

## Internship Report

15. Feb.2019 – 15.Jul.2019

Transatlantic Outreach Program/ Goethe-Institut Washington DC

### **Application process and expectations for an internship at the Goethe-Institut**

My decision to apply for an internship at the Goethe – Institut in Washington DC, was highly motivated by my interest for intercultural communication. After finishing my Bachelor in multilingual communication and writing my Bachelor Thesis on cultural tourism I continued to be very interested, in the functions of international Organizations like the Goethe-Institut. I believed this internship to be a chance to observe the workings of an international organization. In addition to this, I was also hoping to gain an inside about possible career paths in such organizations. Another reason for my interest in this internship was that it would give me the opportunity to spend six months in the US capital. While I developed an interest for intercultural communication during my Bachelor studies, my Master studies gave the opportunity to refocus my studies onto subjects regarding American history and politics. Seeing as the US capital offers an insight in both of these subjects, with a variety of museums and government buildings, I was very excited about the opportunity to visit this famous city and learn from it, its people and its cultural attractions.

I decided to apply for an internship at the Goethe-Institut in Washington DC in mid-October of 2018. My application consisted of a Cover Letter, a CV and my Transcript of Records from my Bachelor and Master studies. Only a week after, I was contacted by the Managing Director of the Transatlantic Outreach Program - Mr. Wood Powell, who had read my application and thought I would be a good addition to the team of the Transatlantic Outreach Program, a branch of the Goethe-Institut that only exists in Washington DC. After an interview via video chat and a longer waiting process afterwards, I was officially offered the internship position in late November. After a lengthy visa process, the application for different funds and the search for a room near the District, I finally arrived in Washington DC on February 14<sup>th</sup>.

### **What specific projects did you work on / contribute to?**

I was an intern for the Transatlantic Outreach Program at the Goethe-Institut in Washington DC, from February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019 until July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019. During my time with this organization I got to contribute to a number of projects and events.

Right after my arrival in DC in mid - February I got to partake in the review of applications send to us by teachers from all over the country. The Transatlantic Outreach Program focuses on teachers of Social Studies and STEM, who work in the United States and Canada. Besides organizing virtual exchanges with German High Schools and providing free teaching material and material for workshops, the Transatlantic Outreach Program also organizes fully funded Study Tours for over a hundred teachers every year. These Study tours take part during the summer months. For two weeks chosen teachers get to travel to Germany, where they learn about a variety of topics like renewable energy, the dual education system, the German remembrance culture, the impact of the division between East- and West Germany and many more. To be chosen for this opportunity teachers have to send an application to TOP including multiple essays and a lesson plan which is then reviewed by a number of people during a review weekend. I got to take part in this weekend, reading through and evaluating applications.

During my time with the Transatlantic Outreach Program the overarching main project, which I was solely responsible for was the creation of our TOP 2019 Spring Newsletter. A yearly publication of the Transatlantic Outreach Program in which ten lesson plans (K – 12) for Social Studies and STEM Teachers are published. These are lessons which we receive from our TOP Alumni. All of the teachers who travel with us during the summer (over 100) are asked to develop a lesson plan based on something they have learned during their trip to Germany. The lessons have to be in a certain format (this year for the first time, TOP required teachers to follow the IDM format when creating their lessons) and have to incorporate contemporary Germany. Together with my colleague Jenny Windell (Project Manager) I read through the over 100 lessons handed in by our 2018 TOP Alumni and choose the top 10. While we of course mainly focused on the quality of said lessons we also made sure that all grades would be represented and that Social Studies as well as STEM subjects would be covered in our newsletter. I was given a budget of \$ 7000 within which I had to stay. I was communicating with the ten teachers whose lessons were picked and aided them in getting their lessons print ready. I worked together with a copy editor and a designer, making decisions about the look and the content of the newsletter and established a steady work flow

through which deadlines would be met and we would stay within budget. Ultimately, we created a great publication which I am really proud of.

Another one of the more elaborate TOP projects that I had a part in was a new educational film which was filmed in Berlin this spring. At the time of my arrival in DC, TOP had just had to end the collaboration with a school in Berlin with which we had been planning to work for this project. I researched out to other schools in Berlin with a potential interest in working with TOP and compiled a list of possible candidates, out of which TOP picked a new partner school for the film project. The collaboration with said school has been very productive and filming was completed in Berlin this spring.

