



SUMMER SCHOOL AS A MODERN WAY OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

Today, in the age of globalization and rapidly developing information technologies the education market is becoming more and more competitive. The universities all over the world are looking for more effective forms of promoting their educational institutions on an international level. Among the increasingly popular international educational projects are summer schools. They are organized to encourage the exchange of teaching and learning experience, development of strategies for cooperation, career advancement, or personal enrichment. Summer school programs make it possible to simulate the scientific community by creating training courses on the topical issues and involving renowned professors and experts from famous universities worldwide. The characteristic feature of summer school classes is the wide use of active methods and creative techniques, including group projects, excursions, discussions, interactive lectures and case studies. National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine has organized an International Summer School on the theme "Achievements and Applications of Environmental and Life Sciences for Sustainable

Development". The program includes the basic course Knowledge for Sustainable Development of Society for degree credit, improving skills of English for specific purposes and acquaintance with historical and centuries-old cultural heritage of western Ukraine. The results of the survey held among the participants (50% of whom were foreign students and lecturers) have demonstrated the main advantages of the International Summer School: working in international student teams, developing skills in setting and achieving common goals, making the best use of the latest research results and foreign experience in the field, as well as the opportunity to get closer to the culture and customs of Ukraine. By the results of their studies the participants receive certificates with a certain number of ECTS credits. Thus, organization of international summer school is a challenging area of university education development, and its implementation and content enhancement attracts talented students to research, promotes internationalization of education and practical realization of the principles of creating common educational space and the university concept of lifelong learning.

Keywords: international summer schools, university, training courses.

INTRODUCTION

Today, international summer schools are becoming increasingly popular as one of the most effective forms of promoting educational institutions on an international level, exchange of teaching and learning experience, development of strategies for cooperation, career advancement, or personal enrichment. Summer school programs make it possible to simulate the scientific community by creating training courses on the topical issues and involving renowned professors and experts from all over the world. The characteristic feature of summer school classes is the wide use of active methods and techniques, including group projects, excursions, discussions, interactive lectures and case studies. In July 2015, following the best world practices in organization of such events, National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine launched an International Summer School on the theme "Achievements and Applications of Environmental and Life Sciences for Sustainable

Development". The program includes: the basic course Knowledge for Sustainable Development of Society for degree credit; English for specific purposes with focus on improving communication skills; acquaintance with historical and centuries-old cultural heritage of western Ukraine as well as its picturesque landscapes.

The participants of Summer school were students and lecturers from the Agricultural Universities of Ukraine and Poland. A small town of Zalischyky in Western Ukraine was chosen as a venue for Summer school. The region is known for its unique natural conditions and local colour. During the ten-day period the participants had a really busy schedule: attended lectures given by Polish and Ukrainian professors, were involved in workshop activities, visited fascinating places of interest in the region, took part in an exciting cultural program. The main course on sustainable development covered a variety of current issues as: production of organic products, designing of water saving engineering systems, solving the problems of soil fertility conservation. The workshop tutors provided the course participants with methods of creating complex strategy of involving agricultural enterprises into the global system of sustainable development. Special attention was focused on development of rural areas and niche market. Besides, the participants were introduced to the American techniques of creating the PowerPoint presentations. The workshops were led by tutors who did five-month internship in the faculty exchange program USDA-2014 in the Department of Agricultural and Recourse Economics of the College of Agricultural Sciences, Colorado State University, USA. The learning outcome was the development of their training course Knowledge for sustainable development of society which they successfully implemented in the Summer school course. Working and studying closely together, students learnt to work in an international environment, which is essential for a researcher in an increasingly globalized world.

English as the main language of international communication was chosen as the language of instruction in the Summer School. Since it was not native to most participants, the program of summer school included the course of English for specific purposes. The English course focused on improving students' English language skills by participation in thematic discussions, international team-working and presentation of group projects. The course

participants developed communication skills in presenting the results of their research and discussing the important issues using professional business terminology.

The aim of the project International Summer School 2015 was not just to study. An extensive cultural program was elaborated to involve every participant into the activities according to their interests. This part of summer school program included guide tours, outings, excursions provided by local art and culture experts.

Finally participants of the 1st International Summer School presented their group projects of case-studies based on real US farms data. Each group developed the strategy of sustainable development of an enterprise according to the structure "ecology, society and business" and presented their view on how to solve the major problems that modern agricultural enterprises of different specialization and level of development currently face. Four international groups included participants from different universities Poland and Ukraine. The groups presented their strategic vision for the development of dairy and vegetable oriented farms as well as a highly specialized enterprise engaged in growing lavender. The final product of the training and practical activities was presented in English at the general meeting. The participants demonstrated a high level of understanding the significance of sustainable development in the key aspects: economic, social, and environmental, as well as professional English language skills and effective team-working. By the results of their studies the participants receive certificates with a certain number of ECTS credits.

