

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING IN POST-WAR CROATIA: CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

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Building on a strong partnership with University of Zagreb, Department of Social Work, and a local community organization serving a post-war community in the Osijek and Vukovar region, in 2011, the Indiana University School of Social Work developed an international service-learning course that aims at strengthening social work students' competencies to work with post-war communities. This study examines learning outcomes of a five-year study abroad experience in post-war Croatia.

All 49 students who completed the International Service-Learning course in the past five years were emailed and invited to participate in this study. Drawing on a data set of 30 student respondents to a survey, and one focus-group of six students, the study examines key learning outcomes gained through participation in the program. For purposes of this study, four subscales were developed: (1) critical thinking/academic development, (2) cultural competence, (3) personal and leadership developments, and (4) civic participation/global mindfulness. Average scores for each subscale were calculated. The results show substantial improvement in learning outcomes as a result of taking the course in all subscales, especially in cultural competence (Mean=4.48, SD=0.55) and global mindfulness (Mean=4.38, SD=0.60). More specifically, through focus group data, we learn that international service-learning experiences become a powerful learning platform that goes beyond teaching students professional competencies, shaping their leadership skills, as well as positively influencing their roles as agents of change in their own communities. Preliminary results indicate that, through living in a post-war community even for a short time, and working with local Croatian organizations, students begin to confront their own realities and prejudicial notions, and become more inclusive of different views that question their personal assumptions, and prepare them to interact with refugees in Indiana and other parts of the world. More importantly, students appear to begin shaping a sense of pluralism, question their upbringing, and build on the ability to work in dissonant and unequal environments. The implications for practice, teaching and research are also explored.

KEYWORDS: service-learning, study abroad, post-war community practice, global mindfulness, macro-practice

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