

# LIFE Spring Academy 2015 in Ann Arbor: Three Fellows' Report

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With much excitement, the Berlin, Zurich, and Virginia fellows, some old, some new, set out for the LIFE Spring Academy 2015 in Ann Arbor. For the new fellows, this was particularly interesting as we were not sure what to expect from the Academy, and in the end it exceeded our expectations.

The (on average) 15 hours of travel from Europe to Michigan and a time difference of 6 hours meant that we were a little worse for wear when we landed on Sunday, but in the end it was more than worth it for this unique, fruitful and rewarding research experience. Having traversed a cool 7,000 km, we were picked up at Detroit airport by a charming driver who took us to Ann Arbor, a guided tour included. He brought us to the "North Quad," a newly built dormitory in Ann Arbor, and the European fellows were glad of the opportunity to get a taste of American student life. Sharing a room with another fellow was quite a new experience for the Europeans, since it is more common to have your own bedroom in your student years.

However, fellows enjoyed this slice of American student life, since it facilitated social contact and also stressed the differences in culture, making the stay especially interesting.

On Sunday night the fellows met for an informal dinner and catch up in the Michigan League, a beautiful old building close to the North Quad, followed by a walk up to the Arboretum and Botanical Gardens. The "Arb" is a wonderful park with a lot of trees, hills, and a river running through it, only a short walk from the town center. It was quite a lot of fun to visit and gave us a good initial impression of the beautiful nature in Michigan. While "hiking" to the river, new fellows got to know each other and old fellows touched base, catching up on what had happened since the last academy. Everyone was happy to see each other again and not even the sudden, monsoon-like rainstorm managed to dampen our excitement. In the end we were only sad that the fall of night and rain prevented us from seeing more of the park.



No caption needed!

The academy started with a warm introduction by the Michigan co-chairs, Toni Antonucci and Patricia Reuter-Lorenz, followed by a fascinating opening talk by Patti on “Age-related decline and compensation: Implications for a lifespan approach,” a fitting start to the LIFE academy, which we’re sure Paul Baltes would have approved of! On Monday we also enjoyed roundtables on a range of topics from statistics, to neuroplasticity, to navigating the job market, and featured lively discussions among fellows and faculty.

And, of course, on Monday evening we had the great, great pleasure of a tour of Michigan Stadium. Our guide John Simpson, who has worked there as a volunteer for over 30 years, was a fantastic fount of both facts and anecdotes, while some of the faculty were kind enough to take the time to explain the rules of American Football to some of the unenlightened European fellows. We learned that the stadium has the largest seating capacity in the western world ( $N = 109,901$ ), how it got the name “Big House” and that the Iowa Visitors locker room is painted pink, as a psychological tactic to reduce aggression in the visiting team.

Following the stadium visit we enjoyed a traditional “Tailgating” dinner, a typical American BBQ where everyone was thrilled with the great burgers and brownies. A subsequent visit to a local bar with regional pale ales, jars of Sangria, and frozen strawberry daiquiris was the perfect ending for an amazing first academy day.

Over the next days we enjoyed faculty and fellow presentations on topics as varied as digital dating abuse in teens, social relations across the lifespan, and buccal cell telomere length in elderly Swiss former indentured child labourers. And in the final

presentation we finally got the word we had all been waiting to hear... “Hoopschrauber”!

Other highlights included a workshop on big data, the panel discussion and the alumni award lecture: Richard Gonzalez gave the big-data workshop, and peppered his talk with examples of how he uses big data in his personal life, writing scripts to pull and analyze his Fitbit data, and to produce a daily report on the weather so he can best prepare for his cycle to work!

The panel discussion, which had been reintroduced at the previous Berlin academy with great success, was again held, this time on the future of lifespan research (see notes compiled by Alanna Epstein on pp. 21ff.). Again, the panel discussion brought the opportunity to hear multiple viewpoints on topics important to faculty and fellows alike, with the discussion ending with advice to the fellows for future success – collaboration, mobility, and curiosity!

Natalie Ebner, who was in the first cohort of LIFE fellows a decade ago, gave the outstanding alumni lecture. Her talk, on “Social and emotional aging: A neurobehavioral analysis,” where she outlined some of her current work, was inspiring (if a little intimidating) for the current fellows.

Natalie also gave the commencement speech at a dinner in the Ann Arbor Natural History Museum, where we celebrated the graduation of the UM fellows Wylie Wan, Lauren Reed, and Bill Chopik. All three fellows are going to do new and exciting things and we wish them all the best!

Following the commencement dinner a few of the fellows went home to prepare for their presentations the next day, while the majority went kara-



Natalie Ebner receives the LIFE Outstanding Alumni Award 2014.



Informal meeting during the commencement at the Natural History Museum.



oke-ing! The karaoke event was full of joy, featuring wonderful live singing from our fellows, many photos and selfies, as well as some beers and games. Fellows from different sites often don't see each other until the next academy, but we really enjoyed each other's company, and each reunion is special and memorable.

On the final evening we enjoyed traditional Ethiopian cuisine, with the fellows and faculty nicely mixed across the tables. At one table there was a lively discussion about cultural differences around how to address professors, particularly in written communication, ranging from the German "Sehr geehrter Herr Professor Dr. XY" to the slightly less formal American approach of "Hi." The last evening ended for most of the fellows in a lively salsa bar, with salsa lessons given by two of the fellows.

Throughout the academy the food was simply superb. From the first egg casseroles for breakfast, to the last donuts and coffee, and a whole range of delicious lunches in-between (including Obama's

favorite sandwich!) we were full from dawn until dusk, and the fellows are very grateful to the organizers for looking after us so well.

On Friday morning we met one final time, for breakfast at a local eatery, where we enjoyed pancakes, eggs benedict, and more pancakes, before everyone went their own ways in different directions. Many of the fellows took the opportunity to explore further afield, including Chicago, Lake Michigan, Toronto, and even New York.

Once again the Academy was a great success, both scientifically and socially, and the LIFE Fellows want to thank the organizers and participants for making this fantastic event possible! We are very much looking forward to Schloss Marbach, and you can hear all about it in the next newsletter!



Good food again!



Transatlantic friendships forming.

