

The Citadel, Military College of South Carolina

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**Project Title:** German language and culture courses

**Project Location:** Berlin and Wernigerode, Germany

**Project Timetable:** May 18 – July 14

**Summary of the Experience:** The first two weeks were spent in Berlin, Germany. I flew into Warsaw, Poland and then took a train to Berlin. After landing in Warsaw and traveling to Berlin by train I had to report to a German grammar school in the city center. The school was administered and taught by a very professional and small staff. Many people of all nationalities attended this school with me. I was the only American in my class of 12 students. It was very challenging as the class is only taught in German. The easy thing of it is that German is taught from an English perspective as all students are required to speak English fluently. I lived in a very nice neighborhood in southwest Berlin with my host family. Their apartment was on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. The mother was a primary school teacher and the father was a computer security specialist. They were very polite people but I didn't get to visit with them very often because of their work and my schooling and site seeing. School began at 09:00 and ended at 13:00. It was intense and tiring with a 15 minute lunch break.

After Berlin, I traveled to Wernigerode. Wernigerode is located in north-central Germany on the eastern slope of the Harz Mountains. Berlin is a city of 3 Million and Wernigerode has 35,000. Even though it is a large city it has a very small town feel. Wernigerode is a historical city and demands that all citizens have their houses in the old Stein-Baum architectural style. All roofs in the city must have been made of clay brick and highly maintained. The city is extremely clean and is really a great place.

I stayed with Alf and Andrea Bernhardt in a location of the town called Hasseroder. Andrea is a school teacher and Alf is a Microsoft certified computer security analysis and networking trainer. I guess these are common jobs. I stayed with them for 6 weeks. My job in this town was to lead and assist English classes, home economics, and sports. Andrea is an English, German, and home economics teacher but I was able to teach my own sports classes.

The students I taught were between the ages of 11 and 18. To German standards they were below average intelligence students and required special education. By American standards, the students were normal and would have gone to the same school as I did. They were very athletic and taught me how to play soccer. Andrea was a gracious host and showed me around to many great historical places. I visited a concentration camp, American western style town, and many military museums.

**What I learned:** In Berlin almost everybody from 14 to 40 can speak English and most of them fluently. In Wernigerode it was a different story. I was totally immersed in German culture here. There was only one person I could entirely speak English to, other than that very few people could speak English. My host mother rented a room next to my bedroom to a lawyer so I was able to speak with him every day as I returned home from school. He spoke English but with German grammar but I could understand him most of the time. He was very smart in German politics and history and was excited to explain it to me. I, of course, was very interested in his line of work because his job can't be found in the U.S. Prior to this trip I had only one year of German language classes. The two months that I was in Germany was fantastic. Many people including my host mother and professors cannot believe how well my German is.

**Program strengths:** The Berlin program was very challenging but was well orchestrated. I feel like if I would go back now that I would learn so much more. I really wish I could have taken more time at that institute. The Wernigerode program was all strengths. I was made part of the teaching staff at the school. I participated in extracurricular activities, helped tutor students, and would actually hang out with many students on the weekends. I made many friends with them and hopefully made a lasting impression of Americans in their minds.

**Program shortcomings:** The only shortcoming in the Berlin program was finding my way there. They basically told me to show up at 09:00 and emailed me a map. They neglected to tell me that their building entrance was inside of a courtyard of a building complex. It was a bit difficult to find making me 30 minutes late but I was well received and there was no problem.

**Impact:** I have a deeper interest in Germany now. I wish to pursue German language and in the near future I would like to be fluent. I graduate this May and am going to be looking into going to graduate school in Germany. Before I arrived I wasn't sure about teaching special needs students but as time went on I became very popular in the school and I loved my job. The children I befriended will always have a lasting impact in my life. I have also become very good friends with my host mother and she briefly visited me in August at my home near Geff and she will be visiting me twice while I'm at The Citadel.