METHOD

The main goal of the International Summer School was to form social environmental awareness of future professionals through dissemination of knowledge in order to ensure the sustainable development of the society, to prognosticate and prevent climate change. Accordingly, the main objectives were: to provide students with an opportunity to develop the system of competences for sustainable development of humankind and prevention of climate change; development of partner and friendly contacts with foreign colleagues; practicing English speaking skills in realistic professional and social situations; exploring the historical and cultural heritage and unique natural conditions of the western region of Ukraine in the case study of Zalischyky, Ternopil region.

The main methods that were applied to assess and analyze the effectiveness of the International Summer School project were:

- walk and talk - a 'go along method' which involves both walking and talking. This method was particularly useful for evaluating location based projects or activities, such as festival of amateur art activities or exhibition of handicrafts;
- observations - useful for studying and gathering information on an activity (what happens, what someone does or how they behave). The observation really helped to see what people really do, rather than what they say they do;
- focus groups - useful for organized group discussion in order to understand the views of everyone and their experiences of a project.

Ideally, throughout the life of the project, workshops were an excellent, interactive way to understand different peoples' opinions and attitudes. They provided participants with the chance to challenge the agenda set by the project leader, raise new issues and/or ask questions back. These creative methods were used by all teams involved in the project and became more attractive while ensuring the focus for discussion.

In order to gather the necessary information for a detailed analysis of the project we developed a special assessment form (Fig 1) and carried out a survey.

Figure 1. International Summer School Questionnaire

Evaluation form was conventionally divided into several parts: evaluation of the course contents, evaluation of tutors' professional skills, summer school facilities and provision of the necessary equipment and materials, and the general opinion of every participant on the overall organization of Summer School.

FINDINGS

Our survey results indicate that the majority of participants (59%) rated of the Project with highly marks and 34 % of participants rated the Project with good marks (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. The results of the survey of the International Summer School participants

In addition, the results of the survey held among the participants (50% of whom were foreign students and lecturers) have demonstrated the main advantages of the International Summer School: working in international student teams, developing skills in setting and achieving common goals, making the best use of the latest research results and foreign experience in the field, as well as the opportunity to get closer to the culture and customs of Ukraine.

As a follow-up, we have developed the synthesis, methods and recommendations to be subsequently used in the activities of the international summer school, namely:

- to increase the hours of the English language course;
- to deepen the research into the field of sustainable development through the use of statistic information about the research objects for building the probable strategy of development;
- to develop additional courses for various professions;
- to expand the practical aspect of research;
- to attract more Ukrainian and foreign participants and lecturers;
- to expand the boundaries of international cooperation in order to implement the future Summer School projects.

DISCUSSION

1. The role and value of higher education has been significantly increased in the 21st century. Higher education is believed to be the strategic commodity and the strength of the country, as it defines the ability of the society to respond to changes and ensure its sustainable functioning and flourishing in the globalized world of today. There are two directions in the development of the European educational space - internationalization of higher education and improvement of its quality [De Wit, 2010].

2. Accordingly, universities seek to strengthen international cooperation by offering attractive training programs combined with modern forms of education that meet the needs of international students. The main criteria of the internationalization of educational process at university include: the number of training programs in a foreign language; the number of visiting professors from abroad; the percentage of foreign students enrolled in exchange programs in relation to the total number of students of the institution; the number of domestic students who visited foreign universities as part of exchange programs [Kahanec, 2011]. However, the basic tools of internationalization of higher education are as follows: mobility - the exchange of students and lecturers between universities for short-term training or enrollment of students for full-time training; educational projects - creation of consortia with common interests (joint training programs); networking - thematic communities with similar interests at universities in Europe and the world. Thus, the education market is beginning to stimulate international and national educational systems as well as universities themselves to work out modern concepts and ways of systematic improvement of the quality of education and creating competitive advantage in the global world. Furthermore, an important objective of the internationalization of higher education is the effect of "cultural diplomacy", i.e. establishing firm personal relationships and professional contacts in the process of joint training. Such contacts make it possible for students with different cultural background to get acquainted with new ways of thinking and decision-making, as well as to address the problems from different points of view.

3. Based on the above reasoning, it is quite justifiable that a lot of universities nowadays introduce the practice of short summer (or winter) training courses (mainly in vacation time), generally known as summer (winter) school. The organizers of summer schools offer

attractive educational programs using up-to-date forms and methods of education combined with active recreation and leisure which meets the demands of both domestic and foreign students.

We believe that improvement of training programs can be achieved by a guarantor being entitled the right to a particular course and having the adequate liability. It is the coordinators of summer schools who have got such an opportunity. They include the most relevant topics into the training programs, suggest ambiguous issues for discussions, and involve into teaching activities the outstanding scholars proficient in their field and capable of conveying the knowledge to the course participants using various innovative methods.

CONCLUSION

Thus, organization of international summer school is a challenging area in the development of university education. The implementation of such projects and their content enhancement attracts talented students to research, promotes internationalization of education and practical realization of the principles of creating common educational space and the university concept of lifelong learning. The main purpose of further internationalization of European universities is the attractiveness of the European region for students, researchers and teachers from all over the world. And one of the ways to solve this objective is organization and implementation of international educational and cultural projects, including summer schools.

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