



Newsletter

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In Association with: Vassar College

My Berlin

The BCGS asked me to introduce the



© Photo by Carmen Müller, BCGS
On tour with Michael S. Cullen

newly arrived Spring group to the Berlin district of Prenzlberg in March 2008. I'm curious whether some of these students will make an experience similar to my own.

As long as I've been living in Berlin people have been asking me what brought and/or keeps me here; many think it difficult if not impossible – a New Yorker has chosen Berlin!

No doubt, Berlin is at once provincial and liberal and provides many chances to get involved or engaged. These chances have grown since 1990. It is easier to get around in Berlin now and also leave the city. Shopping is almost 24/7, via internet I can exchange words and ideas with friends, relatives and associates and read US-newspapers online at my own convenience, and now that NPR is available, I can know what's happening in the U.S. in real time. In a certain, positive way, I have not exchanged New York for Berlin; I'm both there and here simultaneously.

Michael S. Cullen

I would like to tell you about the very positive experience that I had recently as this year's academic director of BCGS. As you know BCGS is part of a larger exchange program that the FU has developed over the years with a number of U.S. universities. This offers some 30 German students to study at American universities for up to a year.

I was recently involved in a week-long round of interviews of German applicants to this

Fond Farewells, Warm Welcomes

I am very happy to send you our third BCGS newsletter. Apart from our students and staff, Michael S. Cullen was also kind enough to contribute to this edition. Since Christo's implementation of his idea to wrap the *Reichstag*, Michael is probably one of the best-known Americans in Berlin.

Apart from my gratitude to the contributors, I like to mention to you some changes in the office. In mid-December 2007, our program assistant Barbara Intelmann moved with her family to Basle, Switzerland, where her husband and she had been offered new job opportunities. No doubt, Barbara's performance on the job was outstanding, her commitment and flexibility deserve our highest praise and gratitude. Everybody who had the pleasure to work with her wishes her all the best, and, according to well-informed

circles, the Intelmanns are happily settled, and their Swiss-German dialect is improving rapidly. Another case of striking roots quickly took place on BCGS territory, namely with respect to our new assistant Dörte Hein. After an intensive staff



© Photo by Carmen Müller, BCGS
Dr. Otto, Prof. Dr. Berghahn, Barbara Intelmann, Dr. Müller at Barbara's Farewell

search, we were able to hire Dörte who is an accredited management assistant in office communication and knows the U.S. from her year at the Central School in Hamilton, NY. Given her administrative skills, quick grasp of problems, and friendly manner, Dörte has proved to be the right choice for us.

Selecting an Impressive Crop of German FU Exchange Students

program. It was exhausting, but very rewarding. I learned a lot about the disciplines that they were studying. But what I found most encouraging were their attitudes and the plans that the selection committee learned about.

They all spoke excellent English, often knew a couple of other foreign languages well, and were very knowledgeable about the U.S. Many of them had been in high school exchanges before. They also had many

complimentary things to say about the FU and, of course, Berlin as a great cultural and political center.

While our American students find it quite a challenge to look for a congenial *Wohngemeinschaft*, one of the German interviewees told us about a very warm and hospitable family with 3 children who took her in during her high school year in Iowa. It was not one of those spacious mansions so common in Mid-Western towns, but a

As regards our tutors, there has also been farewell and welcome. Dortje Klatte quit her job because she had completed her M.A. exams in January 2008 and left for Canada in order to write her thesis. Needless to say, Dortje was a most valuable asset to our students for over three semesters. Since March 2008, Janna FieBelmann has followed in her footsteps. Like all of our tutors, Janna gained first-hand experience in study abroad, in her case it was at the University of Minnesota and at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She studies literature and culture at the J.F.K. Institute for North American Studies at the FU. *Dr. Carmen Müller*

At a Glance

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mobile home in a trailer park. She is still in touch with them and the committee was very happy to give a scholarship to a person who can evidently settle happily into any environment.

Clearly this is a great program not just for our BCGS students, but also for many of their German peers at the FU.

