

Instructionally Related Activities Report Form

SPONSOR: Melissa Soenke
PROGRAM/DEPARTMENT: Psychology
ACTIVITY TITLE: International Symposium on Resilience Research, Mainz, Germany
DATE (S) OF ACTIVITY: September 28-30, 2016

Please submit via email to the IRA Coordinator along with any supporting documentation at david.daniels@csuci.edu within 30 days after the activity. Thank you for your commitment to engaging our students!

A. ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- (1) PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY;
- (2) HOW DID THE ACTIVITY RELATE TO A COURSE(S) AND/OR LEARNING OBJECTIVES?
- (3) WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE STRENGTHS OF THE ACTIVITY?
- (4) WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE/WERE THE ACTIVITY'S WEAKNESSES?
- (5) HOW WOULD YOU IMPROVE THIS ACTIVITY FOR NEXT TIME?
- (6) WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THE PROCESS?
- (7) WHAT ARE STUDENT RESPONSES TO THE ACTIVITY? ATTACH STUDENT EVALUATIONS OR ASSESSMENTS (IN ACCORDANCE WITH FERPA RESTRICTIONS YOU MUST REMOVE ALL PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE STUDENT INFORMATION)
- 8) GIVE A SUMMARY OF EXPENSES FOR THE ACTIVITY.

B. ATTENDEE LIST- SUPPORTING DOCUMENT:

In addition to the report form, *in a separate document*, attach to your email a list of attendees complete with each student major and grade level. This for IRA Committee reference only and will not be published on the IRA website. Include your name and the title of your IRA activity on the document.

C. IMAGES FROM ACTIVITY:

Finally, attach to your email up to 6 images demonstrating student participation (under 2 MB total) with captions/titles. Please attach these photos in .JPEG format directly to email. Thank you!

(1) PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY

Funding for this activity allowed two psychology students to attend the 2nd Annual International Symposium on Resilience Research in Mainz, Germany from September 28-30, 2016. Students arrived in Frankfurt and traveled to Mainz on September 27. We attended all three days of the conference, organized by the German Resilience Center (Deutsches Resilienz-Zentrum, DRZ) and International Resilience Alliance in collaboration with the Rhine-Main Neuroscience Network. Conference presentations were given by some of the leading psychologists and neuroscientists in the field and were centered upon discussion of the latest developments in human and animal resiliency research, with particular emphasis on exploring new research methods. For example, presentations discussed specific neural pathways and genes associated with resiliency in rats and mice, neural pathways associated with learned helplessness in rats, neurotransmitters and genes associated with resiliency and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in humans, and even resiliency training currently being conducted with NASA astronauts. The conference offered students an opportunity to engage in discussion with the world's leading resilience researchers on topics related to the genetic, endocrine, neurological, and cognitive indices of stress and resilience. Given the range of topics and approaches, students were able to see connections to material they were learning in their other psychology courses, specifically Research Methods, Behavioral Neuroscience, and Learning, Cognition and Behavior.

Both students enjoyed the conference presentations tremendously and were able to connect the topics being discussed back to the research and coursework for their psychology courses at CI. Although the plan was to have students enrolled in PSY 490: Psychology of Stress and Coping and PSY 494: Independent research in Psychology, the Stress and Coping course for Fall was not able to meet because of low enrollment, so both students were enrolled in independent research related to stress, coping, and resiliency in the context of grief and loss. Although the PSY 490 course did not meet in Fall 2016 as planned, the students who attended the conference put together a PowerPoint presentation on resiliency based on the presentations they attended at the conference that I was able to use when I taught the course this Spring. They were also able to use the information learned at the conference to enhance an ongoing research project that they both worked extensively on that uses grief blogs to explore coping with the death of someone close. Results from this project were presented at the SAGE Student Research Conference held May 2017.

In addition to the learning that took place during the conference, students also reported learning a lot from their experience in Mainz, Germany. For both students this was their first trip to Europe (for one the first trip outside of the US) and they reported enjoying the experience immensely. During down time between conference activities we enjoyed



California State
University

**INSTRUCTIONALLY
RELATED
ACTIVITIES**

C H A N N E L

eating meals together at local restaurants, walking through the city, and visiting historical sites and museums including the Gutenberg museum. Johannes Gutenberg is one of Mainz's most famous citizens and the Gutenberg museum explores the history and workings of his invention, the printing press. The museum also houses two original Gutenberg Bibles. We all learned a lot about the history of the city, a history that itself reflects the topics of resiliency that the week was focused around. Much of the city was destroyed by bombing during World War II, but the resiliency of the region and its residents has allowed Mainz to maintain its prominence and prestige.

