

ON CAMPUS

IASAS Student Leader Global Summit 2019

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Leadership and mental health came under the spotlight when more than 50 student leaders from all over the world met at Stellenbosch University (SU) from 23 to 26 June 2019 for the International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS) Student Leader Global Summit. It was the first time that SU hosted this global summit for student leaders.

IASAS is a non-profit organisation that was founded in Belgium in 2013. It is a worldwide association of university professionals working in the area of student affairs and services. IASAS has more than 1 400 individual, institutional and association members representing over 90 countries on five continents.

The fourth IASAS Student Leader Global Summit (SLGS) welcomed 45 students from 14 countries across the world. The SLGS provides a global platform for improving multi- and intercultural communication and understanding amongst students. The goal of the summits is to bring student leaders from different parts of the world together to discuss student governance, leadership, social justice and other topics of shared interest.

With this year's summit focusing on leadership, mental health and well-being, participants discussed the what, why and how to cultivate behaviours, and develop skills and campaigns that enhance and support mental well-being in general and in their specific communities.

During the opening session on Monday, 24 June 2019, Dr Birgit Schreiber (Vice-President of IASAS) from South Africa, along with Dr Lisa Bardill Moscaritolo (IASAS General Secretary) from the United States, and Damian Medina (IASAS Social Media Coordinator) from China, shared some insights into the initiatives and outcomes regarding mental health and well-being support at their respective universities. Students gave feedback and asked questions on their presentations and later discussed the topic further in groups.

The issue of mental health and well-being had already been a highly suggested topic of discussion during the first summit, which was held in Montreal, Canada, in March 2016. Exploring this topic in more detail provided for a rich discussion.

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In her opening comments, Dr Schreiber, Senior Student Affairs Director at SU at the time, reminded the students how important the summit was in helping to prepare future leaders of the world. “This is a coming together of international students from various countries and multiple regions of the world. It is very important that we come together and develop shared and sustainable solutions that work for everyone, locally relevant and globally sustainable. It is very important that we speak about leadership in a context of collaboration and cooperation,” said Schreiber.

Over the course of the summit, students also had the opportunity to connect with other student leaders and to have group discussions, where they explored their own understanding of leadership and gained insight into mental wellness, meditation, and the role that student leaders play within an ecosystem of support. They also built collaborations and teams, identified resources and strategies that support mental well-being, engaged collaboratively across their differences, and developed a micro-campaign suited to their unique context. This affirmed the importance of developing relevant and impactful interventions at local level.

As professionals, we are helping students to be successful not only in the classroom, but also outside of the classroom. The opportunity for students to gain from this experience and to apply it at their universities is at the heart of the SLGS. Many of the students stay in contact through a What’s App group and share successes on the ideas they implemented on their campuses, topics around mental health and well-being, as well as the difficult times they may be facing as leaders. The supportive nature of the messages demonstrates the strong community created in just three days.

The next Student Leader Global Summit in 2020 will be on Sustainability at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, at the end of June 2020. For more information on upcoming events and the next SLGS, visit the IASAS website at <http://iasas.global/http-2018-student-leader-global-summit/>

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