Maastricht University Students Participation in Annual Public Health Law Conference 2019

Maastricht University Masters of Public Health in Governance and Leadership Representatives: Salonee Nemade, Sarah Plank, Sarah Gradl, Eliza Zantema, Camilla Johannessen and Juliette Garnier

We had the honour of being selected to represent Maastricht University at the annual Public Health Law seminar run by the Open Medical Institute in partnership with the Austrian-American Foundation and Maastricht University (academic partner) in Salzburg, Austria, over the last week.

The experience was one-of-a-kind! From an academic and practical view, what we enjoyed the most was how it was not a typical seminar conference where great knowledge is imparted with little discussion but rather this seminar allowed us to apply the new knowledge we gained immediately to real public health problems thus reinforcing the concepts taught. From a people-centred and value-based view, we had the opportunity to interact and have discussions with amazing professionals associated directly and indirectly with health and public health (doctors, lawyers, professors, researchers) thus exposing us to a vast network of connections from around the world.

Main takeaways from this seminar:

- The careful use of frameworks to create more structure in the often ‘messy’ field of public health law and the importance of public health law in the daily work of a public health professional.
- Intercultural exchange through not only the sharing of knowledge on public health policies and challenges of specific countries, but also learning about other cultures, languages and really listening to each other. Moreover, it allowed us to understand the importance of law and its link to health policies. Many citizens and professionals nowadays do not want anything to do with law because they assume that it is very complex. Thus enabling us to realize how accessible and essential law is to public health practice, as well as how we can integrate it, through the 5 services.
The importance of ethics in public health was highlighted by some of the speakers and practical examples evolved into a very fruitful discussion and gave us an exemplary idea of how to integrate these considerations in our future profession. Therefore, all the different topics of this seminar gave us food for thought that we could use to nurture our reflections about public health issues.

Lastly, we had several insights concerning leadership. First was about what is leadership in a public health setting, but also what it means in terms of personal development. We realized how crucial it is to develop ourselves as leaders, not to access power, but rather to stimulate others and to make the right decision in the relevant context. The group work we were assigned in the seminar gave us the opportunity to experience having to work in a team with people coming from different disciplines, different backgrounds (ages and countries). There was a need for strong and directed leadership skills, which in turn is essential to make great achievements in public health.