



## Newsletter

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*In Association with: Vassar College*

### Editorial



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**Lindsey Schram**

OGP, Columbia University

As a representative of the Office of Global Programs at Columbia University responsible for handling the pre-departure process of our BCGS students, I visited the program this July. While I have a long association with Germany, having studied in Munich for a year over a decade ago, this summer was my first trip to Berlin. All of the standard things one hears about the city are true: hipsters rule the eastern quarters with their ironic consumerism (and 80s fashion), the city is artsy, progressive, layered in history, complex, diverse, inexpensive. The city transcends any facile attempts at definition: it's not always beautiful, but is fascinating with its aggressively modern architecture, its wide streets, the stateliness of some of the older neighborhoods and the distinct lack of *Gemütlichkeit*. Berlin is a magnet for our students who clearly relish being part of the fabric of the city and living like true Berliners.

*Lindsey Schram*

I first came to Berlin in September, 1989, planning to remain for a year of dissertation research. My spoken German was middling at best, and it had been won through hard toil in the texts of Hegel and Marx. My exalted and archaic philosophical vocabu-

### German-American Highlights

With the leaves turning to autumn colors, we also want to send you a colorful fall newsletter. Enjoy articles and photos on some of our program activities in the spring semester, but also follow the first challenging, yet rewarding steps of one of our 13 newly arrived academic year students, Howard W. Fisher from Boston University. His sister Ellen, a former Barnard student, attended the BCGS from 2003-04 and recommended the program to her younger sibling, establishing a family tradition that we are proud of. Talking about alums, Brendan J. Karch from Swarthmore College studied with us in Spring 2001 and confesses in this issue his "love affair" with Berlin ever since his Junior semester abroad.

With respect to German-American relations, the two highlights of this summer were the opening of the new U. S. Embassy in Berlin on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and the

visit of Barack Obama on July 24<sup>th</sup>. I had the privilege to join the former event



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**The U.S. Embassy in Berlin**

as one of the approx. 4,500 invited guests at *Pariser Platz*, and despite the chilly and drizzling weather, I not only enjoyed the speeches of present and past German and American heads of state but also the typical American food and spectacular fireworks over the Brandenburg Gate. The latter event, namely the speech of Barack Obama in front of the *Siegessäule*, was attended by almost all of our spring students. Some even brought banners to support the soon to be Democratic candidate.

On a final note, I would like to thank our past Academic Director, Professor Volker R. Berghahn from Columbia University, for his devoted and inspiring academic and personal contribution to our program. His successor, Professor Warren Breckman from the University of Pennsylvania, will share his ideas on intercultural learning with you in the article below.

*Dr. Carmen Müller, BCGS, Resident Admin. Director*

### At a Glance

- **Courses at BCGS**
- **From Hell to Paradise?**
- **Leipzig - Between Bach and Reunification**
- **Nuremberg - A Millennium of History**
- **"Germany is Watching US"**
- **A Unique Look at Neighborhood Management Programs in Berlin**
- **BCGS Reception**
- **In Love with Berlin**

### Berlin's Alchemy at Work



**Prof. Dr. Warren Breckman**  
University of Pennsylvania

BCGS, Academic Director 2008-09

lary seldom failed to elicit sympathetic smiles from the Berliners who tried to decipher my requests for food, drink, and shelter. Somehow I found all three, and settled into life in Berlin. Weeks later, the Wall fell, and Berlin, Germany, and the world were launched

into a new epoch. The impressions from that year are indelible, its effects on me permanent. It was the beginning of an attachment that has brought me back to Berlin again and again.

As this year's BCGS academic director, my hope is that the students in the program will experience similar life-changing effects: a deepening scholarly interest, the discovery of a new passion, cultural enrichment, travel, the revelatory moment when the strange becomes familiar, and the leap when a foreign language is no longer an obstacle to, but

an opportunity for communication. The BCGS provides a crucial support structure for all these students, but ultimately, this year will be a personal process of discovery for each. My greatest hope is that they will come away with skills and attitudes that they can carry with them wherever their lives lead. Knowledge of one foreign culture and language can open up the whole world by enlarging a person's sense of self, sharpening the appreciation of diversity, and building the confidence and capacities necessary to cope in new and challenging circumstances.



