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Students Present Research at Human Rights Workshop

March 9, 2018

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Four Illinois Wesleyan University students were among 10 undergraduate presenters at the sixth annual [Human Rights Undergraduate Research Workshop](#) hosted by Illinois Wesleyan Feb. 23-25.

Zoe Bouras '18, Matt Banaitis '18, Muyi Yang '18 and Josie Blumberg '19 each presented research related to the workshop's theme: Revolution and Human Rights.

The workshop, which showcased undergraduate presenters from IWU and five other universities, featured student research that covered a broad range of social issues, from the rights of immigrants to government involvement in sexual violence. Also during the workshop, keynote speaker Mark Steinberg, Professor of History and Director of Graduate Studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, delivered an address titled "The Russian Revolution as Utopian Leap."

"I got to hear from peers from other institutions as well as a variety of IWU professors," Bouras said. "I particularly enjoyed that everyone has such different work. When doing research, it's really easy to get caught up in your one or two topics. It's refreshing to see new work that others are doing."



Zoe Bouras '18 presents her research "Dom Perignon vs. Miller Lite."

former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Yang argued that sexual violence in this context comes as a direct result of the state perpetuating an ideal of dominant, normative, masculine authority that is dangerously heightened in times of violence.

Blumberg, in her work "Influence of Cultural Characteristics and Values on Peace," compared the cultures of Japan and Rwanda, two countries with similar cultural attitudes but different demographics and histories of colonialism, to determine how a country's culture contributes to the success of peace initiatives. An international studies major and economics minor, Blumberg's research drew, in part, from personal interviews she conducted in Hiroshima, where nonprofit organizations and survivors of the atomic bomb are dedicated to ending nuclear proliferation. As the global community continues to implement peace efforts in war-torn countries today, Blumberg finds that taking into account a country's values is vital in order to rebuild societies that can maintain long-lasting peace.

"What I appreciate most about this workshop is the way in which students from all over the country come, interact and share ideas about human rights concerns with IWU students who have similar interests," said Ben and Susan Rhodes Professor of Peace and Social Justice Irv Epstein, who serves as department chair of Educational Studies and director for the Center for Human Rights and Social Justice.

"Intellectual engagement lies at the heart of what the liberal arts entail, and for two days, these students experience the pure joy of such engagement in a mutually supportive environment. As an observer and faculty participant, I found the workshop to be as enthralling as it was empowering."



Muyi Yang '18 presents his research "Sexual Violence & the State in Armed Conflict."

Bouras, an international studies and political science double major, presented her political science senior seminar paper, titled "Dom Perignon vs. Miller Lite." Her presentation examined the personality traits that can generate feelings of anti-elitism, a growing phenomenon with the potential to damage existing political structures and discourses.

Banaitis, presenting "Bosnian Immigration to the United States," used his background as a history major and international studies minor – with a diplomatic studies concentration – to tell the story of Bosnian refugees who fled to the United States during the Bosnian War.

Yang, an international studies major and political science minor, shed light on the hidden issue of sexual violence against male victims in armed conflict in her presentation, "Sexual Violence & the State in Armed Conflict." By analyzing testimonies from The International Criminal Tribunal for the



Mark Steinberg, professor of history and director of graduate studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, gives the keynote address "The Russian Revolution as Utopian Leap."