

Information über das Praktikum beim Deutschen Bundestag  
Information about the Internship at the German Parliament

German Department • Dartmouth College  
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Welcome to the Bundestag! This document provides information about doing an internship at the German Bundestag – one of the many amazing opportunities that the German Department offers. This internship (*Praktikum*) offers students interested in government, economics, and history, as well as fluency in German, the opportunity to work as secretariat assistants in various parliamentary committees of the German Bundestag during any term other than the summer.

Since 1981, Dartmouth students have been interning in various capacities for the German Bundestag. Students originally interned in Bonn, which was the capital of (West) Germany from 1945 through 1991. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and a vote by the German government to move the capital back to Berlin in June 1991, interns have worked in Berlin. Traditionally, students have done internships in the Bundestag the term following the German Foreign Study Program.

Working in a foreign country and in a foreign language can be both exciting and frightening. The purpose of this manual is to alleviate some of those concerns and provide information on different aspects of the internship. Hopefully, it will answer any questions you may have. Also included are testimonials from previous Dartmouth students who interned in various committees.

## Description of the Internship

Now what exactly does the German Bundestag need Dartmouth students for? As an intern in the Bundestag, you will have a variety of responsibilities and be exposed to all aspects of the legislative process in the German government. Interns work as assistants for the secretariat of a parliamentary committee in the Bundestag. The committee secretariats – comparable to committee staff in the United States Congress – assist the committee chairperson and committee at large. (Unlike in the United States, the secretariat staff is not of any particular party.) The secretariat works with the chairperson of the committee to arrange committee hearings, process legislation, and provide research, among other tasks. The following is a list of some duties that previous interns have performed:

- Researching and writing reports on topics related to the committee
- Processing and distributing legislation and associated amendments
- Arranging visits for people testifying at committees
- Translating documents into German or English
- Organizing and attending committee hearings
- Transcribing or summarizing committee hearings
- Giving tours of the Bundestag complex

Please note that intern duties vary by committee. Interns in the Foreign Affairs Committee (*Auswärtiger Ausschuss*) are not allowed to attend committee hearings, as they are closed door, even to staff. (Note interns can attend committee hearings at any of the other committees.) You will likely have more work when the Bundestag is in session (called a *Sitzungswoche*), which varies from week to week. Note that there are more *Sitzungswochen* in the fall and winter and fewer in the spring and summer.

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## To Apply

If you are interested you should contact Professor Bruce Duncan in the German Department. You must submit a statement of purpose in German and two letters of recommendation from faculty members to Wadeane Kunz, the Administrator of German Studies in the German Department ([Wadeane.Kunz@Dartmouth.edu](mailto:Wadeane.Kunz@Dartmouth.edu)) by the end of the Winter term of the previous academic year. This statement of purpose, which will be sent to the Bundestag, should describe your reasons for wanting to work at the Bundestag, relevant coursework, and a few committees you would prefer to work for. It must be in German and should be about one to two pages in length. While you will know early when your eight-week internship will take place, you will not get your specific assignment until much closer to the time of your internship – the mills of the Bundestag grind slowly. Also, once accepted, you will need to fill out a form to be submitted with a certificate of enrollment and a copy of your passport (see below).

## Things You Need for Your Internship

Working and getting paid in a foreign country can be tricky. The following is a list of things that you need to work at the Bundestag. Most of these things you will have to get once you are over there during your first week at work. Your supervisor will give you time off to do all this stuff. You must, however, send the Bundestag a few forms, arrange housing, and get health care insurance before you leave. Before you leave, you should also schedule an appointment with whoever is taking care of the paperwork for Dartmouth interns. (This person changes every few years, but the German Department will know.) You will meet with this person on the first day at their office at Unter den Linden 62-68 and they will guide you through all the paperwork.

