

Magna Charta Observatory Annual Conference

Hamilton, Canada 2019.

University Freedoms and Responsibilities: Responding to the Challenges of the Future

Student report by Matej Beriša

The MCO Annual Conference was held in Hamilton Canada, October 16th and 17th 2019. The host of this conference was McMaster University in Hamilton. I attended as a student representative from the Croatian Student Council where I am leader of the Office for student standards. Among the participants, there were two other students present, but in time I believe that more students will recognize the importance of a conference like this.

The theme of this conference was University Freedoms and Responsibilities: Responding to the Challenges of the Future. With a very rich program and great speakers, the atmosphere was very pleasant and welcoming. Every participant was given an opportunity to speak and actively participate in every conversation. Even though I'm a student, I was able to put my own point of view on this topic.

At the beginning of the conference Secretary General David J. Lock reported on the main achievements of the Magna Charta Observatory. Over 900 Universities have now signed the Magna Charta Universitatum. These universities have obligated themselves to respect the principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum.

It was clear from the conference that universities are having to work increasingly hard, especially in providing high quality higher education in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs. We can clearly see that student mentality grows in very different fields of education. So, universities need to provide quality in different fields, with equality and sustainability. Can universities and community work together? During this conference I saw that McMaster University is a great example of how a University and community can work together to create a better world, with greater sustainability. Modern Universities should join in the social and economic fields of their local or regional communities with all their knowledge and new ideas. I think that was the key note.

A workshop which I want to mention as the best one for me was "Students and Sustainability". I was very surprised when I saw that also students can lead in different fields of education like this one, when they have proper support. Recent research shows that 91% of students say they are concerned about climate change and that is more than ever. The main question was, can universities do something to respond to the demand from students to see action on sustainability. All participants have the same answer: higher education has a responsibility to ensure their students' knowledge and skills create a sustainable world for all of us. In my opinion its not easy. We have different universities in terms of development and quality in higher education. They all have different goals to achieve as soon as possible. In my opinion, some universities first need to provide quality in higher education, like a good environment for studying, digitalization and general standardization on a global level. When a good base is present, every next step for creating better world around us is easier.

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