

School of Social Work Students, Faculty Attend Conference on Volunteering in Cologne, Germany



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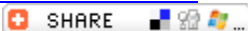
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When Caritas, one of Germany's largest providers of social services, decided to host a conference exploring how Germany might bolster the country's interest in volunteering, the Indiana University School of Social Work was among those invited to attend.

Of particular interest to the Germans, was the School of Social Work's use of volunteering as a tool in classrooms, said Associate Professor Lisa McGuire. McGuire, along with Associate Professor Kathy Lay took a group of 10 social work

students to attend the conference sponsored by Caritas in Cologne, Germany at the end of September. School of Social Work Dean Michael Patchner accompanied the group as well.

Caritas is the national arm of Catholic Social Services in Germany and has a relationship with a number of agencies in that country. "There is not a strong cultural tradition (to volunteer) as there has been in the United States," McGuire noted. "Part of the reason we have developed more volunteer services is we haven't developed our social welfare system to the extent Germany has," she said. While Caritas has been interested in trying to develop the capacity for volunteerism in Germany, there is a concern among some people that if they do more volunteering that will contract the public services that are available.

"They are trying to build this from nothing," McGuire said of the public's attitude toward volunteering. "This is a very interesting time when everybody is looking at the economy and money and what needs to be a government responsibility and what needs to be personal volunteering."

"I think all of us came to the conclusion there is room for both – a good strong social welfare system that is augmented by volunteerism. But how to get that balance right is really challenging."

McGuire and Lay presented a formal 90-minute lecture and also held an all-day workshop for 15 people, including the IU students. "We presented the DEAL model – the idea was you could use volunteering as a tool in classrooms," McGuire said. "While there is obviously a benefit to volunteering, it is also a tool for students to learn the classroom material better, she explained. The DEAL is an academic tool to document the learning and encourage critical thinking for volunteering in classes – what we know in the US as service-learning.

"There has to be a link between the volunteering and the classroom content" she explained. For example, Lay teaches human behavior theory in the Master of Social Work program. She has her students volunteer at Horizon House – an agency that provides services to the homeless. The students have to identify the theories they have learn in class with their interactions with people at Horizon House, McGuire said.

"Not only does it help students understand the class content, but they learn about things that are sometimes hard to capture – how people are different than themselves and about social welfare programs that we have that work or don't work," she added. "It was really a new concept for them (the Germans)," McGuire said. The invitation to attend the conference came after a Caritas official came to Indianapolis several years ago and visited the School of Social Work during his stay here.

Another feature of the trip was the students got to visit several social service agencies, including a women's addiction facility. The women are able to spend 12 to 16 weeks for rehabilitation, which is unheard of in a public facility in the U.S., McGuire noted. They can also bring their children who are up to age six to stay with them. The students got a chance to talk with six women about their treatment, she added.

The students also visited a child welfare agency and got a sense of how the German system differs from what typically happens in the U.S. Germany provides many services to people before they reach the point of being involved in the child protection system, McGuire noted.

The visits provided the IU students a chance to see the differences in approaches to the same problems agencies in the U.S. are trying to deal with.