- **Certificate of Enrollment:** Before you leave, you must send the German Bundestag a couple of pieces of paper: a certificate of enrollment from the Dartmouth Registrar (*eine Studienbescheinigung*), another Germany-specific form that requires an official university stamp and dean's signature, as well as a copy of your passport. This should be done early as it often takes a while for the form to make it through the international and Bundestag mail systems. You should work with the German Department to get these forms.
- **Passport:** In addition to your passport, you'll need a set of passport photos for various things. Note that these photos must be the right size by European (not US) standards. Germany requires 3.5 x 4.5 cm photos. There are booths in many U-Bahn stations where you can get these photos. It also useful to have copies of your passport on hand.
- **Housing:** You will obviously need a place to stay during your internship. There are a couple of different options:
  - o Host family: If you know someone in Berlin, stay with them. If you were on the LSA or FSP and lived with a host family, you could ask to stay with them again; that is if you got along. Make sure you make it clear to them that you will pay to stay in their house and eat their food. I would suggest asking them how much they want because they are usually pretty reasonable. (I stayed with my host family and paid €350 a month.)
  - o Get your own flat: It is easiest if you know someone in Berlin who knows the area and who can help you get started – be it other people to room with, what area to live in, etc. You'll probably want to live somewhat near "die Mitte"- not Dahlem or some out-of-the-way place like that. Appropriate choices would be Mitte itself or Prenzlauerberg (which has an emerging youthful parenting demographic) – also Friedrichshain, which has spillover effects from Prenzlauerberg. Shöneberg works, though it's a little further (very quiet and demographically diverse). I suggest reading up on the best places to live to accommodate price and style.

- Live in a *Wohngemeinschaft*: This is definitely the cheapest option and easiest way to meet people. You'll share a flat with about three others yet have your own room (though its likely you'll live with smokers, if that bothers you). Three websites you can use to find a *WG* are below. (Some of these websites will also allow you to find single rooms if you prefer, but the advantage of having a *WG* is that you'll meet some interesting people.)
  - [wg-gesucht.de](http://wg-gesucht.de)
  - [www.studentenwerk-berlin.de](http://www.studentenwerk-berlin.de)
  - [www.mitwohnzentrale.de](http://www.mitwohnzentrale.de)
  
- **Health Care Insurance:** Germany has a universal health care system and requires everyone to have health care insurance. Thus, in order to work at the Bundestag you must be insured and have proof of insurance when you arrive. Make sure your insurance covers you abroad and meets German requirements. As per the law, you need you have to submit a written statement from your health insurer stating the existing insurance policy fulfills the statutory requirements in Germany. If you have a health insurance card that should be fine. The Dartmouth Student Group Health Plan (DSGHP) is sufficient.
  
- **Bank Account in Germany:** In order to get paid, you need a bank account (*Konto*) in Germany. Unfortunately, the Bundestag can only deposit money into a German bank account; thus, you will need to open one when you arrive. It is very easy to open a student account (*Studentenkonto*), which is free. You may have to show proof that you are a student and some banks will not let you open an account unless you are a student in Germany (e.g. Berliner Bank). Deutsche Bank is probably the best choice, particularly if you have a Bank of America account because you can withdraw money from a Deutsch Bank account at a Bank of America ATM for no extra charge. Berliner Sparkasse is another option, but you might have to deal with exchange, transfer, and wiring fees when converting to dollars. When you open an account, do not tell the bank that you will only be using the account for three months, because they will refuse to open an account for you. Also, depending on the bank you may need a certificate of residency (see below) to open an account.
  
- **Certificate of Residency (*Anmeldungsbestätigung*):** This is simply a piece of paper with a stamp certifying that you live in Berlin. In order to get this you have to go to the city hall (*Bürgeramt*) for the part of Berlin you are living in (check online) and fill out some forms (some of which you can find online). You must bring along some sort of proof of residency, such as a signed letter from your host family or, if you are staying in an apartment, from the person who leased it to you. You must show this to the Bundestag to get paid, the *Ausländerbehörde* to get a visa (see below), and the bank to get an account. Do this early in the day, as the lines can be long.

