International Experience 2016: Serbia and Croatia

Course Syllabus

Preliminary Draft—Subject to Change
Course Overview

In this International Experience course, we will visit and learn about two neighboring countries in Southeastern Europe: Serbia and Croatia. In particular, we will be focusing on the processes of social, political and economic transformation in the Balkans. As such, this course will explore several main themes: 1) the political and economic transition process, 2) regional co-operation, situated against the backdrop of historical conflict, and 3) entrepreneurship. The course will also emphasize a comparative perspective between the two countries.

This course consists of seven mandatory pre-trip class sessions, in addition to the trip itself.

Readings

A list of suggested readings will be provided. From the list, students will be able to select readings that will focus on the social, political and economic issues in the region. In addition to articles from the Economist and various other newspapers and magazines, research reports, and historical accounts, relevant works of fiction will also be included.

Course Assignments and Grading

There will be three main assignments for the course: a presentation, a research report, and a mini-consulting project. All assignments will be done in groups of two or more students. Each assignment is worth a specific number of points (indicated below), for a total of 100 points in the course.

Presentation—20 points

In groups of at least three members, students will deliver a presentation on a topic related to one of the following domains: 1) economy, 2) society or 3) politics. Within a particular domain, the presentation should focus on a specific challenge that the two nations are facing at this time. In addition, the presentation should also outline measures that the two countries might take to improve on the issue. Each presentation should adopt a comparative perspective, comparing and contrasting Serbia and Croatia with respect to a particular issue. Where possible, presentations should highlight any potential for the two nations to address their issues jointly.

For example, a presentation on an economic topic might discuss the prevalence of corruption in the two countries, and its effect on the economy, from discouraging both domestic entrepreneurship and foreign investment, to driving highly skilled labor to emigrate. Make sure to discuss root causes of the issue (i.e. why is corruption so deep-seated in the two societies?), as well as the consequences (i.e. what effects does corruption have for the two economies?). The presentation might discuss how Serbia and Croatia differ in addressing issues of corruption, through local laws in Serbia and the EU’s mandates in Croatia. Finally, the group should suggest potential solutions for the identified issue. Here it helps to be specific. For example, you might discuss recommendations for curbing different types of corruption, including political, petty and systemic corruption. You might also suggest ways in which Serbia and Croatia could cooperate in their efforts to tackle corruption.
Each student group will have 12 minutes to present, and an additional three minutes to field questions from the audience.

This assignment will be graded by both your classmates, as well as myself. For each presentation, all students except the presenting team will be required to submit a presentation evaluation survey online. In that survey, students will provide a numerical score (1-5) for the presentation, as well as brief feedback to the presenting team. The average numerical score from the class will constitute 60% of the presentation grade, whereas my score will contribute the remaining 40% of the overall presentation grade.

**Research report—10 points**

In groups of at least two members, students will be required to write a research report on one of the organizations we will be visiting on the trip. All reports will be compiled into a dossier, which will be distributed to students in order to facilitate our trip preparation.

The report should be around 2,000 words, and it should include the following elements:

1) A short (one-paragraph) background on the organization.
2) A current challenge the organization may be grappling with, and a potential solution.
3) A list of 10 questions regarding the organization, that you might ask the organization’s leadership. This list should include a question from each of the organizational perspectives at Yale SOM (i.e. Competitor, Customer, Investor, Sourcing and Managing Funds, Employee, Operations Engine, the Global Macroeconomy, Innovator, State and Society and the Executive).

This report is due by March 2, 5pm.

**Startup-consulting project – 50 points**

In partnership with a Serbian startup accelerator, students will be given the chance to work on a hands-on consulting project, where the client will be a local startup. Student groups will be paired up with individual startups. This matching process will be handled by Professor Katic and the accelerator’s leadership.

Student groups will be expected to commence their consulting projects as soon as they are matched to startups at the beginning of Spring-1. Before we leave for the trip, you should have a good idea of what specific issue the startup needs help with, and you can start thinking about how you might approach solving the problem (or performance gap) that the startup is experiencing. Further, we will dedicate one of our last pre-trip sessions to a project workshop. During that session, student groups will also very briefly (in 5 minutes or less, Powerpoint not required) present their startup clients and the issue they are working on.

While in Belgrade, one of the days will be set aside for working with the startups. You should use that day to gather any outstanding information, talk to the founders, present any initial ideas for solving the issue etc.
Based on your pre-trip research and communication with the startup, as well as on the interactions with the startups in Belgrade, each group will have a written report as their deliverable. The report should be around 3,000 words, and it should cover:

1) Startup facts. You might discuss the product, what stage the startup is in, how many employees they have, how they’re doing in terms of funding etc.

2) The performance gap. In other words, you should explain where there might be a gap, for example, between the startup’s current state and the ideal future state (i.e. Where they are, and where they might like to be in five years).