## Courses at BCGS, Freie Universität Berlin and other Berlin Universities

### BCGS German Language Practicum

Taken during the orientation period, this mandatory



Dieter Wardenbach  
BCGS Language Instructor

six-week course functions as an introduction to German academic culture and preparation for successful

study in the German university system. The course is offered at different levels, and special attention is paid to practical vocabulary for both academic and daily living applications.

### Cultural Program

During the fall, we enjoyed guided tours through the hip district of Prenzlauer Berg and the museum *Berlinische Galerie*. In addition, we saw a recent production of the Beethoven opera "Fidelio" in the *Staatsoper* and attended a plenary session at

the German parliament. A day-trip to the *Bauhaus* at Dessau and an exploration of the multi-ethnic culinary scene of Berlin concluded the cultural program of our six-week language practicum.



From left to right: Jennifer D. Ewing, Catherine A. Stupp, Kate Hatheway (BCGS Fall 2008) exploring the Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg

### Supervised Study in the German University System

The FU Berlin and other Berlin universities offer a wide array of courses from which program students may choose as long as the prerequisites are met. Depending on the semester of study, students are recommended to take two to five different courses at the FU. All German university course titles, point values, and grades are translated into U.S. terms by the BCGS.

## First Weeks in Berlin

### From Hell to Paradise?

Only a week into my year abroad and I was in Hell. I had not found an apartment to move into once I am torn away from my caring host family, I had no idea what classes I would take, and I had a million and one things to do to establish myself legally as a student in Germany. I had no free time, no hope, no Internet. Forget fun. The initial thrill of just being in Berlin had worn off, and I was miserably lost. Full of misgivings, I even went so far as to ask myself whether the experience of studying in Berlin was worth the mire of protocol and paperwork I was wading through.

That was all last week. This week I have successfully completed half of the million things from my to-do list, and there is only another half a million yet to go. Yes, things are looking up. I have since found an apartment in former East Berlin. The apartment has not been renovated since it was built, and thus uses a

coal-burning stove rather than central heating. Living there promises to be an adventure in and of itself. I have somehow found time to have fun. I have procured tickets to a performance of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* at the Berliner Ensemble, founded by Brecht himself. I am also enjoying learning from my host family the infinitely fascinating differences between everyday life in the U.S. and Germany. For instance, drafts. That's right, drafts: the flow of cool air in a building or confined space. They are running rampant in Europe and they are the source of much angst.

Granted, I'm still lost. I only know what is going on in my language course perhaps 50% of the time. I have entered a phase in which I cannot form complete sentences in either English or German. I am slowly forgetting my English, but hopefully I am gaining ground with my German. Above all, I am learn-

ing to accept the bureaucracy as part of my experience here. I now enjoy certain tasks and view them as an opportunity to learn new vocabulary. Every line (*Schlange*) I wait in is a treat, every piece of paperwork (*Formular*) a thrill. I



Howard W. Fisher

In front of the German Chancellery

even look forward to chewing the fat with office workers and civil servants. And come winter, when I can no longer afford to buy coal due to the failing economy, I shall huddle next to my stove as the last embers die out and say to myself, "Yes, this is what I wanted! I asked for this!"

Howard W. Fisher  
(Boston University, BCGS Fall 2008)

### Academic Director's Course (Fall 2008):

#### Berlin in the Age of Revolution, 1750–1848

This course will explore Berlin's cultural and intellectual history from the period of the Enlightenment through to the Revolution of 1848. We will investigate the culture of the Berlin Enlightenment; the rise of Berlin Romanticism after 1800; the Prussian government's efforts to respond to the French Revolution and Napoleon's defeat of Prussia by undertaking reforms, including the transformation of the Prussian educational system and the founding of the Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität (now the Humboldt University); the attempt to restore monarchical authority and social stability in the wake of Napoleon's defeat; the establishment and expansion of important cultural institutions in the 1820s; and, finally, the development of new forms of radicalism in the 1830s and 1840s, which presaged the outbreak of revolution in 1848.