- **German Work Visa:** To work and get paid in Germany you obviously need a work/residency permit (*Aufenthaltsgenehmigung*). This is perhaps the most complicated and time-consuming thing to get. You must visit the Ausländerbehörde (Foreigners' Authority) when it is open, which is not very often. Visit the following website to find out more: <http://www.berlin.de/labo/auslaender/dienstleistungen/>. There is only one Ausländerbehörde in Berlin and it is at Friedrich-Krause-Ufer 24. The closest U-Bahn station is U-Bhf. Amrumer Str. Once you get off the U-Bahn just follow the signs - you will eventually cross a bridge, turn left, and the building is on the right side of the street. There are also some buses that run nearby. Several weeks in advance of your internship, call and schedule an appointment for your first week. You can also try and ask our contact person in the Bundestag to make an appointment for you. They schedule several weeks out and book up. If you do not have an appointment, it's fine. Try and get there early one day and plan on spending a couple of hours waiting and experiencing what it feels like to be an foreign worker. If it is really busy, you may have to come back another day or schedule an appointment in person (you will get one that is several weeks earlier than what they tell you over the phone). You need several pieces of paper (including your *Anmeldungsbestätigung*), your passport, and passport photos to get the visa so make sure you check with whoever you checked in with the first day before you go so you don't have to go back again. The visa itself also costs about €60 so bring enough cash with you. Note that this visa runs out the last day of your internship, after which the 90-day tourist visa is back into effect. If you are a German citizen, lucky you, you don't have to do any of this.
- **International Student ID:** This is not necessary for your internship, but it will get you a lot of really good discounts in Berlin and Europe. (Dartmouth IDs are not accepted.) You can buy these online at ISIC.org or STATravel.com for about \$20 and should be bought beforehand in the US.

## Stipend

To cover expenses, the German government provides interns with a monthly stipend of about €1500 after taxes. (This is better than any government internship in Washington, D.C., pays.) This should be more than enough to cover living expenses for the duration of your internship (Berlin is relatively cheap as big cities go) as well as airfare to and from Berlin. Please note that often times the people you are often working for in the committee secretariats do not know you are getting paid. It is unusual for interns in Germany to get paid, particularly this much; thus, it is recommended that you keep it to yourself.

Getting paid in Germany means navigating the only tax system in the world that is more complicated than ours in the US. Your paycheck will be deposited directly into your German bank account and upon payment you will get rather complicated form with what you have been paid – they give you a lengthy handout (in German of course) explaining this form. You will pay two taxes – an income tax (*Lohnsteuer*) and a solidarity tax (*Solidaritätszuschlag*). For the income tax, you should be in Lohnsteuer Class I, which is the lowest. If you are not, you are getting taxed too much and need to change it. If your paperwork is not filed correctly, you will automatically be put into Lohnsteuer Class VI and pay too much tax. During your internship, you should receive a form called a Lohnsteuerbescheinigung, which will have all this information. The solidarity tax was originally introduced to help rebuild East Germany after reunification and paid by only West Germans. Both of these taxes will appear on the form. Before taxes (*brutto*) your salary should be €1794.77 per month and after taxes (*netto*) about €1500.

While the income and solidarity taxes will automatically be withheld from your income, there is a way to get the money back – that is if you are a U.S. citizen. The U.S. and Germany signed a treaty back in 1989 and under this treaty American citizens are exempt from paying taxes twice (in both Germany and the U.S.). You may need to wait a full year after you file your tax return in the U.S., but it may be worth it if your taxes are lower in the U.S. In order to get the money back, you will need to keep your German bank account open. For more information visit the IRS website:

<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/international/article/0,,id=169486,00.html>.

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## Work Hours During Internship

Interns are expected to work full time; however, the amount of work will vary depending on whether the Bundestag is in session, which varies from week to week. If it is in session (a *Sitzungswoche*) then you are expected to be at work from about 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. When the Bundestag is not in session (a *Nicht Sitzungswoche*), the hours are more relaxed – from about 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. Regardless of whether the Bundestag is in session, on Friday you are free to leave after 2:00 pm as the Bundestag empties out early for the weekend. This opens up a lot of opportunity to travel around Europe during the

weekends. With the main train station only a 10-minute walk away, you can easily catch an afternoon train to Amsterdam, Paris, Prague, etc. Another important thing to note is that as required by German law, you have a couple days of official vacation time to take during your internship. You have to fill out certain forms beforehand and it may just be easier to ask your boss, but they are there if you need them.