I also aided in representing the Transatlantic Outreach Program at two major events, one being the *Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms Fair* and the other being the *EU Open House* at the German embassy, where I helped to represent not only the Transatlantic Outreach Program but also the Goethe-Institut. These events required excellent customer service skills of me as I was challenged to convey a lot of information during the short time that visitors would stop at our booths. I learned how to spark teachers' interests in the TOP program and how to explain the work of the Goethe-Institut to people who might have never heard of it. One of my highlights was meeting Emily Haber, the German Ambassador to the United States during the EU Open House day and briefly talking to her about TOP and the Goethe-Institut.

Because I was an intern at the Goethe-Institut DC during the year of German-American Friendship, which is still going on under the slogan "wunderbar together", I got to be part of the *Wanderbus* tour. The *Wanderbus* is essentially a mobile classroom travelling all over the country to promote German language programs and contemporary Germany at High Schools. The *Wanderbus* itself includes multiple features like VR Googles (allowing the students to take city tours of major German cities), videos from the International Space Station and iPads where the students can sign up for online German learning programs for free. *Wunderbar Together* flew me out to California to aid the team of the *Wanderbus* in visiting 3 different High Schools and driving all the way from Los Angeles, over Palo Alto to San Francisco. I interacted with students and teachers, helped with the setup and the packing up of the mobile classroom and the stage, and helped to guide the students through the truck. I played interactive games with them, helped organize the stage show and communicated with teachers and parents who came to help us out at every stop.

Another project I worked on was the organization of the orientation weekend for our TOP Fellows. Before we send the Social Studies and STEM teachers that have been chosen to travel to Germany on their way, they come to the Goethe Institut in DC, where they take part in a two day orientation, which aims to prepare them for their two weeks in Germany and provide them with important information.

The team of the Transatlantic Outreach Program prepares a variety of presentations and activities for the TOP fellows, reaching from German vocab lessons, over workshops about contemporary Germany to presentations on intercultural communication. I helped with several of these presentations, answering questions about the German language during our vocab lesson and talking to participants about the current political relations between the US and Germany. I was furthermore solely responsible for holding the presentation on intercultural communication, while my colleague Jenny Windell was travelling through Germany with one of our TOP groups. This presentation was specifically designed to help our teachers understand cultural differences between the US and Germany. I used my background in culture studies in order to make this presentation my own and was able to share some anecdotes to illustrate certain points, thanks to some of my own experiences with culture shock and international travel. It was challenging for me, as this was the first time I was taking the knowledge I had gained during my studies and conveyed it to a group of educators. Since I am still in grad school it took me some time to feel confident about my ability to teach other educators. Ultimately, holding this presentation was one of the highlights of my internship, as it gave the confidence to share my knowledge with others and opened up a dialogue about cultural differences among our TOP fellows. In addition to this I also helped with organizing food and drinks for the orientations and helped with set up beforehand and clean up, as well as making sure everything went smoothly and helping our fellows with individual requests in regards to i.e. special diets.

In connection to the TOP study tours I also helped evaluate the Study Tour itineraries, in order to ensure the tours would be as productive and educational as possible. I designed two prototypes of study tours (one for STEM and one for Social Studies) based on my knowledge of Germany and we took some of these ideas and included them into the programs for our fellows. One of the ideas I brought up was a visit to the “Begegnungschor” in Berlin, a choir composed of citizens from Berlin as well as refugees who are new to the community.

I was also trained to cover the front desk for one hour every week where I developed new skills in customer service. I interacted with the participants of our language classes, informing them about our classes and exams. I also answered phone calls and informed visitors about the Goethe-Institut, current art exhibitions and other subjects regarding the language or culture program of the Institut. In addition this I also helped as a proctor during language exams in the language department.

In addition to these bigger projects I also had a number of smaller responsibilities. I i.e. helped to compile data of the TOP applicants and organize it in comprehensive excel sheets, I double checked flight information and was in contact with teachers from all over the country, to make sure they would be able to make their way to Germany without complication. I also did a number of translations for the means of email communication or presentations. I got to partake in the *German for Hire* Program which is an initiative by the BKD (Bildungskooperation Deutschland) of the Goethe-Institut. I visited the University of Maryland (UMD) and talked to the students of two German courses about living and studying in Germany, as well as sustainability and renewable energy. I was also part of the Goethe Intern Series, run by the information department of Goethe DC. I let my colleagues from that department follow me around for a day to give people an idea of my daily life as a DC intern and my work with the Transatlantic Outreach Program.

**What are some things you learned as an intern with TOP? What are some lessons you will take away?**

As an intern with the Transatlantic Outreach Program I learned significantly more than during any of my prior internships.

