

CROATIA

LOCATION: OSIJEK, CROATIA
TEAM SIZE: 5 STUDENTS
TEAM LEADER: 2 STAFF
DATE: MAY 14 - 28, 2008

Five Sterling students along with two faculty members traveled to the historic city of Osijek, Croatia for a short-term mission trip experience May 14 – 28, 2008.

The small team participated in non-traditional mission trip. Working for the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Croatia, the team spent most of their time in the Seminary's 30,000 book library. While serving in the library, the team entered old-fashioned card catalog cards into an electronic database. The team put in 125 hours of work and successfully entered around 1,000 books, roughly 1%, into the electronic system.

One of the experiences the team encountered included learning about the typical European transportation method, walking. "We averaged three to five miles a day, and in one two-day period walked 16 miles!" Will Best, team leader, said. "Some of the best fellowship was developed as the [local] students showed us around the city on those long walks."

"One night our group walked to a near-by café to have coffee with some students from the seminary. It took us about 30 minutes to get there, and the whole time we were walking, all of us were spread-out interacting with the students" Junior Jessica Hounshell, said. "This bonding time really made us become close with certain students from the seminary."

The team was also able to gain an understanding of the historical turmoil that Croatia has overcome by traveling to Vukovar, a town located on the Danube River and the Serbian border. In 1991, Serbian and Chetnic forces overtook the town and murdered over 130 men, women and children. In 1995, after US sponsored peace accords, their mass grave was uncovered and a memorial has since been erected on the site.

"The impact on us was sobering. Most of these people [who had been killed] were the same age as our student's parents. It helped us understand the ongoing ethnic hatred reaching back centuries," Best said.

Those comprising the Croatia team were Jessica Hounshell, Wickliffe, Ohio, Adrian Ivasic, Mentor, Ohio, Jennifer Jones, Grand Island, Neb., Courtney Van Ravenswaay, Shawnee Mission, Kan., Katy Wild, Olathe, Kan., and Will Best, team leader and Shawn Reed, assistant team leader,

In preparation for the trip the team raised funds through support letters, selling carnations, a button making project, as well as selling "Finals' Week" care packages. The team also had prayer meetings and team logistics meetings. The team spent individual time researching various aspects of Croatia in preparation for their journey.

