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Burns Fellowship Report
DPA International fellow
CNBC reporter

I can't possibly say enough positive things about my experience as a Burns fellow. Since I arrived back home in New York City last week, I've already reached out to a number of journalists to encourage them to apply next year.

In quick summation: I worked at Deutsche Presse-Agentur International in Berlin during the duration of my fellowship, spending (some of) my free time to report stories about the economics of trade and migration for CNBC back in the States. Berlin was amazing — it now ranks among my favorite places I've been — and the work was challenging and rewarding.

So this report will be a bit boring: Maybe future fellows will find something useful in here, but mostly it will just be me gushing about how great everything was.

To start, the orientation was useful, fun and the perfect transition from real life into the fellowship. It was immediately apparent why we had the roundtable sessions with the experts (both the Germany discussions and the self-analysis-provoking U.S. panels were consistently educational), but I was initially confused about why so much time was dedicated to socializing. Yeah, it's nice to meet new journalists, and I guess it's valuable to get a controlled preview of what making German friends is like, but was it really necessary to spend whole days hanging out?

Yes — unequivocally. Not only did I make a handful of great, and hopefully lasting, friendships, but I also learned so much from my peers about Germany and what I could expect from the work environment. Future fellows should jump head-first into that part of the orientation because it is easily the most rewarding.

So I get to Berlin, and find my way to my apartment in Neukölln. I instantly fell in love with the block and the area. I lived at the corner of a street called Friedelstrasse and Maybachufer, which means I was right on the canal between my neighborhood and Kreuzberg, and there are tens of bars, restaurants and cafes within a block of my front door. If you're a future fellow coming to Berlin, I can't really think of a good argument for living anywhere else. The general area is hugely convenient to any other part of the city and more fun and vibrant than any urban space I've ever been; I regularly saw the other North American fellows because they were so frequently hanging out in my neck of the woods.

The next two weeks were spent in language classes. I'd spent a few hours with Rosetta Stone and Duolingo applications on phone before arriving, but the only sort of German I could confidently utter was numbers and animals — hardly the basis for a fruitful journalistic endeavor. Both teachers provided by the Goethe Institut were professional and helpful, and they taught me enough basic vocabulary and grammar to propel my own studies for the rest of the fellowship. I participated in a four-person group with three other Burns fellows, and I know opinions of the

class were mixed, but I have to say that I've had language instruction in several universities and countries around the world and this was as good as it gets for an introductory course.

Anyway, the end result of the class and my own subsequent practice was that I can now slowly read a German news item with the help of a dictionary, I can get the gist of just about any day-to-day German conversation, and I can convey more or less what I want to say — as long as my ideas stay at about a fourth-grade level.

At the beginning of my third week I started at DPA International, which is the globally-oriented English-language team for Germany's premier wire service. I was greeted by Marco Mierke, the international managing editor, who was extremely welcoming and enthusiastic to get me contributing in whatever way I could.

Based on my understanding of what DPA was as an outlet, I'd supposed before arriving that I would likely be more useful as an editor than any sort of reporter: Despite being based in Berlin, the English-language wire derives just about all of its content from a network of foreign correspondents, so there's not a whole lot of reporting going on in Berlin itself.

That prediction more or less bore out, and my colleagues at DPA offered me the opportunity to edit articles from the correspondents, working with those reporters to craft the best possible stories. I worked on a handful of stories every day, and ended up with 133 editing bylines by the end of the fellowship — hardly a land-speed record, but a fair bit of work that I'm proud to have done. That whole process was quite educational for a young journalist: I learned about how those foreign correspondents craft stories and communicate from the field, and I feel as though my writing has improved from spending eight hours per day working with other people's copy.

This isn't to say that I acted solely as an editor during my tenure at DPA. Rather, I wrote the occasional story for them when I was able to add some expertise or speed up coverage of a late-breaking subject. In total, I had 14 bylines for the wire, none of which were hugely impressive reported pieces, but a few about the European Central Bank that made me feel like I was adding real value to the team. I saw a few of these pieces pop up on DPA customer websites, but most had been stripped of all bylines (as is often the case with wire copy), so there's not really anything to link to in this report.