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### German Office Culture

Office culture in Germany is very different from that in the United States. There are a few things you should be aware of before you start. First, the *Sie* form is always used in the Bundestag – no big surprise. More surprising, however, is that your colleagues will call you Herr or Frau so-and-so, even if you tell them to call you by your first name. (It took me six weeks to get my boss to finally call me by my first name.) Even teenagers interning in the Bundestag are referred to as Herr or Frau so-and-so. Formal language extends to telephones and e-mails. German salutations and valedictions are hard to come by, but very important to include in e-mails. *Lieber Herr* (or *Liebe Frau*) and *Sehr geehrter Herr* (or *Sehr geehrte Frau*) are good ones. For valedictions, stick with *Mit vielen Grüßen* or some variation.

As for the dress code, the Bundestag is surprisingly casual (in total juxtaposition to the Capitol Hill). During *Sitzungswochen*, the dress code is more formal and you should bring a suit along to wear to your committee hearings. When the Bundestag is not in session, however, you'll see people in jeans and t-shirts. For these weeks, slacks and a collared shirt are fine.

There are a few other things to beware of working in the Bundestag. You will likely have your own office. Note that Germans usually keep their office doors closed or only slightly ajar – definitely not wide open. Also, eight-week internships that are common in the US are very rare in Germany – paid ones are non-existent. High-school students in Germany may do two-week internships, but definitely not eight weeks. Remember that the people you are working do not know how much you are getting paid. Furthermore, other interns in the Bundestag are almost always getting paid nothing. Bringing up how much you are getting paid can be a sore topic for them.

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### Things to do in the Bundestag and Berlin

Working in the Bundestag definitely has its perks. With your ID card you have an all access pass to the entire Bundestag complex. Take time to explore all of the buildings- Paul-Löbe-Haus, Jakob-Kaiser-Haus, Marie-Elisabeth-Lüders-Haus, and der Reichstag. All of the committees are housed in Paul-Löbe-Haus while the members of the Bundestag have their offices in Jakob-Kaiser-Haus and Marie-Elisabeth-Lüders-Haus. It is quite expansive and can be tiring to walk from one end to the other. (During my internship, I saw one member of the Bundestag use a scooter to get around.)

The Reichstag obviously has a lot of history, much of which has been preserved and can be seen walking around its corridors. In the Reichstag is the main chamber of the Bundestag – the Plenarsaal. Directly above is the Fraktionsebene, where each party has their meeting room. Whenever the Bundestag is in session, there is always stuff going on in the Plenarsaal, so take some time to go watch. In your office you should be able to find a schedule of the proceedings in the Plenarsaal for each Sitzungswoche and plan to attend when they are talking about something interesting. For particularly popular events (like an important speech by the Chancellor), you should reserve tickets ahead of time (usually a week before). With your ID, you can also avoid waiting in line to visit the dome on top of the Reichstag. (There is a stairwell from the Fraktionsebene to the top.)

As an intern at the Bundestag you are also allowed to get a library card, with which you can check out books from the Bibliothek des Deutschen Bundestages. Unlike the Library of Congress, the public does not have access to it Bundestag library. Thus, if you interested in doing some research during your internship, take advantage of access to the third largest library in the world, at least according the people working there. You can arranging a tour of the library and get your card then.

The Bundestag offers several sports clubs (*Sportgemeinschaft*) that you can participate in: <http://sport-im-parlament.de/berlin>. (I played ping-pong with my boss every Tuesday night in the Bundestag gym.) There is also a Facebook page for Praktikant(inn)en des Bundestages, which may help in connecting with the many other interns in the Bundestag. Sometimes they even have a weekly Praktikantenstammtisch in the evenings: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=314641411799&ref=ts>.

As for other things to do in Berlin, buy a guidebook – there are tons of places to explore in Berlin. Zitty.de is a good place to look for events in Berlin. You can take a tour of the Bundeskanzleramt. Note that you have to book this in advance and tours only happen on certain Saturdays. Call ahead of time to reserve a spot. Visiting the Germany's upper house of parliament – the Bundesrat – is also worth doing. Again, you must make reservations in advance. They sometimes offer tours exclusively for Bundestag interns. The Cinestar at Potsdamer Platz gives student discounts for movies, no matter what time of day it is. Other movie theaters usually have discounts only on “Kino Dienstag,” but these shows are usually really crowded.

