

STATEMENT OF PROPOSED STUDY OR RESEARCH

xxx, Germany, Teaching English as a Foreign Language
English Teaching Assistantship

I propose to teach English as a foreign language in Germany, drawing on my own experience with tutoring English, learning and tutoring German, and studying in Germany. I will use my knowledge of the rural New England lifestyle to broaden students' understanding of life and culture in the United States and encourage them to explore the diversity that America has to offer. Similarly, during the year abroad, I plan to expand my own awareness of the varied aspects of German culture by participating in organic farming, through which I will be introduced to a particular facet of the German lifestyle on a hands-on, small-scale level.

Through years of German language and literature classes, a year of study in Munich, strong friendships with native Germans, and my work as a German teaching assistant, I have established a relationship with the German language, people, and culture. It is the German language teachers I've had, both at my home institution of Colby College and abroad in Munich, who have excited my interest in German language and culture and have inspired me to pursue this interest further. It is they who have allowed me to form a connection with Germany, and it is my goal now to facilitate an exchange. As a teacher for Fulbright, I want to be the inspiration for German students of English to seek out a relationship with the U.S. I want to introduce them to the world of opportunity that is revealed when people of differing backgrounds and cultures come together to form an exchange of experiences and perspectives, just as my teachers introduced this world to me.

As a teacher, I will be working to expand students' minds and show them new ways to perceive the world around them. The Fulbright Program is unique in allowing this mental growth to occur, as it is concerned with language and learning as well as culture. The classroom is an energetic and open arena in which to make mistakes, get creative, question, analyze, and challenge the mind through the study and use/discussion of the subjects of language and culture.

The acquisition of language requires a change in mind-set, and actually demands that the learner adopt the "mind-set" of the language itself. Part of the thrill of learning a language is beginning to *think* in that language. Learning to immerse oneself in a language, learning to stop translating from one language to another and instead to think as a native speaker would are all skills that I have worked to impart on the German students I teach at Colby. As a student of German, I have become well-acquainted with the word "circumlocution," and in my semi-weekly TA sessions with students from Colby's introductory German class, I encourage students to define new German vocabulary using other German words, or to ask how one says a particular German word by describing it in German. As a teaching assistant, I would apply these same principles and teaching methods in the German classroom. Teaching students to use the words they know when expressing themselves, rather than feeding them the specific words they are trying to express, is often tiring and frustrating to begin with, but inevitably develops into something rewarding and enjoyable. It shows students how to re-route their brains in order to think more openly and creatively.

The change in mind-set that accompanies language acquisition deepens with practice leading to the phenomenon of dreaming in a foreign language for the first time, or of walking down the street and catching oneself thinking in another language. These experiences, which come from an immersion in a language and an alteration in one's state of mind, are experiences that I hope to enable German students to experience with the English language.

Just as the process of learning a foreign language stimulates mental growth, so does learning about another culture, particularly when it requires that previous ideas about that culture be changed or disassembled. Motivated by this fact, I am especially interested in raising cultural awareness on both sides of the Atlantic. It has been my experience that both Germans and Americans are largely educated by the media and pop-culture where knowledge of other cultures is concerned. The result is that many Germans form an exaggerated view of American college life, for example, and tend to envision the wealth, luxury and corruption of Hollywood when picturing an American community. Likewise, ask an American what he thinks of Germany, and he'll most likely conjure up images of beer-drinking, pretzel-eating, polka-playing, lederhosen-wearing Bavarian men. As a Fulbright teacher, I would have the opportunity to dismantle stereotypes like these by using discussion and story-telling to teach students about the wealth of diversity in the American lifestyle that is not widely transmitted abroad. Being a native of the rural town of Belchertown, Massachusetts, I can fairly attest to the fact that small-town life is not nearly so glamorous, nor so tainted as life in Beverly Hills. Similarly, through Fulbright, I would be able to learn more about Germany from students and from my surroundings. As a Fulbrighter, I would learn more specifically why Germany and Bavaria are not synonymous and would be able to expand my own notions about German life. By working in a small setting, I would actually be allowed to form a broader and more complete understanding of Germany—an understanding which I would, in turn, be able to take back to the U.S.

The concepts of promoting understanding between cultures and of gaining insight into the broader picture of German life through interactions on a small scale are ideas that I would pursue outside of my assistantship through work in organic farming. During my year of study in Germany, I was struck by the environmental awareness that was prevalent across the country—from widespread recycling and escalators that automatically cease to move when not in use, to large-scale public transportation and more walking and biking. In a country so aware of its environmental responsibilities, I would be in my element on an organic farm, where I would learn about food, farming, and sustainability while simultaneously acquiring a better sense of Germany by exposing myself to a totally unfamiliar setting within German culture.

Volunteering on an organic farm would allow me to pursue a personal interest within a German community. It would allow me to relate to local people on their terms, to understand the inner-workings of their livelihoods, to contribute in a tangible way to their communities, and to work, literally in the field, on a grassroots level, in order to better understand a culture that has caught my attention and continues to intrigue me.

As an international studies major, my biggest goal is to learn to understand other cultures, to decipher them, and to observe how they both differ from and coalesce with my own. I can think of no better way to do this than to form face-to-face relationships with local people and people from all walks of life—farmers and students alike. With this cultural understanding comes acceptance and an arena for the exchange of ideas, culture, knowledge, entertainment, stories, and experiences. This acceptance is what I hope to find, this exchange what I hope to create, and both are what I hope to give to Germany, and what I eventually hope to bring back to the U.S.