*Prof. Dr. Volker R. Berghahn,
Columbia University*



Courses at BCGS, Freie Universität Berlin and other Berlin Universities

Studying Environmental Policy in Berlin

As the capital of one of the most environmentally conscious and progressive countries in the world, Berlin is a hotbed of innovative environmental policy ideas and initiatives. In addition to the innumerable environmental foundations, research centers, and policy institutes to be found in the city, Berlin is home to three major universities with rich environmental policy course offerings.



Alice E. Murphy, BCGS
Fall 2007

The *Freie Universität*, besides offering several environmentally-gear-

ed undergraduate political science courses, is home to the *Forschungsstelle für Umweltpolitik* (Environmental Policy Research Centre). The Centre offers various opportunities to gain knowledge on the state of current environmental policy and technological advancements in the field of environmental protection and climate change prevention.

For those interested in a more technical or scientific approach to environmental issues, the *Technische Universität* offers a fascinating range of environmental management and environment and technology classes. The *Humboldt Universität*, too, has a selection of environmentally-gear-

ed courses. No matter what you are hoping to learn about environmental issues, you will find the answers in Berlin.

Alice E. Murphy
(Tulane University)

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.

BCGS German Language Practicum

Taken during the orientation period, this mandatory 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. In addition, a cultural program rounds out the language practicum.

Academic Director's Course (Spring 2008):

Modern Germany, 1900–2000

This course offers a comprehensive survey of Germany's development in the 20th century. In addition to political events and military campaigns, the course will also examine in considerable detail German society, its structures, relations between men and women, trends in both high and popular culture, and the ups and downs of the industrial economy in its global setting. Lectures and readings are designed to introduce students to the country's conflicted history and to the controversies it unleashed in international scholarship.

Resident Administrative Director's Course (Spring 2008):

U.S. Perceptions of Germany and the Germans from Bismarck to Hitler

This course explores the role of national stereotypes in German-American relations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the session's first part, readings introduce basic socio-cultural and economic history of Germany and German-American relations during these time periods. The second part closely examines the ways stereotypes may have helped to shape and justify American policies towards Germany.

First Weeks in Berlin

Math – The Universal Language?

When my guest sister asked me to help with her latest math assignment, I was thrilled. I was exhausted from a week of immersion in a brand new world, and it felt good to be back on my intellectual home turf. Well almost home turf, I was still speaking a foreign language.

At first my explanation was really going great. My excitement and self confidence manifested in notably better German. I was conjugating verbs like never before. The trouble came when the math reduced to a very basic form, which required a very basic vocabulary that I had never learned. The remaining task was to take $18/15$ and divide both the top and bottom by 3 for a final form of $6/5$. Here is a rough translation of what the conversation must have sounded like:

"OK, almost done. We just

have to..." *cancel the threes, but I don't know how to say cancel. Work around it!* "Umm... OK, first we need to break these numbers into smaller pieces, you know like timsing backwards."

How do you say factoring?

"Timsing backwards? Do you mean multiplying backwards, as in dividing?"

"Multiplying! Multiplying! OK, it's kind of like dividing except we keep both pieces, both slices, both parts and write them as... as a multiplying."

"Huh?"

"OK, let's start with this

number here above, here." *How do you say numerator?* "What is the word for the top thing here?"

"Eighteen!?"

"No, in general, the top part of a..." *How do you say fraction?* "What is the word for this whole thing together?"

"Math!?"

Well maybe not quite that horribly confused, but it was not the straight path toward the solution that I'm used to. Finally, after I had developed through continued questioning the necessary vocabulary, I was able to provide a coherent explanation. She told me it's called "kürzen."

Canceling is "kürzen," a word which I already knew under another definition "to make shorter, as in a text, speech, or (mathematical) explanation."

Maxwell T. Hansen
(Cornell University)



Maxwell T. Hansen,
BCGS Spring 2008

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Cultural Activities and Excursions

Dresden or What does UNESCO have in Common with Canaletto?

