True to the saying, “Last but not lest”, the winter season’s final Seminar was anything but. Over the course of the weekend fellows, faculty, and support staff alike streamed in, were treated on Sunday to a lovely welcome dinner, but retired early to bed in anticipation of the arduous yet rewarding week ahead, promised by Course and Co-course directors, Dr. Selesnick and Dr. Rasp respectively.

The week played out in symphonic fashion, with Dr. Blevins establishing on Monday the themes, topics, and tone for the week in his lecture “Temporal Bone Anatomy”, and thereafter reinforced by Dr. Kania’s lecture, “Surgery for Otosclerosis”. With Tuesday came a brisk and lively aura, and with the seminar in full swing, fellows and faculty exuded excitement with regard to laboratory workshop. A little slow at first as faculty and fellows alike acquainted themselves, through the wonderful help of Medtronic and MedEl staff, with laboratory layout and equipment, after 45 minutes all were fluidly settling in. Each fellow received their own temporal bone for the week, and from Tuesday through Thursday the laboratory hummed of drills and instruction amidst the hustle and bustle of staff and faculty moving from fellow to fellow. The bone specimens were quite special, as many fellows personally noted, because practice on real tissue samples is not always common in the fellows’ home countries. As the week progressed, the fellows’ samples morphed from rough tissue to refined, skillfully constructed surgical configurations; practical experience physically manifested. Indeed, the physical alterations to bone were a-none-too obvious physical reflection of how the fellows’ skills and mental approaches became honed over the week. By Thursday’s end, a rollicking mood was palpable, and was fittingly concluded with a private concert for the seminar participants in the Schloß. Desire notwithstanding, the fellows were treated to an encore of lectures on Friday, among the highpoints were Dr. Lustig’s intriguing presentation, “Surgery for Cancer of the Temporal Bone”, and Dr. Böheim’s insightful talk, “Powered Middle Ear Implants”, delivered by Dr. Selesnick.

With a positive difference in test scores of roughly 15% between Monday and Friday, in addition to evaluations citing newfound confidence in modern techniques and exuding overall praise, this seminar was certainly one more resounding success. Furthermore, as with seminars prior, this week, and in seminars to come, the fellows coalesced into a tightly-knit network that will remain in contact for many years after. Lastly, however disappointing the separation after so little yet rich time together, in this final respect, the creation of friendship, the seminar was also successful. Armed with knowledge and confidence, full of aspirations, and supported by a new network of friends, newly retrained doctors headed home the next day to improve medicine in their country, and eventually, the world.
Group Faculty Photo, (L-R): George Alexiades, MD, FACS; Romain Kania, MD, PhD; Cem Meco, MD, FEBORL-HNS; Samuel H. Selesnick, MD, FACS (Course Director); Gerd Rasp, MD, PhD (Co-course Director); Lawrence R. Lustig, MD; Nikolas Blevins, MD; Christoph Arnoldner, MD

Group Photo of Fellows and Faculty
March 13th, Sunday evening. After a pleasant drive from Zagreb with my colleague Irena Makovac, passing through the Alps’ outskirts and through the wonderful scenic countryside of Upper Austria, we finally reach Salzburg’s Arenberg Castle, just in time for the welcome cocktail. The facilities are reminiscent of a boarding school with privileges – imagine living with the world’s best otologists for a week! Since both of us had previously been Fellows of the Otolaryngology seminar, we fell into a kind of warm homecoming and settled into our rooms with ease and excitement at the same time. The introduction was facilitated by some quality zweigelt and grüner veltinger. A bit of sports before bedtime ensued – fussball at the Armenia lounge. No one has ever known why the cosy space was called that, until the Armenians came and became fussball champions for the night.

March 14th, Monday. Waking up is much less stressful than back home – time to get busy with our temporal bones. Our brains began to swell after the formality that is the pre-course test. Professor Selesnick showed us that it’s possible to conjure up a map of temporal bone anatomy using only dry histopathology and transformed it into a magic area of awe and wonder by using nothing but sheer academic excellence. Awsome. Then, professor Blevins blew our minds with his 3D anatomy presentation and it was time for coffee, since we could not imagine something better would possibly happen through the rest of the day. Yet, it did. Otosclerosis seen through the surgical expertise of professor Kania was poetry through the microscope, and the fellows did well too. Feeling the strain of information in our neural networks, Austrian beer was just what the doctor(s) ordered.

