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Living and Working in Germany

Working and learning in a foreign country was both a unique and yet insightful experience. During my three-month stay in Germany, I learned a great deal about the German culture, the German lifestyle and the German work experience, all of which helped me to become more aware of myself as a person, but also of America as my home country. While simply visiting Europe for three months would have been a unique experience in itself, by working in Germany, and learning German at the Carl Duisberg Centrum in Berlin, my learning of German and of the German lifestyle was greatly enhanced.

The four-week course designed by the Carl Duisberg Centrum fit my expectations completely. For the first two-weeks, my class consisted of six students. We learned about vocabulary, grammar and spent a large portion of the class speaking to each other in an interactive setting. Coming into the course, I identified my two greatest weaknesses in German to be a limited vocabulary and a very loose understanding of the grammar. The Carl Duisberg Centrum identified these two weaknesses, placed me in the correct course and swiftly worked to find a solution as quickly as possible. My teacher, Ingo Meyer, gave us a number of assignments and spent time in class teaching prepositions, adjectives and worked on other problem areas that much of the class faced. This prepared us for the second half of the course where the class focused on German for a more practical setting. We studied vocabulary dealing with business, marketing and learned how to describe graphs and work with numbers all of which are essential for working in a German business. This focus on business in the last two weeks of the course proved to be

a nice transition for those of us who would begin internships in the following weeks. It was preparation for the work experience during the next two months.

Nevertheless, taking a language course in a classroom and working for a firm are quite different. But the focus on business German by the Carl Duisberg Centrum helped to ease this transition. Naturally, my two months at work had their ups and downs. My German slowly got better, but was far from fluent, and though I could understand most directions and understood what I needed to do at work, there was a significant language gap when I needed to respond. As I became more comfortable working for the Berlin Adler, this gap narrowed. During the first weeks of work, my assignment was to help promote the EFAF Cup game that the Adler would play on July 12th against the Parma Panthers of Italy. Since American football does not have a strong following in Germany, it was sometimes difficult to find support in advertising for the game and was difficult in trying to draw fans to the stadium. However, by offering a discount on tickets and advertising extensively through Berlin, the number of fans attending the game was 150% higher than average attendance. During this time, the business vocabulary and knowledge I learned at the Carl Duisberg Centrum were crucial. After the “EFAF Cup Finale” game, I worked with my co-workers in getting the office back in order by taking inventory, preparing tickets for upcoming games and organizing the athletic gear that was to be distributed to the members of the football team and the cheerleaders.

Although my tasks at work were varied, perhaps the most important thing I learned at work and in Germany is the importance of communication. Although my German improved substantially over the course of the three month period, it still was not fluent and there was a significant language barrier between myself and my co-workers

since they did not speak English. In hindsight this was a blessing in disguise, I had no other choice but to struggle through my German, and through practicing, it got better. I also learned how important communication is in the workplace and is probably the single most important thing to have for an efficient office. It was the constant struggle to effectively communicate my ideas and beliefs to my co-workers that made me appreciate this often overlooked skill. The desire to better communicate also propelled me to spend my own time after work to study German by purchasing vocabulary cards and studying grammar from my CDC course books.

Though my experiences in Germany were spent largely in a work environment, perhaps the most rewarding thing was to interact with the German people on a day to day basis. My host family provided a nice link through which I could integrate into Berlin. During my first days in Berlin, I took a small tour of the city with my host mother Barbara and we walked through Victoria Park in Kreuzberg. I also attended church with my family quite regularly, which at times was tough to understand but was another opportunity to connect with German society. Each morning I ate breakfast with my host mother, and though the meal was simple, consisting of the typical German bread, meat and cheese, it did give me the opportunity to converse with her over the happenings of my days in school and at work. As time wore on I began to feel more comfortable in Germany even though it was still a very foreign country. I explored deeper into the German society, seeking out new restaurants and small bookshops while also simply wandering through Berlin and absorbing my surroundings.

Although the CDC course focused primarily on business German, there were other aspects that taught us how to interact in everyday situations such as buying a train

ticket or learning how the train system works in Germany to buying food in a grocery store. I especially enjoyed the last Thursday of the language course when our teacher, Ingo, took our class and another class on a small tour of Berlin. We went to the Nikolaiviertel in Berlin and also took a boat tour of the Spree. Any trip to Germany and Europe in general would not be complete without trips to other countries and other cities within Germany. During my stay I was fortunate enough to visit Frankfurt, Dresden, Potsdam and Hamburg and since I had never been to Europe, I traveled to several of the neighboring countries around Germany. This further exposed me to the different cultures of not only eastern Germany, but also gave me a glimpse of life in the former eastern block countries of Poland and the Czech Republic. Although these trips were not part of the internship program, they certainly will be some of the most memorable.

My experiences learning German at the Carl Duisberg Center and working at the Berlin Adler were far from smooth, but it was the challenges I faced that made me a more independent person and more aware of my place in the world. I will forever treasure the experiences I had in Germany and will remember the people I met at work and in my free time. Although my stay in Germany was only for three months, it will always be an important experience throughout my life. This upcoming year I plan on interning on Wall Street or in one of the major financial centers of America and the international experience I gained from the CDS program will be something that sets me apart from the others in this competitive field of work. I do not know whether I will again work in a foreign country, but if I do so the experiences I learned in Germany will help me make the transition to another culture be smoother and more enjoyable.