With its some 500,000 inhabitants, Dresden is one of the medium-sized German cities; given its rich cultural and historical heritage, however, the Saxon capital was an ideal destination for our educational field trip in mid-November 2007. Upon arrival, a local tour guide showed us the major sites, such as *Brühl's* terrace, the royal palace, the *Zwinger* fortification, the *Semper* opera house, and the reconstructed *Frauenkirche* (Lady's Church). A retired Protestant pastor, who had witnessed

the Allied air raids on Dresden in February 1945 as a child and had been persecuted by the *Stasi*, gave us a very informative as well as personal tour of the church.



On the gallery in the *Frauenkirche*

© Photo by Carmen Müller, BCGS

Furthermore, we enjoyed all the breathtaking sights of the city's silhouette and bridges, its posh suburban neighborhoods, and its surrounding picturesque landscape during a boat trip on the Elbe River. On this occasion we understood why the gorgeous Dresden Elbe valley is on UNESCO's world heritage list and why the famous Venetian artist Bernardo Bellotto, who Germans also call "Canaletto" like his uncle, was so inspired by this beauty. The art historian Christine Gruler showed us not only the

famous "Canalettos" but also the other world-renowned paintings like the Sistine Madonna by Raphael in the picture gallery *Alte Meister*. If this was not enough to kindle our imagination, the treasure chamber museum *Grünes Gewölbe* was. Given the wealth of our impressions, neither the modest weather conditions nor the strike of the German railway and the resulting adventurous return journey by bus could destroy our perfect satisfaction with our three-day excursion to Dresden. c m

U.S. Congress and Deutscher Bundestag – Two Worlds apart?

Upon a recent excursion to the *Bundestag*, the BCGS group had the opportunity to experience the inner workings of the German government from the point of a view of tourists as well as world citizens. The comparisons that can be drawn between the U.S. and German governments are practically infinite, rivaling only the number of differences between the two countries. For one, it would be difficult for Americans to imagine Congress with more than two leading

parties, all somehow making politics work; at the same time, countries with many factions also tend to marvel at the so-called American democracy which discourages multiple political parties from participating. According to Dr. Sven Vollrath, head of the liaison office of the *Bundestag* at the EU in Brussels, the possibility of Germany heading towards a two-party system is unlikely, if only because of the many already established parties which wield considerable

political weight. At the same time, the recent major election in which Chancellor

ment shows that perhaps the multi-party system in Germany is far from ideal. For this, we can thank the European-wide trend towards conservative coalition-induced government, especially in the leading EU countries, starting with Gordon Brown and Nicolas Sarkozy, ending with Angela Merkel's latest effort to befriend President Bush. Although Dr. Vollrath would very much disagree, perhaps we are not so different after all?



Lala S. Kasimova, BCGS, Spring 2008 (second from the left) in the *Bundestag*

© Photo by courtesy of Jason M. Harper

Merkel secured her position thanks to a coalition agree-

Lala S. Kasimova
(Cornell University)

Extracurriculars

"Confessionals" at Distributed Campus

Looking back on the summer before I came to Berlin, I was excited about the upcoming year, but unsure as to what lay ahead. A few weeks before arriving, us incoming exchange students were advised to register with Distributed Campus. Good advice often goes unheeded.

Intrigued by the project, but having yet to thoroughly explore the website, I began interning with Distributed Campus at the Center for Digital Systems (CeDiS) at the start of *Wintersemester* last fall. The online portal prepares and supports students for and during their study

abroad stay. Distributed Campus prides itself on being



© Photo by Carmen Müller, BCGS

Gwen K. Moores, BCGS, Fall 2007 / Spring 2008

easy to navigate and features a range of articles dedicated to making student's lives easier in Berlin.

A good portion of the articles come in the style of

testimonials from the various American students who have interned with Distributed Campus. Although the articles are written by different American students at different points during their time in Berlin and cover diverse topics from culture shock to currywurst, all speak from the voice of experience.

