Solving problems and improving services

Open up any newspaper or web portal and you’ll probably see news about something going wrong. Something does not work the way it should. Something else is hopelessly late. Something else is much too slow, much too crowded, much too big or simply not there at all. And everyone loves to complain.

But there are some people out there looking for solutions, without yelling, or crying, or blaming, or giving up. Instead, they are conducting research.

As the final step before graduating from RIT Croatia, senior students in the Hospitality and Tourism Management program spent their final semester becoming researchers, investigating real world issues and problems -- from restaurant lighting design to video game streaming, to the impact of artificial intelligence on education and hotel jobs of the future -- and looking for solutions.

In the capstone research project (završni rad), students investigate a current issue or problem that is of particular interest to them. They start by building on their current knowledge, reading and studying experts in the field. Then each student collects original data, by conducting surveys or experiments, live observations, or online data analysis. In the end, students offer solutions to current problems, and suggestions for improvements that could benefit local businesses, or even help these students start their own businesses after graduation. // continues on page 7

WHY WE CHOSE RIT CROATIA

Parents share enrollment stories

Helping a son or daughter choose a college is one of the most important, and most challenging tasks that any parent faces. Of course, all parents want the best for their children, but sometimes it’s hard to know in advance exactly what the best choice would be. We talked to parents of two RIT Croatia freshman students, who shared their thoughts on their children’s college choice.

Victoria Knežević is a lawyer from Dubrovnik whose daughter is currently studying Information Technology / Web and Mobile Computing program in Dubrovnik. Dr. Aleksandra Palada works as Senior Medical Manager at a well-known pharmaceutical house. Her son is studying International Business Studies at the Zagreb campus. // continues on page 7
Designing luxury experiences

A NEW CONCENTRATION IN THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM PROGRAM

Luxury experiences is one of the hottest segments of the tourism industry today, and experts predict that the luxury tourism shows the greatest potential for growth of any segment in the travel industry. And now, starting in the fall of 2019, students in RIT can prepare themselves for careers in this niche specialty by choosing our new program concentration, Designing Luxury Experiences.

“This concentration will provide students with advanced understanding of high-end hospitality services,” said Dr. Besim Agušaj, Area Head of the Hospitality and Tourism Management program at RIT Croatia. “The concentration prepares students for successful careers as product managers, brand managers or experiential services consultants.”

This exciting new concentration puts RIT Croatia on the cutting edge of hospitality and tourism education.

The term luxury is going through some profound changes, from its traditional roots associated with exclusivity and excess to today’s emphasis on culture and authenticity. Luxury today is about art, artisanship, quality, authenticity, achievement and heritage; in other words, cultivation of the human spirit and society. Luxury travel, then, must, instead of having a destructive effect on its social and biological environment, in reality, have a nurturing, uplifting and stabilizing effect on its surrounding communities.

This three-course sequence will culminate in an experiential learning course which includes a trip to a global luxury destination, such as Italy, Hungary, Croatia, Austria, United Arab Emirates (Dubai). Students will dive into the socio-cultural complexities of attaining luxury travel excellence, and explore cultural heritage as a backdrop for authenticity. It will be an outstanding opportunity to see first-hand how successful organizations operate.

At the same time, the Dubrovnik campus is a perfect fit for exactly this kind of program. Dubrovnik, listed as UNESCO world heritage site, is itself considered one of the most up-market destinations, with a growing luxury tourism segment of its own. Because of its very limited natural resources and fragility of the eco-systems, the entire region is trying to move towards a different approach to tourism, competing in the global tourism market with more subtle products rather than mass tourism offers.

Students at the Dubrovnik campus are surrounded by top class hospitality organizations offering extraordinary services and products. The presence of high-end hotel chains (Regent, Hilton, Aman Luxury Resorts etc.), or Porto Montenegro, where a mega yacht marina has been built and is hosting and serving some of the most exclusive customers in the world, positions our program at the forefront of hospitality schools, globally. Also, half of all five-star hotels in Croatia are located in Dubrovnik Neretva County. All these factors make the new program concentration, Designing Luxury Experiences, an exciting new opportunity for our students. //
STUDYING AT RIT CROATIA IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO MEET PEOPLE AND MAKE FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

International students at RIT Croatia

Each year, about 30 percent of our students come from outside Croatia. Our international students bring a variety of cultural experiences, styles, languages and customs that make our learning community more interesting and diverse.