Some of the most important skills I have acquired are connected to the newsletter publication. I learned how to communicate with copy editors, graphic designers and printers. By reading through all the lessons of our TOP fellows in order to choose our favorite ones for the newsletter, I also learned a lot about the IDM format, how lesson plans in the US are structured and the differences between teaching (material and method) in Germany and the United States. I have also gained a deeper understanding of regional differences in the United States through my interactions and communication with teachers from all over the country. During the above mentioned application review weekend I learned what to focus on when looking at an application and how to identify the best possible educators to travel

for TOP. When helping out at fairs I learned how to organize an event, how to promote the Transatlantic Outreach Program and how to network. During my time with the *Wanderbus* I learned how to engage with children and how to spark their interest for Germany and the German language

When it came to the TOP orientation weekends in DC for the chosen teachers who got to travel to Germany, I learned a lot about all the parts that are required in the execution of such an event, from the catering, to the interaction with other colleagues from the Goethe-Institut to guarantee we would have free rooms and working equipment, to the communication with our fellows and how to prepare some of them for their first trip abroad without scaring, but instead encouraging them.

I got to practice my translating skills almost every day while working in a multilingual office and last but not least I improved my excel skills significantly while creating spreadsheets and accumulating all the information about our TOP Fellows that we needed to send them to Germany.

When it comes to more overarching concepts that were part of my learning process, it becomes difficult to summarize them, within the boundaries of this report. I will therefore try to keep it short and stick to some of the major lessons I will take away from this experience.

- I have learned that no matter how difficult a task at hand may seem, as long as you work in a great team almost everything is possible.
- I have learned that the US is a country that is as diverse as all of Europe. People from different States have entirely different ways of life, different outlooks on their existence, perceive the world in entirely different ways. I would therefore always promote the comparison of the United States with all of Europe instead of a single European country because the United States are much more diverse than one might think.
- I have learned that educators in this country choose their job out of passion and conviction and that the resources the Transatlantic Outreach Program provides to teachers, and therefore inadvertently their students have a big impact. TOP enables them to build their global competence, live more environmentally friendly and discover new perspectives.

- Although I always knew it to be true I was once again shown that people who are critical of the unknown, who for example criticize immigration and refugee policies in Germany, mainly think that way because they have never met members of the immigrant community, or a refugee. One of my proudest moments will always be finding the *Begegnungschor* in Berlin, a choir with a simple concept: Each new member comes with a partner, someone who is new to Germany, and they sing together, songs in English, German, Arabic and many other languages. Getting a video months after I suggested this as an activity for our study groups, of TOP fellows from all over the country, with different points of view, singing together with immigrants and refugees was truly amazing and helped me understand that what we do here, the transatlantic work, the bridges that we build, and the connections we maintain, have a much wider reach and are far more impactful than we can even imagine.
- While talking to visitors at the Goethe-Institut I was reminded of a lot of the strong connections that are still intact between Germany and the US. When looking at the news and the political relations between Germany and the United States, especially from a German perspective, it sometimes feels like there is nothing left that is uniting our two nations. Talking to people who have met their spouse in Germany, who have lived there for a large portion of their lives and still have family all over the country, who have visited Germany as an exchange student or Au Pair and stayed in contact with their host family, reminded me that the human connections between our two nations can withstand political altercations. There is something much deeper and more personal that unites our two countries. There is a history that unites our two countries, a history of war and loss but also a history of human kindness like the “Luftbrücke”, a history of families and love, of the exchange of ideas and loyalty. These histories paved the way for human connections and those human connections are what the German – US relationship is really all about.

**What are some key observations you made?**

I believe I did in part already answer this question above but here are some key observations:

- During my work for the TOP and the Goethe Institut I did think it was interesting to see that Americans seem to have a more positive view of Germany than Germans have of America. Of course there are exceptions to this, but these were the general attitudes I encountered. I found that to be very interesting and believe it has a lot to do with the current political situation in the US. However, looking at Germany's past I did find it surprising how many Americans still appreciate Germany.
- While working with educators from all over the country I learned, as I explained above, a lot about regional differences within the United States. An observation that I will still think about for a long time is how unequally money is distributed among school districts in this country. While some schools in more upper-, middle class areas can afford an iPad for every student, other school districts, especially in rural areas are struggling to afford the most basic equipment. I think that makes it more difficult to create lesson plans that can be used by teachers from all over the country. Especially for STEM lessons material for engineering projects is often needed which some school districts might simply not be able to afford.
- I got to see how a German language and culture Institut operates and witnessed many positive things as well as some things that could potentially still be improved. In general I believe that everyone at the Goethe-Institut in DC is doing a fantastic job. I do believe however that the internal communication between and within departments could still be optimized and that for some employees some basic training about intercultural communication could be a productive way in order to avoid conflict/ misunderstandings because of cultural differences.