After the conference we had one full day before our flight back to Los Angeles. We decided to use this day to take a river cruise up the Rhine River and explore a medieval city and castle. The area of the Rhine that we traveled is designated a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. We were able to see what the area outside of the city of Frankfurt & Mainz are like. The river valley is lined with beautiful villages, vineyards, and historic castles. We stopped in Sankt Goar for lunch and to tour the Rheinfels Castle, built in the mid-1200s and the largest castle on the Rhine.

Below is a breakdown of the day-by-day activity itinerary

Monday September 26, 2016

11am – Roadrunner shuttle from campus to LAX

3:25pm – flight from LAX to Frankfurt

Tuesday September 27, 2016

11:20am – arrive in Frankfurt, Germany

Train to Mainz, check in at hotel

Afternoon/Evening - Free time

Wednesday, September 28, 2016

9:30am – 7pm conference presentations (lunch included)

Dinner together after conference

Thursday, September 29, 2016

9am – 5:30pm conference presentations (lunch included)

Dinner together after conference

Friday, September 30, 2016

9:30am – 1pm conference presentations

Afternoon – lunch, city tour, and Gutenberg Museum, dinner together

Saturday, October 1, 2016

Köln-Düsseldorfer river cruise from Mainz, Germany to Sankt Goar and back with lunch in Sankt Goar and tour of Rheinfels Castle (cost of river cruise not covered by IRA funds)

Sunday, October 2, 2016

Morning check out and train to Frankfurt

2:05pm – flight from Frankfurt to LAX

4:40pm – arrive in LAX

Roadrunner shuttle back to campus



(2) HOW DID THE ACTIVITY RELATE TO A COURSE(S) AND/OR LEARNING OBJECTIVES?

The specific learning outcomes the conference helped students fulfill are:

- 1) Demonstrating an understanding of fundamental theories and research methods that characterize the field of stress and coping research.
- 2) Demonstrating an ability to read, understand, and critically review current literature from psychological journals through discussion and written assignments.
- 3) Using measurement tools to design and conduct research into topics related to stress and coping.

Additionally, the conference helped students achieve the following learning outcomes for the psychology major:

- 1) Students should understand and be able to use major research methods in psychology, including design, data analysis and interpretation.
- 2) Students should use and respect skeptical inquiry, critical thinking, and the scientific approach to understanding behavior.
- 3) Students should be able to express themselves effectively in written and oral communication.

By attending conference presentations, students were able to hear firsthand accounts from researchers conducting research on resiliency. Presenters walked attendees through the background, methods, and results for their individual research projects. The conference was designed to represent a wide range of cutting edge research techniques and students were given access to the latest methods in both human and animal resiliency research. For example, presentations explored 1) methods for conducting neuroscience research investigating neural pathways, neurotransmitters, and brain regions associated with resiliency, 2) methods for behaviorally assessing learned helplessness and resiliency in animals and humans, 3) methods for locating genes associated with risk factors for PTSD and resiliency, and 4) applications for treatment of stress and resiliency training. Through discussion at the conference and among ourselves during meals and down-time, students critically evaluated the research being presented. In particular, we discussed the appropriateness of using animal models for understanding resiliency in humans and ways in which the research presented at the conference could inform our own research on resiliency.

Upon our return to campus, students demonstrated their fulfillment of the learning objectives for this activity by applying what they learned during the conference to independent research and creating a PowerPoint presentation on resiliency using material from the conference presentations and our trip to be shared with students in my 490: Psychology of Stress and Coping course.

(3) WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE STRENGTHS OF THE ACTIVITY?



Attending this conference allowed students an opportunity to engage with the topics discussed in their coursework at a level similar to that which they will experience as graduate students in Psychology. Students were able to listen to presentations and discussion with leaders in the field of resiliency research. Professional conferences allow students to explore unique areas of psychology that they may want to pursue graduate studies in and even meet researchers they would like to work closely with in the future. One of the advantages of this conference in particular was the international scope of the researchers and topics discussed. Students gained confidence in speaking about research, developing their own research ideas, and even in navigating another country and culture in traveling abroad. Students reported that their experience abroad in itself helped them to feel like they could travel on their own and made them excited to return to Europe in the future.