My duties consist mainly of proofreading and translating official DC documents as well as adding to the exciting wealth of testimonials. Thanks to these activities, I am able to keep the Denglish at bay. The testimonials I write can be more

accurately described as confessionals, and after five months, I have grown accustomed to this style.

So much so, I will share another confession with you now! Only too late did I discover information on Distributed Campus that in retrospect would have saved me a lot of trouble. I highly recommend for anyone new to the program to take a short cut and scour the website for all the tips and tricks it offers. You don't always have to learn the hard way.

Gwen K. Moores
(University of Chicago)



The Realpolitik of a German Wohngemeinschaft

I'm the first American that my two German roommates, Tobi and Kathi, have ever interacted with regularly. To say that their perceptions of America are completely based on (pop)cultural stereotypes would be to simplify things, but my American identity has played a role on a day-to-day basis. When I first moved in to the WG (*Wohngemeinschaft*), my roommates told me that one reason they chose me, was because, unlike most Americans in their eyes, I don't "dress like a pimp." I try not to think about their idea of an average street in America.

Both of my roommates

also work for an environmental activist group, the *BUNDjugend* Berlin, and America's environmental track record isn't quickly forgotten. After returning from the supermarket one day with non-organic products, Tobi told me, only somewhat ironically, that I was "poisoning our children" while pointing to his shelf in our kitchen filled with the "BIO" stamp.

Of course, I'm just translating these stories into English, because neither Tobi nor Kathi really speak English in the WG. So, it falls to me, often clueless about American pop culture myself, to translate things. Translating a



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Thomas E. Dreisbach, BCGS, Fall 2007/ Spring 2008

scene from the movie "Paris, je t'aime" was no problem, but how am I supposed to translate Jay-Z's "99 Problems?"

It's not hard to see that we're

from two very different cultures. Still, our differences haven't pulled us apart. Sure, someone asked me during our house-warming party whether "American Pie" accurately portrayed teenage life in America, but once you get past the early clichés you find yourself laughing at the same jokes, having the same kinds of conversations, and getting into familiar rhythms – whether or not it involves Jay Z.

Thomas E. Dreisbach
(University of Pennsylvania)

Alumni / Alumnae

Emile Karafiol Prize for Research in Berlin

I came to Berlin with a basic interest in the intersection between architecture, design and politics in modern German history. I left with an exciting new topic for my B.A. paper in history, and a unique head start on my research for it.

My topic – about which I knew nothing before Berlin – was a group of architects and

Germany, and the better-known *Weimar Bauhaus* would have been unthinkable without its principles and persons. Straightforward, practical and beautiful design – universal and timeless, but also essentially "German" – defined the group, from its 1907 founding on. While some research on the *Werkbund* existed, an odd gap in the literature surrounded the First World War, when the group's national character became most pronounced, and also most problematic.

"A National Style for the World: The *Werkbund* in Wartime, 1914–1918" was my B.A. paper's title. With primary and secondary sources from the *Bauhaus*, *Werkbund*, and Foreign Office Archives, as well as all three of Berlin's major university libraries, I continued my work in Chicago during my senior year. My essay won the

University's Emile Karafiol Prize for the Most Outstanding B.A. Essay in European or International History. There was no substitute for being in Berlin: seeing buildings and design objects in person, conducting research for courses at the FU, and handling one-of-a-kind archival documents. The successful B.A. paper was just another complement to an exhilarating, unforgettable year.

Robert E. Wiesenberger
(University of Chicago)

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Robert E. Wiesenberger, BCGS Fall 2005 / Spring 2006

industrialists called the *Deutscher Werkbund*. The group's distinctive industrial style grew up in Wilhelmine

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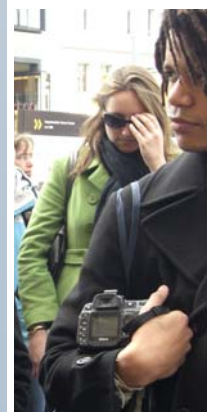
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Photographer:
Always on the hunt for a good picture – Jason M. Harper, Princeton University, BCGS Spring 2008

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