## Cultural Activities and Excursions

### Leipzig - Between Bach and Reunification

BCGS students recently ventured out of Berlin to visit Leipzig, formerly a major city in East Germany.

Famed for its university and book-printing industry, Leipzig was also the original site of protests against the GDR that eventually led to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Our day began with a talk by a history professor, who gave us a witty

account of his life in the former GDR. Next, we received a tour of downtown Leipzig, which is characterized by a mix of modern and traditional architecture. Perhaps the most notable site we visited was the grave of composer J. S. Bach at *Thomaskirche* (St. Thomas' Church). Our final stop was the *Zeitgenössisches Museum*, where a multimedia exhibit guided us through

decades of German history, from the aftermath of World



© Photo by courtesy of J. Wendel

War II to the 1990 reunification. Photographs, docu-

ments, video footage, and assorted memorabilia combined to give us a vivid impression of life in divided Germany. The exhibit conveyed how Germans experienced everything from major historic events to popular culture. Our trip to Leipzig left us with a greater appreciation for this historically significant city.

**Joanna C. Wendel**  
(Princeton University, BCGS Spring 2008)

### Nuremberg - A Millennium of History

What is a trip to Germany without mountain fortresses, *Fachwerkhäuser* and some sturdy medieval walls? These are hardly characteristic of Berlin, but

rather of cities such as Nürnberg. So in mid-May, BCGS students and directors set out to explore this other Germany. Over the course of three days, through guided tours and personal exploration, we had the opportunity to experience Nürnberg as a crossroads of the past and near-past and reflect on the millennium of history nestled on this hill in Franconia. The trip began with an introduction to the city's medieval lore. Nürnberg's imperial hallmark sits atop the *Kaiserberg*, where the Holy

Roman Emperors regularly resided for over 500 years. The importance of the imperial tradition in the development of this city is inescapable. More than just a political center, however, Nürnberg was also culturally significant at that time, and the city pays great homage to Albrecht Dürer, who revolutionized the art world and helped inaugurate the Northern Renaissance from here in Nürnberg. But even after the Empire's decline, Nürnberg remained important in Germany, as a trip outside the medieval walls

reveals. Nürnberg was in the vanguard in 1835 when it inaugurated the first railroad in Germany, and this triggered a modernization that was balanced by a continuing respect for the traditional and historical. This is what attracted Adolf Hitler here, who designated the city as the official host of his annual Party Conventions. He commissioned the sprawling complex of monumental structures and avenues that today serves as a repository for documentation of the horror of his regime.

**Andres R. Torres**  
(Yale University, BCGS Fall 2007/Spring 2008)



© Carmen Müller, BCGS

From left: Andres R. Torres, Gwen K. Moores, Goran Lazarevski, and Thomas E. Dreisbach on the "Way of Human Rights" in Nuremberg

## Extracurriculars

### "Germany is Watching Us" – The Life of a Nightly News Intern

I grabbed my morning coffee at the quiet café in the downstairs lobby. Snatching the press badge from my wallet, I waved to the security guards sitting at the desk next to the elevator. They smiled and buzzed me in. Balancing the coffee, I seized the customary stack of newspapers from a slot labeled "3sat Kulturzeit" and stuffed them underneath my arm. Elevator to the sixth floor. Short jog down a series of hallways. Another elevator. The custodian greets me. *Morgen*. As I turn the last corner, a pretty Iranian, Niloufar,

emerges from the adjacent stairwell. She gives me a half-weary smile, eyeing the stack of newspapers under my arm, and unlocks the door to the office. We throw open the blinds, the windows, turn on the dozens of printers, computers, fax machines, and televisions until the room is buzzing and Nilou and I feel ourselves coming to life.

