

Rapporteur summary for the first panel by Prof. Linda Ziberi, PhD

Professor Muhamed Behi from the New Jersey Institute of Technology shared his experience from the Mechanical and Industrial Engineering field and the role that new technologies such as 3D printing play in research. In the questions and answer session we addressed the issue of student autonomy and prof. Behani made a good point on the importance of giving students freedom during the research process by addressing some of his experiences from his beginnings.

Prof. Ahmad Zargari from Morehead State University talked about how the participation of undergraduate students in research helps them become more engaged in the education process and provides them with life learning skills. The program at Morehead University is something that we can apply here at RIT K in order to involve students in the research process in a more formal way. I think this program will serve both the faculty and the students well, and it can also be good for promoting our university locally and regionally, especially if we start involving students in conferences and other more formal research activities. Of course, prof. Zargari was mostly addressing research in more technical fields such as engineering which is his field, but I think this can be applied in all fields. He also gave some really interesting ideas on making sure that the students have the freedom to choose research topics that do not necessarily correlate with the interests or field of the professors in a certain institution. The idea that you can engage faculty from other institutions to assist students pursue research in areas that they are passionate about.

Prof. James Hall presented a very innovative program at the School of Individualized Studies at RIT New York, and the most interesting aspect of this program was the autonomy that the undergraduate students had in doing research. We saw a lab completely run by students who were using most recent technology to conduct research. Prof. Hall also addressed some concerns regarding faculty coverage with such autonomous research practices and he mentioned that a combination of structure and autonomy are key to producing success with such practices. Some of the benefits that the students gain from such programs include: learning to develop strong proposal process, knowledge of disciplinary conventions, experience in presentations, and emphasis on revision (as prof. Hall said the students learn early on that no one gets it right the first time). The students also learn how to distribute research results; however, they focus on differentiating between a failed project and in progress professionalism (meeting deadlines and exhibiting professionalism) which is the most important part as he said. Prof. Hall said that research most of the time fails, therefore we need to make students aware of the process, and that the success of the research project is not crucial. Toward the end of the presentation he also mentioned the importance of investing in marginalized students and making sure that we celebrate success of all kinds. He talked about encouraging institutions to not pursue the status quo, but apply new modes that are emerging all around the world and experimenting with new ideas.