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Freelance Reporter

New York Times

My placement at the Stuttgarter Nachrichten, a mid-level newspaper, made sense since I cover the U.S. military and the city is ringed with army installations. I was assigned to the politics department, a small section staffed by five reporters and an editor, because of my interest in domestic and foreign affairs.

When I arrived at the paper in mid-August, my contact was away on vacation so I kept busy working on the story ideas I had researched for the New York Times before leaving the States. Apart from questions about why I was at the paper if I was not fluent in German, I didn't have many encounters with other reporters and editors because my German is basic. Thankfully, though, I've lived and worked abroad before and operate well independently.

My contact at the newspaper and I had discussed stories we could work on together before I left the States, but those plans never materialized. Michael was so busy editing the Sunday newspaper and writing op-eds that he never had much time to do original reporting, let alone work on stories with another reporter. The rest of the political team was cordial, though a few considered me an intern despite the introductory email I sent outlining my 15 years of experience, and asked me to ferret out information or set up interviews using my contacts as a freelancer for the New York Times. I helped where I could and asked them for assistance but they were more trouble than they were worth. When I had a reporter use his contacts to set up interviews for me, he would get the date, time or travel time wrong and a 10-minute drive turned into an all-day trip. Or an interview was conducted entirely in German with no accommodation to have it in English or later translated.

The editor in chief and members of the political team were interested in learning more about the New York Times military affairs blog, for which I write, because they want to craft a similar blog on the German army. I prepared a briefing for them on the NYT's blog and attempted to set up meetings for it, but they were either canceled or no one showed up. I eventually gave up.

Stuttgart is one of the most expensive cities in Germany and I readily accepted the paper's offer to live in their corporate apartment because the price was low. However, after I arrived, I was told the price had tripled and additional fees had been added. Despite multiple attempts to figure out the reason behind the price hike, no one would speak to me in English or explain to me the change. Instead, I was told repeatedly via email in German that I had to pay the new amount without any explanation. My contact at the paper refused to help when I asked. My request to Frank Freiling, the Burns program director, to intervene on my behalf was first met with a joke and then a flat refusal despite his profuse offers in Washington, DC to help us should any problems arise. I finally brought in outside counsel for assistance.

Because I'm not fluent in German, I couldn't write any stories for the Nachrichten, so I kept busy with my New York Times assignments that took me all over the country. By far, the best

part of the fellowship was visiting East Germany on assignment for the NYT and getting to know the American fellows. My two weeks at the Goethe Institute in Berlin and learning my way around the city was also another highlight. After living in Germany, I thought I knew and understood the country, but my time in Germany as a working journalist exposed me to the country in an entirely new way that I found fascinating. The opportunity to live and work in Germany on this fellowship was a fantastic one despite my experience in Stuttgart.

Here are some recommendations for the fellowship:

Have the American journalists start their fellowships in Germany in September and stay through October. Many people were gone, including my newsroom contact and multiple sources, and I got very little done in August.

The American fellows did not have an orientation in Germany, which would have been incredibly valuable, as we tried to navigate government and other bureaucracies. Instead, we spent a week with the German fellows in Washington, D.C. attending lectures focused almost exclusively on the upcoming American presidential election.