

## **ANALYZING STUDENT FEEDBACK FROM THE 2017 IAMU STUDENT FORUM: CHARTING PATHS TO THE FUTURE**

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### **Abstract**

The 2017 IAMU Student Forum, jointly organized by IAMU and IMO, was held at the IMO Headquarters in London, England from July 11-13. The student forum was a global event in every sense: 59 students from 52 IAMU member universities, hailing from 30 different countries participated in the event, making it a truly international and multicultural experience for everyone involved. During the student forum, participants had the opportunity to connect and collaborate with world-leading researchers, educators, and experts from the maritime industry while under the auspices of the IMO.

This paper summarizes the workshop outcomes of the 2017 IAMU Student Forum, and analyzes the post-workshop feedback that was collected from the student participants. While the student feedback was overwhelmingly positive for the event, indicating high levels of learning and knowledge gains, encouraging rates of participant satisfaction, and demonstrating signs of successful networking between the participants, there is still much to be learned from the general survey feedback and specific participant comments that will help guide future activities to be even more successful.

## **1 Introduction**

The 2017 IAMU Student Forum, jointly organized by IAMU and IMO, was held at the IMO Headquarters in London, England from July 11-13. The student forum was a global event in every sense: 59 students from 52 IAMU member universities, hailing from 30 different countries participated in the event, making it a truly international and multicultural experience for everyone involved. During the student forum, participants had the opportunity to connect and collaborate with world-leading

researchers, educators, and experts from the maritime industry while under the auspices of the IMO.

The IAMU Student Forum was held in conjunction with IMO's World Maritime Day 2017, which theme was "Connecting ships, ports, and people." This theme was chosen to highlight the vast and diverse components of the maritime industry, and the forum workshops were designed to mirror this concept using a student-centered methodology. The workshop part of the forum consisted of 5 different groups, each assigned with the difficult task of addressing complex issues currently facing the maritime industry. The 5 workshop topics were the "Attraction, retention, and attrition of seafarers," "Global maritime professionals," "Ports and shore-based business," "Quality training on board for the first license," and "Gender in the maritime industry." Over the course of the forum, students worked under the supervision of facilitators and co-facilitators, who were assigned to each group, to identify the underlying issues at the heart of each topic while also coming up with unique suggestions and solutions for dealing with them. This paper will provide an overview of the forum, and also analyze participant feedback on the forum to help identify any weak points of the event with the hopes of improvement for future activities.

## **2 IAMU Student Forum Overview**

One of the main goals of the 2017 IAMU Student Forum was to engage the student participants in a learner-centric approach that would encourage them to work interdependently on well-defined learning tasks. In order to facilitate cooperative learning, each participant was responsible for their own performance, verbalizing their ideas, and conducting their own work while the group facilitators guided the group-learning process, interacting with students in a personal, dialogic fashion rather than being overly directive or authoritative [1]. One of the main objectives for the group facilitators were not to focus on overt instruction, but rather on clarifying topic expectations, catalyzing dialogue, circulating actively among the group members, reinforcing positive instances of cooperative behavior, and issuing timely questions designed to promote elaboration and encourage higher-order thinking [2].

Another goal of the 2017 IAMU Student Forum was to overcome the serious disadvantages of traditional teacher-centric education by encouraging students to actively find links between theory and practice. Group work plays an important role in the development and maturity of personality while also playing an essential role in the process of socialization [3]. This student-centric learning approach was built into the workshop topics and discussion results as the students tried to understand not only the topics themselves, but also their underlying concepts, mechanisms, and tangential themes. Participants in the forum not only acquired the necessary understanding of the designated topics, but also developed generic competencies such as communication

skills, problem solving, and team work spirit, which are the hallmarks of task-based learning methodology [4].