Many of these students have courageously come to Croatia on their own to study, without family ties to the region, or knowledge of the local language. While it isn’t always easy for them to adjust, our international students are eager to meet the challenge of their new lives in Croatia.

Ebrima Ndure
Ebrima Ndure was born in Bakau, The Gambia and raised in Houston, Texas. He is currently enrolled in the International Business program at the Zagreb campus.

“After high school I joined the US Marine Corps where I served in Afghanistan early in my career. Later, I had the opportunity to work in Japan, Philippines, South Sudan, Argentina, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Croatia. While working in Croatia I found out about RIT from other students, and decided to enroll after my enlistment. So far it’s been a good experience, and students have shown me great Croatian hospitality.”

Ioana Ifrim
Originally from Romania, Ioana Ifrim transferred to Zagreb last year from the RIT campus in Dubai.

“My plan is to study at all RIT campuses before I graduate. So I came to Croatia to achieve this dream, while studying, working and living around people from another culture. I have recently visited Plitvice Lakes, Split and even Dubrovnik and I fell in love with the beauty of this country.”

Angel Hristov
Originally from Bulgaria, Angel Hristov has just finished his first year of studies in the Hospitality and Tourism Management program in Dubrovnik.

“I am a little bit older student, continuing my education after spending a few years working in the cruise ship industry. When I arrived in Dubrovnik, I had a culture shock. But after the first semester, I found a group of students with the same interests and future goals and we started to enjoy many places which we found out from the locals, and unknown for the tourists. I really like the professors and their methods of teaching. I like the connection which students have with them. The American teaching style at RIT Croatia is completely different from the European one. I like how every staff member at RIT Croatia is accessible, even the Dean, who would stop and say hello to students. In Bulgaria, that would never happen.”

Kaitlin D’Costa
Kaitlin D’Costa is half Indian and half Pakistani, born in The Sultanate of Oman and raised in a small city called Al-Ain in The United Arab Emirates. She has just finished her first year in the Hospitality and Tourism Management program.

“Growing up in a small community of people was great. I studied in the same school for 14 years, everybody knew everybody, and I was quite comfortable with where I was and with the people around me. However, when the opportunity to study in Croatia became a possibility, I knew I had to take it. Deciding to move to Croatia was a big decision, not only because I had to move to an entirely different continent but also because I had never been completely independent. My parents encouraged me to take a leap of faith and discover new challenges. I had never moved this far out of my comfort zone before.”

Abhishek Banik
Born in India and raised in Dubai, Abhishek Banik also transferred to the Zagreb campus from Dubai.

“I believe that this is one of the best decisions I have made in my life. It’s not just about the university but the whole experience. I faced a lot of challenges, especially language and culture. It is not easy to lead an independent life. Starting from maintaining a budget to saving up money for fun and travels, I learned a lot.”
Students meet the jobs of the future at Career Education Day

Each year, RIT Croatia brings together some of the leading employers in the region to meet our students and share insights about current trends in international business, hospitality, and information technology. Through workshops, panel discussions, presentations, and the opportunity to apply directly for employment, Career Education Day helps students take concrete steps along their career paths.

The event itself is like a “class outside of class” -- a networking and learning opportunity that involves students, employers, professors, staff and our alumni, who often return to CED as employers, representing the companies they work for in search of new talent.

Our alumna, Marina Jurić, now a member of the HR department of Addiko Bank, attended the CED event in Zagreb at the Westin Hotel, and interviewed many RIT Croatia students who applied for jobs.

“For us in Addiko Bank, we are looking for potential employees who show collaboration, creativity, agility, openness for learning, positive attitude and work ethic” she said. “My conversations with students revolved around possible co-ops, job opportunities and career management advice. I was positively impressed with how professional, curious and proactive they all were.”

Among the employers who attended the Dubrovnik CED event was Daniela Ayala, HR Manager of Admirals Cove Resort, in Florida, USA.

“We have very positive experience with your students so we decided to come to Dubrovnik Career Day to open new positions for them. I have attended many panels at various universities, but this kind of proactivity among students is really rare,” she said. //

Students reach out to local children at annual Community Service Day

Each year, first-year students at each campus plan and organize a special event that benefits some deserving group in our communities. This Community Service Day tradition promotes an attitude of giving to others, and helps students learn more about members of our society whom they might not get to know otherwise. In addition, students practice their teamwork and organizational skills by putting together all the planning, organizing and logistical details necessary to create and publicize a special event. This year, students at both campuses organized events for local children.