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## Transportation in Berlin

The Berlin transit system is one of the best in the world and far superior to anything in the United States. The U-Bahn, S-Bahn, and bus systems are very easy to navigate. Depending on where you live, you can buy a monthly pass (*Monatskarte*), which costs about €70. Although they rarely check tickets and some people do ride the trains without tickets (called *Schwarzfahren*), you will get a big fine if you are caught – and no,

claiming you are a foreigner is not an excuse. The Bundestag complex has its own U-Bahn stop called Bundestag on the U55 line. It is often faster to walk from Brandenburg Tor or Hauptbahnhof, which are both within a 10-minute walk from Paul-Löbe-Haus where you will be working. There are also several buses that run past and near the Bundestag. The BVG website is really helpful in figuring out how to around Berlin:

<http://www.bvg.de/index.php/de/index.html>.

If you take your contract and the form describing your work/pay/etc for the internship, your international and Dartmouth Student ID card, and a spare passport photo to one of the larger train stations, you can get a cheaper monthly student card for the U-Bahn and S-Bahn (called an “Ausbildungsticket”). If you are planning on doing extensive traveling in Germany while you’re working, you should get a “Bahnkarte 25” or “Bahnkarte 50.” With an international student ID you can buy the “Bahnkarte 50” for €100 – it is good for a year, and you can purchase any train ticket for half price with it. You can also take up to four friends with you, and they also travel for 50 percent of the normal price. The “Bahnkarte 25” is a similar kind of deal. Make sure you take a spare passport picture with you when you go to purchase the card.

## Testimonials

“As an intern for the Committee on Education, Research and Technology Assessment, I assisted the committee secretariat in mostly administrative matters relating to the committee. I also worked on several projects with the Office of Technology Assessment (TAB), a research arm of the Bundestag that reports to the committee. Ranging from preparing legislation to coordinating committee hearings, the work I did exposed me to the inner workings of a parliamentary committee and system. As a government major with a focus on comparative politics, it was thus an ideal experience.

To be sure, I also spent a lot of my internship having discussions on international politics with other people in the *Bundestag*. Being one of the only Americans working for the Bundestag was a truly remarkable experience, as people would flock to me with questions about American politics. Surprisingly, this was one of the most difficult parts of my internship. Try explaining to a German (in German) why Americans are so reluctant to accept universal healthcare. It’s not easy.” – **Andrew Clay ’12**

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“I interned for the Committee on Foreign Affairs (*Auswärtiger Ausschuss*) in the German Bundestag. The opportunities and experiences I had during this time were nothing short of amazing. In addition to researching and reporting on key current events, I was able to participate in a number of open plenary sessions, take tours (i.e. *Kanzleramt*, *Bundesrat*), and interact with heads of states or foreign dignitaries (I often highlight the time when I held the elevator door open for Afghanistan’s president, Hamid Karzai). I was surprised how accommodating and welcoming the committee was to interns; they really expect thorough work yet tailor the internship to meet the interns’ interests, abilities, and academic goals.

The work in the *Auswärtiger Ausschuss* is interesting and exciting. My jobs fell into three areas: 1) Researching issues and then writing reports of developing current affairs; 2) assisting with ambassador/head of state visits and functions; and 3) miscellaneous tasks relating to international politics/affairs etc (could be mailing letters, a little translation, etc).

I believe compared to other committees, the atmosphere here is a little cold to its interns (stereotypically professional Germans). Nonetheless, you are both challenged and rewarded with the work you do. Furthermore, I established lasting friendships with the other (German) interns there, partly because they felt obliged to help me with my papers by looking for mistakes and offering editorial suggestions. In other words, you get what you put into it. There are many opportunities that related to it, and they were very accommodating to intern desires/demands, etc. I felt very lucky to be there, even if at times I felt inadequate for the job.