**What are the positive aspects of your experience? What expectations did you have that were met?**

When I applied for this internship I was hoping to learn more about transatlantic communication, working in the United States, how Germany is represented abroad, and how to work together with teachers in the US, as well an international team here at the TOP office. Those expectations were met but I learned so many things far beyond that. Some of my best experiences were connected to simply working with the TOP team. I had a great time working with everybody in the team and I really appreciated the teamwork aspect of my job,

being involved in many different projects related to TOP and getting to understand all the little parts and building blocks that make TOP work.

I also liked getting to see the work of other departments of the Goethe-Institut. Be it the language department while helping out during language exams, or taking over shifts at the front desk downstairs, or going to UMD for BKD and *German for Hire*.

The week I got to spend in California for *wunderbartogether* with the *Wanderbus* was one of my many highlights.

When working for TOP I really enjoyed communicating with, and meeting teachers from all 50 states. Hearing their stories, how they teach, the communities in which they work and what going abroad on a study trip means to them. These were some of the interactions I valued the most because they let me see firsthand the impact that TOP has and made the months of preparations for the study tours seem completely worth it. I also enjoyed connecting with people from the German embassy, hearing them speak about TOP and about their perspective on German-American Relations.

I enjoyed the amount of responsibility I was given immensely. Having the TOP 2019 Spring Newsletter as my main project taught me so many things, from time management, over communication to the structure of lessons (IDM format). It also let me see firsthand what fascinates our TOP fellows the most about Germany, what are the main lessons they take away from their trips? What excites them so much that they want to create a whole teaching unit on it and bring it back to their classrooms? Those were just a few of many questions I could answer after reading through hundreds of lessons, selecting my favorites and compiling them into a newsletter.

Finally, I want to really emphasize how great the TOP team is and the huge impact they had on me and how positively they influenced my internship experience. From making sure I always had enough to eat, to helping me out with issues regarding my visa, or my commute to and from work, Wood Powell (Managing Director) , Jenny Windell (Program Manager) and Lisa Nicolaus (education Projects Coordinator) always had an open ear and always wanted to make sure that I would get the most out of my internship experience. They helped me become better in my professional life and taught me so much during my time here.

**What are the negative aspects of your experience? What expectations did you have that were not met? (Be as honest and direct as you like.)**

My experience as an intern for the Transatlantic Outreach Program was truly amazing. It is therefore difficult for me to find many (or any) negative things I would like to mention. I would therefore like to emphasize that the things I am saying here are merely suggestions made by someone who has been at Goethe DC/ TOP for only half a year and although this helped to deepen my understanding of the Goethe-Institut and TOP there are of course still a lot of things I would need to learn more about. It is therefore possible that these suggestions have been made before and cannot be implicated because of reasons that I have not yet considered/ do not know about.

Transparency seems to sometimes be issues at the Goethe Institut. Often time's information is not passed on right away, or not to the right people. This makes some people feel excluded from conversations/decision making processes.

I think it is great that TOP is sending over a hundred teachers to Germany each year. They get to learn about so many aspects of Germany's past, culture, language, policies etc. I do however believe that there might be a missed chance here, to improve the exchange aspect of the whole experience, by having German teachers also learn from Americans. I believe by focusing a little more on the exchange of ideas between German and US educators, the TOP Study Tours could become even more influential and impactful then they already are.

**What about your experience will be applicable to your future career choices?**

Everything I have learned here will be applicable to my future career choices in one way or the other. Besides some very practical skills I have gained, like work with Excel, event planning, and the IDM format I have learned a lot about more complex concepts that I really enjoy. I have learned a lot about intercultural relations and intercultural communication as well as the work that goes into promoting culture in all its shapes and forms internationally. I have learned that I enjoy this work very much and I am certainly considering working in a similar field if not for the Goethe-Institut itself in the future.

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I have learned that I enjoy working in small teams, where everyone has their own projects to work on but we come together regularly to brainstorm and talk about our projects and how they fit together. I have also learned a lot about what goes into publishing something like a newsletter and I have found that although I do not enjoy the editorial process that much I am intrigued by creating things myself or helping other people get the best out of their writing. Therefore, this might be a field of work I would like to explore more in the future.

Ultimately, the part of my job that I enjoyed the most was meeting our TOP Fellows, hearing their stories, and helping them getting to Germany as prepared and open minded as they can be. I was therefore able to verify something I already knew about myself: I like to work with people and I like to aid in building intercultural and international bridges. There are few things I enjoy as much as helping people with different cultural backgrounds communicate and to promote a bigger international/ global understanding between cultures and nations on a grassroots level.