

USC CENTER ON PublicDiploacy

UN Officials Among Graduates of 2006 USC Summer Institute on Public Diplomacy

by Virginia Stratford and Andy Sternberg

Sixteen diplomats and foreign officials graduated from the inaugural USC Summer Institute: Advanced Training in Public Diplomacy. Funded in part by the United Nations Foundation, the Summer Institute offered an opportunity to critically study public diplomacy in a two-week intensive course. Summer Institute participants came from countries across the world including Belgium, Canada, China, France, Germany, Ghana, South Africa, Spain and Thailand. Half of the participants are senior officials at the United Nations Foundation and the rest work at governmental agencies, foreign embassies and non-governmental organizations.

“The students have brought a lot to the table to make [the Summer Institute] a much more engaged subject,” said Horst Rutsch, editor of the *UN Chronicle*, a quarterly publication of the Outreach Division of the United Nations Department of Public Information. “Discussion has been key and that comes from the others. A lot of people have experience with diplomacy and in that group effort to work together the concepts themselves have gained sharpness and definition.”

Three professors led class lecture and discussion on topics such as media and communication studies, international relations, history, and psychology. The purpose of the course was to provide mid-career professionals with public diplomacy training in theory and practice.

“I’m finally getting the tools to help me understand what I’ve been doing for the past ten years,” said Pamela Meidell, founder and director of The Atomic Mirror, a foundation that uses the creative arts to explain the consequences of the nuclear age and to advocate for a nuclear free world. “I came into the course really looking at cultural diplomacy because [...] the arts actually have the capacity to touch people’s hearts first then open their minds.”

The Summer Institute was initiated by Dr. Eytan Gilboa, professor of international communication at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, who is also a visiting professor at the USC Center on Public Diplomacy.

“I thought there was a great demand for public diplomacy training for officials in various government agencies, international organizations, and non-government organizations. There is no such program in the world today which puts the instruments together and is able to connect in a very efficient and useful way between knowledge and practice,” said Gilboa. “We are covering all the significant fields in public diplomacy from the traditional areas of international broadcasting and international exchanges through media diplomacy to the newest forms of public diplomacy such as e-image and cyber-public diplomacy.”

Every day for two weeks, the institute participants divided into groups to analyze the impact of the media on contemporary international issues. These simulated exercises were based upon the lecture material presented by each professor and real-life international affairs.

“We have built a unique methodology which allows participants to immediately apply theory and knowledge that they acquire in books and reading,” said Gilboa. “They can immediately apply that knowledge to real life international situations.”

Class lectures were supplemented by various readings and discussions addressing key issues in public diplomacy past, present and future.

“I think this information will come in useful for me because my department has pre-mandates with our coordination, advocacy, and policy,” said Stephanie Bunker, spokesperson for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “I think [the Summer Institute] has really expanded my notion of the kinds of activities, channels, and audiences that we could look at.”

Dr. Nicholas Cull, chair of the Master's program in Public Diplomacy at the USC Annenberg School for Communication, and Dr. Kelton Rhoads, adjunct professor of Communication and Psychology at the USC Annenberg School for Communication, also conducted the course.

All participants who attended class and actively participated received an official USC Public Diplomacy certificate. The Summer Institute will be held again next year in June 2007. For more information on the USC Summer Institute, please visit <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com/index.php/about/summer>