In today's global economy, it is imperative to focus on international, multicultural and cross-cultural awareness. More and more students and lecturers are implementing new approaches to the concept of leadership in different cultural populations. However, many people lack the training to engage and fully comprehend the meaning of “multicultural coexistence” and “cross-cultural awareness” [5]. To compound matters, many gaps and problems exist within most of the educational systems throughout the world; outdated educational systems do not incorporate components pertaining to leadership training, international relations, and may have low levels of international cooperative research [5], let alone curricula objectives focusing on “multicultural coexistence” and “cross-cultural awareness.”

Due to the global nature of shipping and maritime business, cross-cultural awareness is a critical competence for maritime professionals. In order to address this need, the development and implementation of “a multicultural education movement” needs to be considered [6]. Recently, short-term programs like the Maritime International Exchange (MIX) have been created as a means for maritime education and training (MET) programs to integrate cross-cultural learning and other maritime competencies into a comprehensive learning module [7]. Other programs and events like the IAMU Student Forum have been created to address the growing need to train the international leaders of the future maritime industry. In July 2017, IAMU and IMO collaborated to host the second IAMU Student Forum, which was held at the IMO headquarters in London with the aim of providing students from various maritime universities around the globe with a chance to develop their cross-cultural awareness while focusing on a multitude of issues affecting the maritime industry today. While participating in the forum, the students were encouraged to openly express their own views and opinions, while also coming up with unique suggestions and solutions for dealing with each complex topic.

The theme of the Forum mirrored World Maritime Day 2017: Connecting ships, ports and people. The main objectives of the Forum were to broaden knowledge of the future maritime community by breaking down barriers and strengthening communications; to strengthen education in maritime fields with a particular focus on STCW-related degrees for Officers license, maritime business, logistics, and maritime engineering; to bring together the IAMU community with a focus on the future and tomorrow's leaders; to promote research in and for shipping by maritime personnel; and to promote the IMO and IAMU community to the world. The main event of the Forum was a workshop consisting of 5 different groups, each assigned with different tasks which were complex issues currently facing the maritime industry. The 5 workshop topics were the “Attraction, retention and attrition of seafarers,” “Global maritime professionals,” “Ports and shore-based business,” “Quality training on board for the first license,” and “Gender in the maritime industry.”

As part of their preparation for the Student Forum, there were sets of pre-workshop focus questions sent to the group members in advance which acted as a primer for the participants to get acquainted with the issues and topics. Team members spent time analyzing each element of these focus questions to come up with a better understanding of the inter-relationship of their topics and activate their pre-existing maritime knowledge. The participants were also reminded to keep open minds and think about issues from new perspectives. “This was a great chance to hear and understand ideas from other people who have totally different cultural backgrounds. No matter how different the idea points might be we can always learn something from others” Student F said. At the conclusion of the workshop, each group gave a presentation on their discussion contents and suggestions for dealing with the complex issues. After the Forum finished, the students were completed a feedback survey on the event. The anonymous survey asked the participants to remark on what they learned during the Forum, what benefits they believe they gained from the forum, what was the least interesting aspect about the forum, and what was most interesting aspect about the forum. The Forum, which was sponsored by The Nippon Foundation via IAMU, both NPOs, played an important and unique role in the maritime students’ leadership and cultural competence development [8] and serves as an interesting case model for potential future endeavors that can help young maritime students and cadets develop key skills and a knowledge base for tackling the complicated issues awaiting future generations.

### **3 Analysis of Student Feedback from the Forum**

The questions in the survey summarized above yielded data from 42 student participants. The students rated various aspects of the Forum using a 5 point Likert Scale, and also provided further comments via open-ended responses. The first section of the survey asked participants to rate the amount and relevancy of information learned during the workshop. 68% of the respondents were very satisfied, and an additional 30% were satisfied, indicating that the participants were effectively meeting one of the main objectives for the Forum. One common reason students remarked on for this overwhelming satisfaction with the program could be attributed to the forum being a good opportunity for them to broaden knowledge of the community, break down barriers and strengthen global relations.