(4) WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE/WERE THE ACTIVITY'S WEAKNESSES?

There were a couple of limitations outside of our control for this conference that will help me to think about improving the experience in the future. First, it was unfortunate and unexpected that PSY 490: Psychology of Stress and Coping was under-enrolled and ultimately cancelled in the Fall. Both students were able to enroll in PSY 494: Independent Research in Psychology, but some of the activities planned for when students returned to campus (like presenting what they learned during the conference to classmates) was made more difficult because the conference wasn't occurring in the context of this course.

Second, I was hoping that students might submit and present posters on their own research during the conference. The deadline for submitting poster presentations was early in the summer, before students had decided that they were able to go to the conference. In the future, poster presentation submissions will be possible if more students from previous classes are able to attend. Because both students who attended the conference were relatively new to research, the timing didn't make it possible for them to present at the conference. They were able to work on research during the Fall that they completed in December. This research was part of a long term, ongoing research project, and results were presented at the SAGE Student Research conference, but in the future I hope that students attending this conference will present research in Germany as part of the experience.

(5) HOW WOULD YOU IMPROVE THIS ACTIVITY FOR NEXT TIME?

The main way in which I would like to improve this activity for the future will be to recruit students who have completed research so that they can present at the conference. The deadline for conference submissions comes during the summer, making it impossible for students just beginning research to participate. In recruiting students who have been working on research for a year and already have data collected and analyzed to present, students can make the most of their conference experience by presenting their own work, in addition to getting to attend all the exceptional professional talks.



I also think that students might benefit from more time outside of the conference in Mainz to explore the city's own resilient history in relation to the conference. A more formal program of museums and activities could help students more explicitly make these connections.

(6) WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THE PROCESS?

This conference was such a great opportunity for me and my students. This was my first time traveling to a conference with undergraduate students and my first time taking students abroad. We all had such a great trip, learned so much about resiliency, the city of Mainz and its surrounding region, and enjoyed the entire experience. I learned that although professional conferences can feel intimidating (even to us faculty researchers) undergraduate students get a lot from the presentations and discussions with leading researchers. By attending professional conferences, undergraduates can gain ideas and experience to prepare them for graduate school and connect with potential mentors and collaborators. They also gain confidence in their own role as researchers and psychologists.

(7) WHAT ARE STUDENT RESPONSES TO THE ACTIVITY? ATTACH STUDENT EVALUATIONS OR ASSESSMENTS (IN ACCORDANCE WITH FERPA RESTRICTIONS YOU MUST REMOVE ALL PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE STUDENT INFORMATION)

Because only two students attended this activity, it was difficult to solicit anonymous and critical survey feedback about the activity and semester long participation in research. Both students reported enjoying the conference, learning a lot from the talks and discussions, and easily integrated their new knowledge into their psychology course work and independent research. Additionally, both students reported that the thing they valued most about the experience was the opportunity to travel to Germany and explore Mainz. They were surprised by how easy it was to navigate a different culture and were excited to plan trips to Europe in the future.

(8) GIVE A SUMMARY OF EXPENSES FOR THE ACTIVITY.

Conference registration: \$127.00

Flight from LAX to Frankfurt International: $\$2009.06 \times 2 = \4018.12

Roadrunner shuttle from campus to LAX and back: \$158.80

Hotel Room in Mainz (5 nights): \$1,341.79

Meals: \$306.34

Train from Frankfurt Airport to Mainz and back and taxi to hotel: \$32.05



California State
University

**INSTRUCTIONALLY
RELATED
ACTIVITIES**

C H A N N E L
I S L A N D S

Total cost: \$5984.12

*IRA funding was only used to fund student travel and expenses, faculty travel and expenses was funded through other funds.

**B. ON SEPARATE DOCUMENT, PLEASE ATTACH ATTENDEE LIST
(PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFO REMOVED)**

**C. PLEASE INCLUDE UP TO 6 IMAGES AS ATTACHMENTS TO YOUR
SUBMISSION**

Attendees for IRA #802: International Symposium on Resilience Research, Mainz, Germany

Melissa Soenke – Assistant Professor of Psychology – Faculty Sponsor

Esmeralda Cenicerros – Senior Psychology Student

Markeita Hatter – Senior Psychology Student