As for the office itself, there's little to report: Everyone was friendly and patient with me when I didn't know a process, and I'm extremely thankful for their friendship and mentorship. I was the international service's first-ever Burns fellow, but they work regularly with Fulbright scholars, so they had a good handle on how to treat me. Because Marco went on temporary leave soon after I arrived, a few of my colleagues were a bit confused about my actual role and employment status, but this only ever has positive results (i.e. more trust being placed in me than would otherwise have been the case).

And finally, my own reporting: I applied to the fellowship with some pretty ambitious goals about doing stories related to the refugee crisis for CNBC. I'd wanted to look at how migrants were making and spending money as they became more established in Germany, and I was

curious about looking at the economic angles of the governments' integration efforts. Two things changed that plan.

Firstly, I discovered that the vast majority of the recent spate of refugees was still going through the education portion of their resettlement, so they were still receiving government funds and so there wasn't yet any non-anecdotal information on how successful economic integration has been. The second reason I turned to other topics was that the U.S. presidential election had become a nearly all-consuming preoccupation for both CNBC and myself, so I was thinking a lot more about related discussions as I approached my German correspondence work.

The end result was that I focused on trade issues — one of the central themes in the U.S. elections — for about half of my articles. I spent much of the first month developing sources who were opposed to trade (I already knew tens of business leaders and economists who thought otherwise), and then I employed those contacts for a few different stories: News analysis, day-of-breaking correspondence, and some longer form explanatory journalism.

Beyond that focus, I wrote a handful of other articles. Those included a quick post on young Germans who waited for hours to pay hundreds of dollars for Kanye West-branded t-shirts, and a man-on-the-street look at the brief global panic around Deutsche Bank (London and New York were frightened, Berlin was obviously unconcerned). That latter story also materialized into a live televised report that I conducted five hours before my flight out of the country.

Still, many of my journalistic efforts in Germany were spent trying to report out an economic angle to the refugee crisis: I interviewed about 20 migrants and a similar number of Germans who were involved in integration efforts. I have at least two separate articles planned out from that cache of sourcing, but will delay their publication until November as the election news cycle will continue to overshadow all else through the next month.

To conclude, I'll offer two pieces of advice to future U.S./Canada fellows.

Firstly, you can never start too early on anything related to this fellowship: I did some German studying, apartment hunting and source scouting as soon as I could, and I felt immensely better prepared for it.

And secondly, don't believe that age-old nonsense about Germany only offering bad food. I live and die by a good meal, and I lived plenty well in Berlin and the handful of other cities I've visited (Leipzig, Hamburg, Cologne, Frankfurt, Munich). Sometimes it just requires a little hunting, but for those who are placed in the capital, I've collected some poorly-written thoughts on the subject (<https://medium.com/@exitthisrow/where-to-eat-in-berlin-798e3cd0efdb>).

My CNBC articles and TV appearance (none of my bylined DPA pieces are online):

Idea of a Trump White House leaves Germany angry and anxious – August 18

<http://www.cnbc.com/2016/08/18/idea-of-a-trump-white-house-leaves-germany-angry-and-anxious.html>

Fans line up around the block for Kanye West's European pop-up shops – August 19

<http://www.cnbc.com/2016/08/19/fans-line-up-around-the-block-for-kanye-wests-european-pop-up-shops.html>

TTIP deal: Obamatrade suffers a series of blows in Europe – September 2

<http://www.cnbc.com/2016/09/02/ttip-deal-obamatrade-suffers-a-series-of-blows-in-europe.html>

Hundreds of thousands take to streets in Germany against Obama-backed trade deal – September 17

<http://www.cnbc.com/2016/09/17/germans-march-against-trade-deals-with-us-and-canada-stop-ceta-ttip.html>

Germans oppose Obama trade plan, but say they don't hate Americans – September 19

<http://www.cnbc.com/2016/09/19/germans-protest-ttip-and-ceta-trade-agreements-with-us-and-canada.html>

Whatever it is, it doesn't bother us: Berliners react to Deutsche Bank's woes – September 30

<http://www.cnbc.com/2016/09/30/deutsche-bank-whatever-it-is-it-doesnt-bother-us-berliners-react-to-lenders-woes.html>

Do Germans care about Deutsche Bank? – September 30

<http://video.cnbc.com/gallery/?video=3000555719>