Survey results also indicated that another main objective of the forum, to bring together the IAMU community with a focus on the future and tomorrow’s leaders, was successfully fulfilled. According to collected results from the survey, 100% of respondents felt satisfied (82% of which were very satisfied ) about the “Connections built with other participating students. Despite the various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, all of the survey respondents agreed that they had connected well together. "This is a great opportunity to meet students and professionals from all over the world and get the possibility to take part in very interesting discussions,” Student B wrote. Another common theme in student comments via the survey

indicated a heightened sense of, “multicultural coexistence” and “cross-cultural awareness,” competences that will help these future maritime professionals to solve conflicts and alleviate burdens that afflict the maritime industry [5]. “Even though the time was short, this was a very good opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences. It is impressive to learn from others, especially because we realize we have the same challenges and that we should cooperate in the near future,” Student A wrote in their feedback. Student C had similar sentiments: “It is amazing that students from different countries and continents gather around to share their ideas and perceive other opinions. All together, we pushed for some results in the workshop.”

The survey also offered us a glimpse into some feedback about the facilitators and how they managed the groups. One survey question asked “Did the facilitator allow too much time for discussion, too little time, or about the right amount of time?” More than half of the participants (61%) indicated that the discussion time was the right amount, while 27% students think their facilitators allowed too much time. On the other hand, only 12% students felt the discussion time was too short. This data may be an indicator that perhaps that the topics assigned to each group had some inherent variance in complexity. i.e. some topics required less discussion time than others. One potential way to alleviate this problem would be to provide more time to students pre-Forum to read materials and have initial engagement with their topics to lay some of the groundwork for their later discussions. This would allow the participants to delve even deeper into their topics, and also open up more time during the actual event for other activities and inter-group interactions. The learned-centered instructional process may benefit from more pre-event scaffolding so that the groups of students can work interdependently on their learning tasks; and an online component could further ensure that each student is responsible for their own performance, verbalizing (or writing) their ideas, and actively participating in the group-learning process. [1]

The facilitators functioned partly as collegial coaches, interacting with students in a personal, dialogic fashion rather than being overly directive or authoritative. Furthermore, facilitators were instructed to clarify topic expectations, catalyze dialogue, circulate actively among the groups, reinforce positive instances of cooperative behavior, issue timely questions designed to promote elaboration and encourage higher-order thinking. Moreover, the opportunity to interact with participants in small groups may not only benefit the group members but may also enable the facilitators to know the students much better about their mode of thinking, communication and relating to others [1]. This particular learning style was chosen for the Forum so that facilitators could enrich their group work experience and become better-acquainted with the students in their groups [2].

Previous research shows that group-based projects and group discussions should be carefully structured; to maximize efficiency, students must be thoroughly prepared through social skill-building activities, assignments must be open-ended rather than

have preset answers, and the task must be such that a group, rather than only an individual, is truly required to accomplish it [9]. Though most students had either formal or informal experience with group work at the high school or university level in their respective countries, they may not treat these previous experiences as generally positive. “In my school, I have a leadership class once in a week but my teacher seems confused how to teach us about ‘leadership’ ……It was such a boring class before but the forum helped me to consider about what leadership means” Student I said.

This forum was of great significance and overcame some of the serious disadvantages of traditional education by encouraging links between theory and practice, and better use of learning. Group work plays an important role in the development and maturity of personality while also playing a momentous factor in the process of socialization [3]. The participants in this forum acquired not only the necessary understanding of their individual topics, but also received professional knowledge relating to the themes and generic competencies such as communication skills, problem solving and team building skills [4]. “The best part of the forum was the group work, as this was a very good opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences. It is impressive to learn so much from others, especially because we realize we have same challenges so we can cooperate in the near future” Student J said.