3) The solution and action plan. Here you should provide a detailed plan for tackling the issue you identified as the performance gap. For example, if you discussed the need to improve certain aspects of the product in order to market it to a wider audience, you might discuss the steps needed to do that. Make sure to give specific recommendations—think about how and by whom your proposed solution might be implemented (including the timeline for specific steps), as well as the resistance it might run into.

The startup-consulting project report is due on April 1, 5pm. The report will be shared with the startups.

**Participation- 20 points**

Students are expected to contribute constructively to discussions, both in the classroom and on company visits. To achieve a strong participation record, I encourage you to think “quality over quantity” in terms of comments.

Missing a class session/trip activity will earn an automatic participation score of 0. I will grade participation for every student after every class/trip activity on a 0-2 scale, so I can keep a more objective record of your contributions throughout the semester. All points will then be summed up and converted to a total of 18.

Two points of the participation grade are reserved for filling out the presentation surveys.

**Course Schedule**

**BEFORE THE COURSE**

Please fill out this survey once you have registered for the IE 2016: Serbia and Croatia, so that the TA team and I can plan the logistics of the trip. In addition to logistical questions, the survey asks questions about your professional experience, in order to match students to consulting teams. The Serbian startup accelerator will help us identify what specific skillsets the startups need, and together, we will allocate students to teams.

To access the survey, please click here
PRE-TRIP CLASS MEETINGS

Pre-trip class meetings will take place on Wednesdays from 4:10-5:30 in Spring-1.

In addition to these sessions, there will be an optional social event, which will allow us to get to know each other (as well as Balkan cuisine and culture) before the trip. We will be going to Kafana NYC for dinner and a live music performance by a traditional Serbian band. The cost of the event will be covered, however, students will have to arrange for their own transportation to and from NYC.

Session 1: January 27

*Topics:* IE 2016: Serbia and Croatia course overview
Introduction to the region: history, politics, economy, and culture of Serbia and Croatia

Session 2: February 3

*Topics:* A spotlight on Serbia
*Guest speaker:* Consul General of Serbia

Session 3: February 10

*Topics:* A spotlight on Croatia
*Guest speaker:* Consul General of Croatia

Session 4: February 17

*Topics:* Economic-political transition process
Regional relations and relations with foreign stakeholders (Russia, EU, the Middle East)

Session 5: February 24

*Topics:* Entrepreneurship in the Balkans & Startup Consulting Workshop
*Guest speakers:* TBD

Session 6: March 2

*Topics:* Current social, political and economic issues in the region (Potential issues include: Syrian refugee crisis, Kosovo’s UNESCO membership bid, Serbia’s future EU ascension)
*Guest speakers:* TBD

Session 7: March 9

*Topics:* Trip logistics
TRIP ACTIVITIES

A preliminary plan of activities is summarized below, with more details to come soon.

**Belgrade:** March 15-20, Belgrade Art Hotel

While in Belgrade, we will meet with high-level representatives of the Serbian government, several NGOs, as well as various companies. The companies we visit will range across industries, including Nordeus (a highly successful local producer of cross-platform games such as Top Eleven), Gazprom-NIS (currently Russian- and formerly state-owned gas and oil company), as well as FIAT Serbia (the subsidiary where the Fiat 500L of Popemobile fame is made), and others. Students will also spend a day working with their startup clients.

We will also enjoy the local cuisine, sampling traditional Serbian food in the old quarter of Skadarlija, as well as more contemporary fusion-style restaurants, such as Lorenzo i Kakalamba, Radost Disco Grill & Pizza Cabaret and others. We will also have a chance to sample local wine during our visit to Virtus winery, where the owner will entertain us with a traditional venison dinner, wine tasting and live music. Finally, tourist activities will also be included on our itinerary, with particular highlights being the walking tour of the Belgrade Fortress, a visit to the Nikola Tesla museum, and sampling of local craft beers and cocktails in the hipster chic area of Savamala.

**Zagreb:** March 20-22, Hotel Esplanade

On March 20, we will take a 3.5 bus ride from Belgrade to Zagreb. In Zagreb, we will continue with our visits to companies, including a local agricultural conglomerate, a young social media and advertising company and others. We will also meet with members of the Croatian government.

We will continue our gastronomic explorations with Mediterranean cuisine and local wines here. Despite its relatively small size, Croatia boasts 17,000 vine growers. In Vinarija Bornstein, for example, we will sample wine made from indigenous grape varieties, as well as the internationally famous and locally grown Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, and Chardonnay. Zagreb also offers plenty of tourist attractions, including the historical Upper and Lower Town, Maksimir Park, and the quirky Museum of Broken Relationships, among others.

**Dubrovnik:** March 22-24, Hotel Excelsior

The last part of our trip takes us to Dubrovnik (a 55-minute flight from Zagreb). In Dubrovnik, we will meet with representatives of the tourist industry, and spend our time exploring the city’s medieval fortress, which famously served as a Game of Thrones filming location (King’s Landing and Qarth scenes).

Our trip concludes with a farewell dinner in Dubrovnik on the evening of March 23. Hotel check-out is on the morning of March 24.