In Zagreb, students organized a day of fun activities, music, sports, crafts and music for the children of the St. Francis House children’s home. “It was a remarkable day for the children, a day that, as they said, they will never forget,” said Professor Ana Maria Simundić, who led the Zagreb volunteers. “The children’s caretakers were so impressed with our students’ level of engagement and commitment to making the children feel special.”

At the Dubrovnik campus, freshman students, led by Professor Milena Kužnin and Professor Kevin Walker, served members of the “Udruga Bonsai,” a local organization that offers tutoring programs for children in Dubrovnik. Students planned, prepared and served a fresh brunch of American pancakes and waffles. From designing the posters and invitations, to cooking, serving and cleaning up, the event was student-driven every step of the way.

“We started working on the organizational process almost a month in advance,” explained Dubrovnik student volunteer Tetiana Kelbaka. “For me, the most sincere feedback was the real reaction of kids,” said Tetiana. “They were laughing and smiling at each other, chatting with professors, enjoying food and playing games. Their joy really inspired me to participate in even more events like this!” //
RIT Croatia students win HACKATHON (again!)

It was a long weekend full of anticipation for participants in the 5th annual IT “hackathon” – a 36-hour competition organized each year by the DURA Development Agency in partnership with RIT Croatia and University of Dubrovnik. This creative competition was held in Dubrovnik in April, and once again, RIT Croatia students were among the winners. Eight teams of young, innovative and enthusiastic IT experts-in-the-making did their best in demonstrating their skills and ideas in a fun and healthy competitive environment.

RIT Croatia student team from Dubrovnik campus called “Skrrah Industries” won this year’s Hackathon Dubrovnik with the project called Smart House Box. Team members Frano Nola, Stjepan Brzica, Klara Lucianović, Tomo Kulušić and Petar Klešković, designed a web application that gives users clear insight into their expenses, and allows quick and simple payment of water and electricity bills. //

Student Amar Muratović wins prize at a Blockchain competition in Prague

Can you imagine going to a foreign country to participate at a competition in a field you are really very passionate about, but you do not know anyone there? Imagine it was a team competition, and you didn’t even have a team? What would you do?

Well, for our IT / Web and Mobile Computing student Amar Muratović it was not even a question.

“When I saw on LinkedIn that there was a Blockchain Hackathon in Prague, I was so excited. I knew wanted to go and compete,” he said.

The Innovative Blockchain Hackathon is a 24-hour competition that brings together blockchain enthusiasts from different professions to create blockchain solutions for businesses in finance, public services, mobility and logistics, and space technology.

Amar, the only student there, approached two contestants whom he’d never met before; the trio started to work on Blockchain solutions which would help companies like Škoda auto manufacturers to find unusual parts more quickly.

“I didn’t expect much success for myself, because I wasn’t competing against other students. I was competing with professionals working in companies as junior or senior developers and even people with their own businesses,” he said.

The jury obviously thought differently and recognized Amar’s team as winners of special award.

“Space Systems Finland awarded us a fully sponsored trip to Finland to attend a conference there. Also, the CEO of the company wants to meet us and see a presentation about what we did and our future plans,” Amar explained. “My teammates and I are going to continue working together, which is more than we expected and I’m really happy about it.”

In the end, the risk and effort that Amar put in, have more than paid off.

“I went to unknown territory and showed my potential. Anyone can do it. You just need to love something without compromise, take a risk and work hard.” //

THE 6TH INTERNATIONAL JAVA COMMUNITY CONFERENCE

RIT Croatia sponsors Javantura software development conference

For the fourth year in a row, RIT Croatia is proud to be an educational sponsor of Javantura v6 conference, held this February in Zagreb. The conference gathered more than 300 programmers, researchers and developers who use the Java software programming language.

Many of our computing professors and students were involved. Dr. Branko Mihaljević, acting also as the president of the Croatian Java Users association for seven years, and Aleksander Radovan, the president of the educational board, together with Dr. Martin Žagar, were all a part of the organization of the conference, and Dr. Kristina Marasović served on the program committee.

Moreover, this year four of our students were selected as speakers at the conference. Under the mentorship of Dr. Mihaljević, our students Matija Šipek and Paula Pufek delivered a joint presentation on “The Aspects of Polylgot Programming and Memory Management.” Following the research of neural networks under the mentorship of Aleksander Radovan, our students Vjori Hoxha and Ivor Barić held a presentation about “Predicting future using Java and neural networks.”