With a smirk, she grabs the *Berliner Morgenpost* from my arm. I laugh. *Natürlich*. It's the easiest *Zeitung* to find the freshest cultural-political news, and she knows it. I reach dutifully for the *Süddeutsche*

*Zeitung*. After an hour of scouring papers, press pools, and online sources, the Mainz office rings for the daily conference call. In the next eight hours, we'll research the chosen stories, collect phone numbers, permissions, contact information, background stories. With a camera team we'll shoot interviews on location, deliver the footage back to the studio, sweat through a few hours of intense editing, and upload our *Sendung* to the server in Mainz, where it is broadcasted within minutes on the nightly news. Nilou and I sit back and watch our work



© Photo by courtesy of Jason Harper

on national television, satisfied and tired. Germany is watching us. I give her a quick hug, escaping the office into the night to catch a moment's sleep before starting all over again.

**Jason M. Harper**  
(Princeton University, BCGS Spring 2008)



## A Unique Look at Neighborhood Management Programs in Berlin

At my school, Vassar College, sometimes it feels more rural than urban, even though we are in a medium sized city. We have a spacious campus and even a farm. After 2 ½ years there I was ready to live in a more dynamic, diverse place. Berlin was perfect. To really sink my teeth into the city, I looked for an internship that would give me an insider's perspective. The BCGS office helped me find a spot for me at the "Quartiersmanagement" office south of Tiergarten.

In my three-month internship there I learned that since 1999 there have been seven *Quartiersmanagement* offices in neighborhoods with "extraordinary developmental needs" in Berlin. Their addition to the city government was part of the larger "Sozialen Stadt" program, which was passed by the German Senate and provides public services. Central themes in these offices are economic aid, social empowerment, and infrastructural development.

For me as a 23 year old exchange student this time was an opportunity to gain a very unique look at

engage myself in the myriad tasks that faced the office while I was there, some of which ranging from putting on arts festivals, planning a concert, or taking part in discussions about issues in the community with various community members.

While I naturally didn't become integrated into the city, I can say that I now know a whole lot more about Berlin and cities than I did a measly six months ago.

**Evan F. Franzel**  
(Vassar College,  
BCGS Spring 2008)

© Photo by courtesy of Evan Franzel



Second from the right: Evan F. Franzel at a staff meeting

the inner-workings of community organizing in Berlin. I tried as hard as I could to

## Social Event – BCGS Reception on May 21, 2008

From right to left: U.S. Cultural Attaché Peter R. Clausen, Dr. Carmen Müller (BCGS), and Dr. Ursula Grawert (HU Berlin)



From left to right: Ursula Rechenmacher (UdK Berlin) and Christian Monschke (Berlinische Galerie)

© Carmen Müller, BCGS

This year's reception was once more one of our summer highlights thanks to the illustrious group of guests

who seemed to enjoy themselves over animated conversations and an impressive Beethoven performance by

Joanna Wendel (Princeton) and Leah Germer (Columbia) who obviously don't know anything about stage fright.

## Alumni / Alumnae

### In Love with Berlin

When I first laid eyes on Berlin, on a cold, dreary March afternoon over seven years ago, I didn't know what to think. The city was an enormous, unknown labyrinth, and the language a hazy mishmash of unpronounceable sounds. But after one semester of study, a new command of German, a terrific home stay, countless new friendships, and miles of treading through city streets, I had fallen in love with Berlin. It brought history alive for me in a way no textbook could.

After graduating from Swarthmore College, I taught for two years through Teach for America before being drawn back to graduate

studies in German history. Mostly, though, I was drawn back to Berlin. Feeling compelled to better understand Germany's relationship with

© Photo by courtesy of Brendan Karch



its eastern neighbors, I began a dissertation at Harvard that examines national relations in the German-Polish borderlands in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

When I return to the city nowadays, I come as a

researcher, wading through books and historical archives. My work has allowed me to know more about the history of Berlin and Europe than I could have ever imagined when I first set foot here in 2001. I still visit my host family, and we chat about the history which I know on paper, but which they have lived. They help me feel connected to this place and to its past. But above all, it is Berlin's present-day vibrancy, its endless diversity, and its constant flux, which keep me in love with the city.

**Brendan J. Karch**  
(Swarthmore College,  
Spring 2001)

## Editor

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