

BA STUDENT, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND GERMAN, GERMANY

Mass media pervades all aspects of modern society. Whether surfing the web, listening to radio, or watching television, we are constantly affected by mass media. In the words of Niklas Luhmann: "Alles, was wir über die Gesellschaft, ja über die Welt, in der wir leben wissen, wissen wir durch die Massenmedien."

This Fulbright proposal specifically outlines my aims to study political communication in Germany through analysis of political reporting in German public broadcasting. Unlike public broadcasting in the United States that operates primarily through the federally funded Corporation of Public Broadcasting, the public service broadcasting organizations (*Anstalten*) in Germany provide different regions with public service radio and television that is financed primarily by constituent license fees (*Rundfunkgebühren*). This is intended to foster a public service broadcasting system independent of government or commercial control and ensure that the sole responsibility for this broadcasting rests with the states (Länder) of the Federal Republic as part of their 'cultural sovereignty'. However, with growing competition for advertisers and public attention, the media landscape in Germany has become increasingly characterized by competition of economic interests. My research will focus critically on examining the effects of this growing dynamic by analyzing how political reporting is conducted in the public service broadcasting region of northern Germany. Beginning in October 2006, I plan to study and perform research for one academic year (ca. 10 months) at the Universität Hamburg. Hamburg stands as one of the most vital media cities in the Federal Republic of Germany and it is home to northern Germany's largest publicly funded broadcasting organization - the *Norddeutscher Rundfunk* (NDR).

Academically, I will pursue studies at the Universität Hamburg in order to guide and supplement my research efforts. I have been offered support from the University to carry out my proposed studies (See Letter of Support: Universität Hamburg) and as a matriculated student I plan to complete coursework in the Institutes of *Politische Wissenschaft* and *Journalistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft*. Focusing primarily on trends and theories in Political Communication and Media in Germany, course work at the University will both deepen my understanding of the fields and offer me a greater German perspective in media analysis. I will also work with such faculty members at the Universität Hamburg as _____, both known leaders in the fields of Political Communication and Media Studies who can provide input and guidance for many aspects of my research. Furthermore, having spent my junior year (2004-05) abroad in Germany, I am both familiar with the University system in Hamburg and feel confident in my abilities to begin my work promptly and effectively when I arrive in October 2006.

Outside my university studies in political communication and media, I plan to conduct "field" research concerning the *Norddeutscher Rundfunk* (NDR) broadcasting organization. Since its post-war reestablishment in 1945 and reorganization in 1955, NDR is a regional network that serves four northern German Bundesländer - Schleswig-Holstein, Niedersachsen, Hamburg, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern - and reaches approximately twelve million listeners and viewers in northern Germany (2005). Analyzing political communication in northern German public broadcasting would not be possible without analyzing the *Norddeutscher Rundfunk*.

The core of my field research with NDR will focus critically on examining factors that influence political reporting in public broadcasting. With growing competition for advertisers and public attention in an already competitive media environment, I want to investigate how, and to what degree, external pressures (i.e. economic and political interests) influence the content of NDR's political reporting. This field research will be committed to the principles of political communication and I will incorporate different modes of methodologies (i.e. interviewing, participant observations and secondary data analysis) in answering the following questions that address organizational, economic, and procedural dynamics at NDR:

- *Organizational*: How is the *Norddeutscher Rundfunk* structured as a broadcasting organization?
- *Economic*: How exactly is NDR financed and what organizations play a role in lobbying in its interests? How do economic interests influence the media content at NDR?
- *Procedural*: What procedures are used in information selection? What procedures are used in information presentation?

¹"Everything that we know about society, yes about the world in which we live, we know through the Mass Media." (Luhmann, Niklas. Die Realitat der Massenmedien. Westdeutscher Verlag. Wiesbaden. 1996)

The information collected through my applied research will be dependent on interpersonal discourse. Since it would be impossible for me to even begin this undertaking without internal guidance at the organization, I have presented this proposal to NDR and have been offered enthusiastic support in return (See Letter of Support: NDR). My contact at NDR is _____; Editor and Administrator of Internal Communication. With _____ assistance, I will conduct interviews with varying NDR personnel who are both active and influential in political reporting. Such individuals will include (but will not be limited to) news journalists, editors, and marketing directors. Having discussed my interest in understanding the "internal workings" of NDR, _____ has also agreed to assist me in arranging observation appointments, as well as short-term internships, at NDR's different media departments - radio, television, and internet. Exposures to these media branches will aide me in developing a comparative view of NDR's internal procedures, as well as another perspective of how different news mediums distribute political information to the northern German public.

During the entire course of this year I will be working from a timeline to manage my work effectively. Between October and February of 2006 I plan to matriculate at the Universität Hamburg and complete Winter Semester courses. During this time I will parallel my studies with research at NDR and complete analytical work regarding the *Organizational* and *Economic* aspects of the broadcasting organization. During the second half of my Fulbright year I plan to continue completing courses at the University, while undertaking the *Procedural* research associated with NDR. I expect this part of my research to be most demanding, since it will involve both interviewing and observational procedures. This part of my research will additionally promote opportunities for cross-cultural exchange in the professional and community environment. Also, as I complete this project I will administer a website that will elucidate my findings. This will afford me the opportunity to publish online my academic essays, interview transcripts and interactive media; all of which will document my work during the course of the year and serve as an academic resource for future research on this topic.

Upon completion of a Fulbright year, I expect to have developed a true understanding of the German media system, with a special concentration on the NDR broadcasting organization. I expect this experience to deepen my international perspective of political media and communication, as well as enable me to contribute to the comparative knowledge in the field. I will also use these perspectives when I return to the United States to attend law school to focus on international and communication law.