

What makes for good SD training? Lessons from WSDS Evaluations

Based on feedback collected from trainees in Warsaw Science Diplomacy School 2020 and 2021

INTRODUCTION

Warsaw Science Diplomacy School (WSDS), organized by the InsSciDE project, delivered in-depth training in science diplomacy with a historical and strategic framing, for two cohorts in June 2020 and 2021. As a pilot program, InsSciDE also sought to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of WSDS teaching methods and activities, as seen through the eyes of the trainees.

The below excerpts from the WSDS evaluative report are based on daily student surveys during the program, social media posts and verbal feedback in a debrief on the last day of WSDS. The summary portrays the overall reception of the program, highlights its most valued features and provides direct quotes from student feedback.

For a deeper view, see the [full report here](#).

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PARTICIPANTS' EXPECTATIONS

Responses to the question “What do you want to gain from this week of WSDS?” could be sorted into four categories:

- Gain further general knowledge of Science Diplomacy.
- Network with science diplomats.
- Assess the state of international science cooperation, considering a European perspective.
- Develop a toolbox to include in their everyday practice of Science Diplomacy.

Method

InsSciDE Collection of Training Materials

The majority of students expressed that their expectations were met across the five days — with many stating that their expectations were in fact exceeded. The feeling of gaining a fuller view of science diplomacy, and a sense of inspiration for the future, can be seen in comments like these:

“ *"I definitely expanded my knowledge about SD this week. I loved the historical perspective." (WSDS20)*

"The best moment was sharing our impressions and how everyone lived this great experience with the hope of staying connected in the future." (WSDS21) ”

RESULTS

Teamwork Under Diversity

Many participants praised the time spent in breakout discussions and small group work. Dozens of comments highlighted the value of unstructured discussion time to delve into the case studies. The diversity of team compositions was largely appreciated, with participants' survey replies frequently highlighting the interdisciplinary and international nature of the WSDS cohorts.

High-Value Features of WSDS

Below are some of the features that emerged as fundamental to the positive views formed of the school by participants, seconded by instructors and organizers as high-value deliveries by WSDS.

Complex vision of Science Diplomacy: Many facets of science diplomacy were acknowledged by the curriculum – not just that it is desirable, powerful or necessary, but that it can also be dangerous and competitive.

“ *"There is no room for being naive in science diplomacy. Too many interests in play..."* (WSDS21) ”

Method

InsSciDE Collection of Training Materials

Multidisciplinarity stood out as a rare experience and the strongest point of the summer school.

“It was amazing to see all these different cases but also see similarities among them. Truly interdisciplinary” (WSDS21)

“When you put all these people together with very specialized knowledge and a common interest, that’s when the magic happens. That was the best part of this course by far.” (WSDS20)

Significant potential for future collaboration is seen, with ideas ranging from social networks to an alumni association to a ‘women in science’ development, to [co-authoring articles](#) (‘WSDS Student Takes’) and implementing a shared resources platform.

Learning About History, Strategy and Science Diplomacy

InsSciDE intended to pilot an approach to science diplomacy education using “history combined with strategy”. At the outset some students were apprehensive, but by the end of the school, the student teams – on the strength of their diversity, intelligence, and tendency to lean into discovery – had formed a strong understanding of how these twin tools might serve science diplomacy:

“Many of us in our group expressed that we wanted to learn more about the mechanism of science diplomacy and how learning from historical cases could help us develop constructive strategies. [...] Making this connection proved very valuable for us.” (WSDS21)

Reception of the Online Delivery Format

Health restrictions forced both the 2020 and 2021 editions of WSDS online, a challenge to the crucial science diplomacy element of networking but also an opportunity to discover and evaluate more accessible and environmentally friendly ways to engage.

Both WSDS20 and WSDS21 students saluted the fact that the remote format enabled the participation of students who might otherwise have experienced significant difficulty or expense traveling.

Reinforced bonding activities – e.g. breakout group discussions, short breaks with guided meditation, dance or yoga, and after-hours ‘Pub Nights’ – were a critical component of the school’s online success.

“*[What stood out to me was] how much everyone managed to connect despite the virtual setting*” (WSDS21)

While participants longed for face-to-face socializing, they nonetheless created bonds, a group practice, and a network whose future potential appears strong:

“*I appreciated that all group discussions had led to somewhat similar desires/plans for future cooperation. That goes to show how events such as this summer school can boost the collaborative spirit.*” (WSDS21)

For more insights into results of the WSDS curriculum (from strategy exercises to the role of social media to finding a good course rhythm), read the [full report here](#).