March 15th, Tuesday. Wake up, breakfast, coffee and some more coffee. Brought a surplus coffee mug to the lecture hall because it would be a long day. Typanoplasties were made easy by assistant professor Alexiades, and I started to feel more at ease with the temporal bone and tympanon. The entire day served as a memento of basic and intermediate temporal bone dissections, with the best coming last – the temporal bone lab that proved to be mind boggling. Using 3D microscopes was a novelty that I am sure to use back home, since it helps with the biggest hindrance in otology – depth perception on-screen. The faculty were extremely helpful, and we did not hesitate to ask them to step in and show us the ropes. After all, you don’t get the All-star team to scrub in with you in the theatre just about anywhere else. The experience was immensely fun and educational. We got to work on a cadaver temporal bone, and on several real-life models for CI purposes and active ME implants. The rest of the afternoon was spent in discussing temporal bone anatomy over coffee over at the Carpe Diem and the Bazaar, places that any Salzburg Fellow should know well. The evening brought a lively discussion on general otolaryngology and head and neck surgery, exchanging opinions and getting to know the differences in our countries’ standards of treatment. After much talk and an admonition from our fellow presenters tomorrow, we parted ways and went to bed.

March 16th, Wednesday. A hard morning to get up on time. Skipped breakfast and went straight for the coffee. Ossiculoplasty lecture went by fast, but the one I really enjoyed was the one detailing the approaches to the petrous apex. To think that one can be so precise and knowledgeable about such a complicated 3D field of surgery fills me with goosebumps. I want to do that. Reach temporal bone
nirvana with a rotating bone filling up my mind and letting me float through the cochlea and
vestibule up to the dura and the brainstem. Okay, a bit too much, but the concept amused us all. We
formed an inner study group consisting of Macedonia, Montenegro, Croatia and Qatar (special
thanks to the Master of Temporal Anatomy – the one and only Rashid Sheikh called Dragiša who is
also writing his own Salzburg diary). Cochlear Implantation was a good overview of the subject, but
we were in our temporal bone lab in our heads and drilling away even before we got there in person.
The rest of the day was spent in reducing the bones to anatomical rubble and testing our own limits
in pushing the limits of exposing the facial nerve and widening the mastoid cavity. The fellow
presentations showed great variability of practice – some of the things we saw were completely new
to us, and some we could not believe, especially when a colleague from Tanzania showed us the
number of patients waiting for him at home!

March 17th, Thursday. The day started with a great lecture discussing bone anchored hearing aids by
professor Lustig, giving us new insight on BAHA and by us giving him a bit of insight on BoneBridge,
since it’s not available in the US yet. Temporal Bone Trauma and Facial Nerve Surgery was a great
lecture. I did not understand the proper anatomy of the nerve beforehand, and associate professor
Arnoldner exposed it to us completely. Another day of straining our short-term memories to engulf
the endless data thrown at us. Vestibular surgery and Glomus Tumor surgery only finished the job,
and we were worn out by considering the possibilities of what we could do back home with the
knowledge at our disposal. Certainly the most vital part of the seminar is the fact that one has only to
dare and anything is possible. Once anatomy is understood, physiology follows naturally. The last
day of temporal bone lab gave us a chance to explore labyrinthectomies and transcoclear
approaches to the brainstem and middle and posterior cranial fossa. One could spend an entire life
drilling out the temporal bone, and it would not be a life wasted. The evening gave us a wonderful
opportunity to listen to Mozarteum alumni performing Bach. Almost nodded off in the end, seemed
like we were in Salzburg for years and years. It was St. Patrick’s day and the faculty took us out for
drinks. The Shamrock bar was packed, we lost some people there and professor Blevins heroically
went back for them commando style and delivered from harm’s way to Gillie’s – the bar that has the
biggest disco ball in the world compared to the volume of the room (ten of us packed the place).

March 18th, Friday. The last lectures and finally skull base surgery delivered to us by professor
Selesnick. Like a boss. I keep dreaming of operating like that when I grow up ever since I heard his
lecture. Luckily, it’s been recorded and I keep it among my books on the study desk. The Salzburg CD
should be made of gold as far as I am concerned, because it just proves that money can’t buy
happiness. You just need a bunch of otologists in a castle for a week. Professor Aulitzky gave us great
tips on how to learn and teach others over champagne after the graduation dinner, and the Croatian
team flashed our 3 awards – best presentation, best cumulative test score and biggest improver.
Could not have done it without the team. The week made me into a budding otologist, and now,
thanks to the seminars, I want more. This is just the start, and I am sure to use the connections, the
knowledge and the enthusiasm for furthering our otologic surgery programme. Goodbye for now.
The first course was great, the second was inspiring, and the third (hopefully) will be legendary.

Danke sehr,

Andro Košec, ENT&HNS – future otologist