The projects drew upon the concept of the Engaged University, which emphasizes the public role of research universities in “addressing emerging social needs and priorities and engaging the resources of the university in the communities it serves” (Rich, 2013, p. 446). Students conducted interviews, collected data, wrote a brief research paper, and presented preliminary findings, conclusions, and recommendations on topics of mutual interest such as public health, public education,

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economic and technological advancements, and social development of minorities, among others.

The goal of our presentation was to show that cross-cultural learning is essential to public administration education because graduate students in public policy must learn about other environments in order to understand and adopt alternative perspectives. Conference attendees from UD and our partners from BBU spoke about our collaborative research experiences and what we gained from participating in such a program. We also spoke about the challenges of interacting with students and interviewees whose primary language and culture were different from our own.

These challenges however, proved to be valuable lessons for us and our Romanian partners as we learnt to navigate an increasingly global community. It was also incredibly important to share our experiences at this conference so that other universities could learn and ask questions about this unique model that UD and BBU have been strengthening for over a decade.

This program was also unique in that it required us as public policy/administration students to act as advisors to an entity; whether it was the university, local/national governments, or businesses. It required us as academics to step out of our comfort zone and step into the role of a practitioner to assess and provide detailed recommendations on topics we weren't necessarily familiar with beforehand, in a short period of time. This afforded all participants a unique learning experience that simply could not be replicated in a classroom setting.

We believe this model of study abroad has the potential to increase the scope and range of engagement at the global level, not only for graduate students at UD and BBU, but at other universities around the world.

References

- Rich, D. (2013). The Challenging Political Economy of Higher Education: Public Investments and University Strategies. *Journal of Public Administration*, 48(3), pp. 429-454.