This conference was an excellent opportunity to broaden RIT Croatia relationships with IT and software development companies in Croatia, mostly focusing on co-ops, student projects and research collaboration. //
Promoting Dubrovnik in India

Our alumna Ines Nanić represented Croatia for the second year in a row as a keynote speaker and panelist at the W Connect wedding planners conference, held at the Temple Bay Resort in Mamallapuram, India. Owner of the Dubrovnik Event wedding planning agency, Ms. Nanić was one of the only European wedding planners to attend this popular conference, where she has made Dubrovnik a desirable wedding destination among affluent Indian families. //

Gender Equality in the Workplace

Our alumna Mirta Paden Lee, HR manager for IKEA, recently delivered an inspiring speech about the importance and benefits of gender equality at a Gender Equality in the Workplace conference held at HUB385, on the occasion of International Women’s Day, March 8. The conference gathered representatives from other leading employers in Croatia, including AstraZeneca, Atlantic Grupa, Coca-Cola Croatia, Oriflame and Tele2.

“We are aware that women are still far from achieving complete equality with men. That’s why it’s important to continue discussing this topic. In Croatia, even though women make up more than two thirds of highly educated citizens, women still make up less than 20 percent of management at Croatia’s top publicly traded firms.”

Ms. Paden Lee spoke about her own experience as a human resource manager, and the benefits of gender balance among a team of employees.

“Teams with a gender balance have been proved to be more creative, more productive and achieve better results. We also know that gender equality is important to our customers, and helps us better understand their unique needs. All this has a positive influence on our work, and on society as a whole.” //

Alumni and senior student networking dinner

Each year, graduating seniors have an opportunity to socialize and network with recent alumni at the Alumni Senior Dinner. Events were held this year in Dubrovnik and Zagreb.

Recent alums shared their experience and corporate stories with students who are just about to graduate, and start their own careers. In addition, a fun alumni get together was organized in Dubrovnik in April. More than 72 alumni from both campuses, along with faculty and staff, enjoyed an evening of socializing and sharing good memories. //
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“Students came up with a fascinating variety of interesting topics, directly related to current trends and problems in hospitality and business,” said Prof. Rebecca Charry Roje, senior project course instructor. “This capstone course helped them identify a real situation or problem, and become knowledgeable about the current professional theories and concepts behind it. The most exciting and challenging part of the project was collecting original data from people and businesses around them.

This year, students conducted interviews, made site visits, even spied on people using their smart phones while drinking coffee, or posed as mystery shoppers in Dubrovnik souvenir shops. They read through hundreds of reviews on TripAdvisor, collected conversations between hosts and guests on Airbnb, and followed the Twitter accounts of some of Dubrovnik’s leading hotels.

“Sometimes students get frustrated or worried when their research doesn’t go the way they expected, but that’s actually the way real research works. Encountering obstacles, surprises and delays along the way is all a normal part of the process. Dealing with those obstacles is actually where some of the most important learning takes place. And of course, when we look at history, some of the most important scientific findings are the ones that were least expected.”

Throughout the research process, students work closely with a faculty mentor, who guides them through the research process, offering crucial feedback, support and advice.

“The most successful projects are usually the ones that also involve a positive working relationship between the student and the mentor,” said Prof. Charry. “At this stage in their studies, it’s no longer about the professor telling the student what to do, but rather working together with the student in the lead role.”

At the end of the course, students present their findings in a formal research paper as well as an educational 15-minute TED Talk-style presentation, which is open to all RIT Croatia students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends and family members.

“The final presentations always make me proud,” said Prof. Charry. “It’s wonderful to see our students up there in front of an audience, speaking confidently, with knowledge and insight into their topics, and presenting their work in creative ways that helped their audience better understand the world we are living in.” //

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The choice of higher education affects the direction in which our lives and careers will develop further. How did your child make a decision about that next step in education and what was your parental role?

Viktorija Knežević: After hearing a presentation about RIT Croatia at Gimnazija Dubrovnik, my daughter came home full of enthusiasm and announced that she had decided where to enroll. I must admit that at the beginning I did not support her decision. I thought it was far better to sign up for FER (at the University of Zagreb) to study computing. I had the prejudice that a private college is not as good as our well-known public universities. For months we argued about it. I did not want to give in, and she was persistent. But then I met a number of young people who had graduated from RIT Croatia and found good jobs in their chosen fields. Their parents were very satisfied with the education their children acquired. And so I changed my mind, and decided to support my daughter in her choice of RIT Croatia.