When I was there, the chair of the committee was Dr. Michael Fuchs. Kind of a crazy guy – he often seemed a little oblivious to his surroundings, but always acted very formally. The

main secretary, Jutta Leiendecker, likes to engage her humor. Frau Ludwig was a more quiet presence. Frau Hartleif has very high standards for the work you do, and will express when something is inadequate, but is otherwise very nice and interested in who you are. Those are the few lasting impressions of the people I interacted with. My first extended time in Berlin was an unforgettable experience, and I would love to return for similar opportunities.” – **Conrad Whitaker ’11**

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“I interned for the Committee on Education, Research and Technology Assessment (*Ausschuss für Bildung, Forschung, und Technikfolgenabschätzung*). All my coworkers were friendly and helpful as I learned about German politics and improved my language skills. My day-to-day activities included translating documents from German to English, preparing materials for committee meetings, representing the committee at technology conference and lectures, and helping with general administrative tasks.

As an economics major with an interest in international finance, I frequently immersed myself in relevant happenings within the Bundestag. Whether it was listening to Angela Merkl pressure the parliament to approve an unpopular bailout for the stumbling Greek government, or witnessing president Horst Koehler resign over his controversial comments about Germany’s presence in Afghanistan, or attending an economic conference on the 2008 financial crisis in the U.S. embassy, I constantly found myself challenged as student of both the German language and international economics. Experiencing German culture on its home turf and learning politics and the language within their walls, were invaluable experiences to me.” – **Mitt Coats ’11**

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“On my first day at work, I was shuffled up and down Unter den Linden (where all the government buildings are located) by a very pleasant woman, whom I never saw again. No matter, her job was simply to get me registered in my internship, get the appropriate forms stamped and re-stamped, and see to it that I was put into the right hands. It was a very stress-free process with her at the helm, and all I had to do was smile and keep up.

By the end of the first day I found myself in the Committee of Tourism, though that is a bit misleading, since my internship had nothing to do with tourism! I was actually working within a subset of that committee, which organizes an annual conference for young people from Germany, France, and Poland. The conference is a weeklong event honoring the victims of the Holocaust, and is filled with lectures and workshops with academics, authors, and politicians. The week culminates with the German national day of remembrance, a ceremony attended by the Chancellor and the President. My role was to help prepare for the arrival of students and to help organize the logistics of the event. During the conference, I helped facilitate workshops and roundtable discussions.

The second half of my internship was in the Committee for Urban Planning and Development. My position in this committee was somewhat less defined, as we did not

have one singular big event to plan. I did, however, help organize for the bi-weekly meetings of the committee, and I had the opportunity to sit in on the meetings. It was a fantastic inside look into the German government and it was wonderful to be so directly involved in the political process.

I still remain close friends with my two supervisors from the Committee of Tourism, who in fact played a crucial role in the formulation of my senior thesis as well as my application for a DAAD grant. Indeed, I am sure they will be some of the first people I see upon my arrival in Berlin in a couple weeks!

I did my internship directly following the Berlin FSP, which I think is an ideal way to experience the city and improve one's language skills. I eased into Berlin with the help of my host parents and the FSP, and then I had a chance to live on my own in the city and begin to feel like I fit in (somewhat!).” – **Susannah Thompson '08**

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“I interned for the Committee on Women, Children, Families, and Seniors. My internship at the German Parliament gave me a new perspective of dilemmas that both the EU and Germany face. The EU Parliament had recently passed new anti-discrimination laws, which now needed to be implemented in Germany. One of the main repercussions of these EU guidelines was the creation of anti-discrimination legislation for women in the work force. Of course, my committee was deeply involved in this issue. It was exciting to witness the creation of this new important legislation. Every two weeks the commission would get together to debate that topic, among others, and I was able to listen first-hand to their debates. I was also able to attend any other sessions from other committees that interested me.

Working in a German environment was a valuable experience: I constantly had to practice the language, it provided me insight with the German bureaucratic working mentality, and I got to see from up-close how German politics are created. Spending those two additional months in Berlin was an amazing opportunity. I needed this extra time to improve my language skills and the absence of other FSP students around was an incentive to meet and socialize with Berliners.” – **Kimberly Jeffers '06**

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“I was in the Inter-Parliamentary Affairs Division and spent much of my time translating briefing documents (English to German) for the 18 German Parliamentarians who sat on the NATO Economics & Security Committee meeting and took part in the annual NATO meeting. I also researched and wrote a paper (in German) on the reactions of Western and Warsaw Pact countries to West Germany's acceptance into NATO in preparation for the 50th anniversary activities that took place in 2005.” – **Alexia Huffman '05**