When the students were asked “How well-structured was this event ?” 85% of them chose “very satisfied” and the remaining 15% of respondents chose satisfied, which is another indicator of the high level of success of the event. The Forum itself was relatively short, having only 3 days for all activities including the Welcome Reception, Opening Ceremony, Workshop, Presentations, Closing Ceremony, and Technical Tour. Due to the limited time, the facilitators had to keep a close eye on things, keeping the student discussions on task and moving things along as much as possible, while motivating the students, increasing their participation, and making sure that everyone was applying and enjoying themselves. “ I spent time witnessing how each group tackled the assigned topic and provided some input only when it was sought. One of the facilitators noted that “my co-facilitator was very supportive and provided his input whenever required.” Meanwhile, students were making new friends who had the same dreams and goals while enjoying the thrill of their visit to London (the first for many). “It was such a wonderful time and I was so impressed from everyone I met and everything I saw. The other students gave me a new motivation to study much harder and achieve my dreams ” student F wrote. By means of deep-seated discussions on the thorny problems faced by the maritime industry, students learned professional knowledge, gained valuable experience, and widened cultural awareness while improving their communication skills and effectively increasing their confidence with as English a second or foreign language.

#### **4 Suggestions for improvement and development**

Although the participant satisfaction with the Student Forum was overwhelmingly positive, the feedback did reveal some potential areas for improvement. Some students thought they didn't have enough time to prepare and present their discussion findings properly in a professional way. Moreover, there was not enough time for outcome discussions with other groups. Some students indicated that they would have benefitted from more preparation time before the actual Forum, as that would enable even deeper levels of discourse analysis. Many of the group members felt that the workshop only offered chances to communicate with their own group members, and desired more opportunities to connect with participants from other groups.

One potential solution to these problems would be to develop an online component where participants could gather together pre and post-Forum for some initial forays and further reflections on their topics. The benefits of an online component would be multi-faceted, and allow facilitators and students to introduce themselves, communicate ideas in advance, promote mutual understanding, increase the tacit comprehension of the issues, and lay the foundation for the future contact and communication among other groups. An online group could also be an excellent place for facilitators and co-facilitators to share their professional experiences in the maritime sector, offer potential directions for discussion, and more effectively manage the limited time of the actual Forum to maximize contact hours together. Moreover, due to the various ages, backgrounds, and levels of students, some participants initially felt shy or lacked some confidence to communicate clearly in English. Providing participants with an online outlet where they could take more time to write out and express their opinions could speed up the acclimatization process for these students.

Student feedback also indicated that 15 minutes for final presentations was not enough to cover all the content related to their topics. By increasing the final presentations and subsequent Q&A sessions to 30 minutes, each group would be able to summarize their findings, and individual group members would have more chances to showcase the abilities and knowledge they gained during the Forum. It would also be pertinent to dedicate some time for each group to send their members to other groups to share their viewpoints and ideas, listen to feedback and fresh perspectives from other groups, and then bring that information back to their own group to further broaden their discussions. In this way, groups could strengthen the communication between groups and diversify their viewpoints.

## **5 Conclusion**

Overall, participant feedback from the 2017 IAMU Student Forum indicates that the event was a great success. Under the guidance of facilitators and co-facilitators, the students achieved the objectives set out by the organizers, and through an active discourse of their topics, arrived at a deep understanding of the World Maritime Day theme "Connecting ships, ports, and people." Through their participation in the Forum, these future leaders of the maritime industry were able to broaden knowledge

of the future maritime community by breaking down barriers and strengthening communications, strengthen their comprehension of maritime fields with a particular focus on STCW-related degrees for Officers license, maritime business, logistics, and maritime engineering, bring together the IAMU community with a focus on the future, and to promote the IMO and IAMU community to the world. The student participants also improved their communication skills, further developed their multicultural awareness and team building skills, and took part in practical problem-based learning with real life issues that will continue to affect the maritime industry in the future. Hopefully the further improvement and implementation of events like the 2017 IAMU Student Forum can continue to be a basis for the development of future global maritime professionals.

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