

BA STUDENT, TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP, GERMANY

The best way to become familiar with an occupation is through practical, hands-on experience. The Fulbright Teaching Assistantship grant offers the experience of teaching in a classroom outside of the United States. I propose to complete a Teaching Assistantship in Germany, because I want to be a teacher, but I am undecided in my area of specialty. As I obtain my Bachelor of Arts degree in History and German with a minor in Art History, I feel as though I want to teach any one of those subjects to high-school age children. An opportunity to help teach English in a foreign country would broaden my knowledge of pedagogical work, and also allow me to fully immerse in a different culture. I strongly believe in the importance of learning a second language and learning about the cultures of the world. It is exciting to imagine myself having an impact on the language skills and cultural comprehension of the children with whom I will work. This practice would contribute to my personal and professional growth, and assist in directing me to a more specific education field.

Germany would be the ideal country in which to complete the Assistantship because of my interest in and knowledge of the language and culture. Also, Germany has a very strong educational system that is different from that of the United States, and I would like to learn more about it. My experience with German language and society began seven years ago, when I began studying German in high school. During my senior year of high school, I helped teach 4th and 5th graders basic German language and culture. I made worksheets and shared my pictures from the trip I took the previous year. It was a good experience involving language education in a classroom setting. I also found direct cultural contact during the summer of 2006, when I had the opportunity to study in Leipzig, Germany. In addition to classroom time, off-campus field trips and events shaped my experience and allowed me to interact with native speakers. In a group with my peers, I completed several projects that involved interviewing German citizens about aspects of everyday life. In my free time, I visited many of Leipzig's historical sites and museums. I would like to further examine German culture and language firsthand.

My communication skills would appropriately represent the English language and United States culture. I took college courses that covered Early British Literature and Shakespeare, and would be willing to discuss topics such as these. I also took American history courses that covered the 17th to the 20th centuries. As a native of the Philadelphia area, I am familiar with many aspects of the city and am interested in engaging in comparative discussions. The culmination of my American studies was my internship at the Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia, during which I assisted the education staff as they provided tours to summer camp groups. I independently led groups of six- to twelve-year-olds as we discussed Philadelphia history from the 17th century to the present. I learned about how to engage groups of young people for extended periods of time. This experience allowed me to comprehend the skills necessary to command a group of students and lead them in meaningful discussion.

Based on my studies of contemporary German culture, I believe the artistic climate in Germany is at a high point. One can find major art exhibitions in large cities like Berlin and Munich that represent the global art community. There are also visual culture advancements taking place in smaller towns. I believe there is a special artistic sense of renewal throughout the country that is a result of eighteen years of social, economic and cultural rebuilding. In my time outside the classroom, I would like to study the role of visual culture in the town in which I am placed. This could involve an art gallery, a carpenter, a jeweler, or any type of craft worker. There will likely be an individual or an institution in the vicinity of my location. I would like to examine the relationship between technology and art. This may be as simple as interviewing local artists or craft workers. I would ask them in what ways they think technology, such as widespread access to the Internet, has affected their work. My thesis will have to be tailored to fit the specific resources available in my town. As a final product, I will transcribe interviews and write journal entries. Any background information necessary will be obtained at local libraries. This side project would allow me to think and write about contemporary visual culture in Germany and the changes ensuing due to technological advancements that connect the world and change the workday of the artist and craft worker. This project would necessitate interviewing local citizens and engaging in the community.

I would like my cultural representation of the United States to go beyond my time in the classroom. Hopefully, I will have the opportunity to volunteer some of my time to local institutions like galleries or libraries. I want to be involved in the local creative and academic culture. I want to offer my time speaking with others and answering questions. I imagine myself assisting in events and generally being involved in the local community.

Because of my desire to be directly involved in my regional culture and my aspirations to teach, a job in public history and museum education may be the most appropriate career path for me. I feel the experience of a Teaching Assistantship would contribute to my practical knowledge of teaching methods. I will get a better sense of how to connect with teenagers, and apply this knowledge to my future endeavors. The Teaching Assistantship would allow me to educate, but also bring an aspect of cultural awareness and understanding into my work. These will be important skills to have as I begin my career. Upon my return to the United States, I will seek employment in museums as part of an education staff. I will utilize my familiarity with school-aged children, and also seek to innovatively bring forth cultural connections. Not immediately upon my return, but within a few years, I will pursue a graduate degree in History. As a result of my time in Germany, my language skills will be sufficient to carry out graduate research and utilize German texts. I could then engage in a profession as a German language teacher, or perhaps teach European history. Whatever my exact career path may be, I know an experience abroad is a vital component. I believe the Fulbright Teaching Assistantship Grant is the appropriate step in my course to a career in culture and history.