Aleksandra Palada: Stjepan did not start off planning to study at RIT. During his high school education, he considered the Maritime Faculty in Split. However, one day in the spring of his fourth year, he asked me what I would say about him enrolling at RIT. At that time, I did not know anything about this college. He had heard about RIT from his school colleagues and he collected information about the International Business program. But I knew that I wanted to support his decision. Fortunately, there is plenty of information on RIT’s website and, after studying it, I liked the idea that Stjepan would get an education that would make him employable all over the world. Stjepan made a decision about enrollment very quickly, in a few weeks, and I supported him in everything.

What do you think are the characteristics of quality education and how should colleges prepare students for their professional life?

Viktorija Knežević: I support the way RIT Croatia prepares students, through a lot of practical work, encouraging research, resourcefulness and teamwork. I’m sorry that there were no educational institutions of this type when I was a student in Croatia. RIT is a whole new, different world compared to typical Croatian institutions. Teachers really care that students learn more, the relationship is full of respect for these young people and their parents, because we all have the same goal - to prepare them as best as we can for life.

Aleksandra Palada: The fact that RIT is very serious about academic integrity is very important to me; cheating should not be tolerated and any other dishonesty during the study. That’s what’s missing in our society and other institutions of higher education.

Are you satisfied with your decision to enroll your child at RIT Croatia?

Aleksandra Palada: Yes, I am. Even after finishing the first semester, I saw progress and growth in Stjepan. He worked hard and started studying and working from the very beginning. Classes in English are not a problem for him. He enjoys the lectures and likes the system of continuous assessment. RIT Croatia is helping him to become the best version of himself. //
Outstanding Undergraduate Scholars

Each year, Rochester Institute of Technology recognizes the best of the best among thousands of its graduating seniors, with the Outstanding Undergraduate Scholar Award. And each year, RIT Croatia students are among those who earn this prestigious award, based on their academic achievement, community service, and recommendations from the faculty. This year’s winners were: Luka Crnjaković, Tea Franjić, Mislav Horvatić, Andrea Kecić, Nikola Lenert, and Petra Todorović. To celebrate their achievement, each student is presented a special medallion at commencement. In addition, each student invites his or her favorite professor or staff member to a celebration dinner hosted by Kecić, Nikola Lenert, Tea Franjić, Mislav Horvatić, Andrea Luka Crnjaković, and Todorović invited professors Milena Kužnin and Kevin Walker.

Imagine RIT Festival

Each year, the main campus in Rochester, New York hosts a creativity and innovation festival that showcases the amazing work being done by students and professors in every field – from imaging science to medical technology to music in augmented reality. Imagine RIT: Creativity and Innovation Festival is a campus-wide event that showcases the creative and innovative spirit of RIT students, faculty, and staff.

Visitors experience the breadth and depth of RIT through interactive presentations, hands-on demonstrations, exhibitions, and research projects set up throughout campus, and performance stages with live music and entertainment.

And each year, outstanding first-year students from the RIT Croatia campuses are selected to attend. They not only represent RIT Croatia at the festival, they also have a chance to tour the campus, meet new friends, and see a bit of America. This year, RIT Croatia was proud to send first year students Dora Beronić, Marija Brkić, Ira Kvakarić, and Džejla Šuman, who were selected for this honor by the faculty, based on their academic achievement and community spirit.

RIT experts demonstrate cutting edge technology to recover lost text from historical manuscripts

RIT Croatia was proud to host a series of lectures and workshops on the emerging field of Cultural Heritage Imaging. Experts from this growing field, which uses novel imaging techniques to study historical objects, visited in March from RIT’s main campus in Rochester, New York, and shared their knowledge with RIT Croatia students, students from the University of Dubrovnik restoration studies program, members of the Dubrovnik Scientific Library, and the Dubrovnik general public. The series of events was titled “Imaging a future for the past – uncovering lost text from manuscripts.”

Of particular interest are imaging techniques that go beyond the capabilities of the human visual system to discover new information about artifacts, either through the enhancement of faded or otherwise unreadable text, or through techniques that study the materials used in the creation and modification of the objects (i.e., pigments, substrates, tools, etc.). The audience could see a high level overview of multispectral imaging and how it is used to “see through” faded, damaged or palimpsested texts.

Visitors included Dr. David Messinger, who holds the Xerox Chair in Imaging Science and Director of the Chester F. Carlson Center for Imaging Science at RIT, Ms. Tania Kleyhnans, a doctoral student at RIT studying hyperspectral image analysis of illuminated manuscripts and paintings, and Dr. Roger Easton, professor at RIT’s Chester F. Carlson Center for Imaging Science.