Happy greetings from Berlin!

We are off to a good start here with our two January arrivals, Linn Tjornhom (Class of 2025) and Esteban Paulino (Class of 2025), while looking forward to Bea De Oliveira (Class of 2024) and Cate Knothe (Class of 2024) joining us very soon. Braving rain and snow and some rather cold temperatures – in sum, the usual weather mix for January and February - Linn and Esteban have both been busy exploring Berlin while also focusing on and excelling in their respective German classes.

With each new student’s arrival, we are reminded of the fact that our students come to Berlin to immerse themselves in a new environment (and country) in order to get to experience what it is like living abroad. And it has been great in these first weeks to get to share in their moments and stories of the funny, the amazing, the peculiar, and the didn’t-expect-this!

Here’s to a wonderful semester ahead and to spring’s arrival that is hopefully just around the corner... right? And to all you Blue Devils still undecided about studying abroad, come join us in Fall 2023 to experience Berlin for yourself!

Mit herzlichen Grüßen

Tin Wegel (Resident Director)

Lina-Sofie Raith (Program Assistant)
Regained Confidence
by Linn Tjornhom

Stepping off the plane, I was running through basic German small talk phrases in my head, nervous that it had been about four years since I last spoke German. As my host mom picked me up, I was definitely a bit rusty, as I struggled to say much more than “Ja” and “cool” as she told me about herself and the city. Through conversations over breakfast with my host family and some grammar review in my German course, my brain readjusted, and the language started to come back to me.

After even just a few days I was able to not only follow the conversation at the dinner table but could also contribute without feeling too held back by the language! Using German with strangers in everyday life (at the store, ordering food, public transport, etc.) is still nerve-wracking, but it really makes me feel like I belong in the city. I’ve gained so much confidence since everyone is so understanding and helpful anytime I struggle to say a certain sentence. That confidence helps harden my resolve to keep speaking German when the occasional employee insists on responding only in English either because they think it’s fun or they don’t want to deal with my accent. Luckily those people are the minority, and my confidence in my German is skyrocketing.

Living in a city like Berlin is so different than living at Duke. There’s so much more freedom with the public transportation and the ability to go anywhere I want. After we were done with class one day, I just took the subway for a quick stop at the Brandenburg Gate before going home, knowing I could easily come back another time for longer.

This weekend my host family took me up to Drachenberg where we saw gorgeous views of the skyline illuminated by light shining through the clouds. They pointed out all of the important and many of the not-so-important buildings we could see, and I can’t wait to keep exploring all these places and diving deeper into the history and culture of Berlin!

I’m loving this experience, but one thing’s for sure - despite coming here already knowing German, full language immersion while starting a new life is exhausting, and I’ve been sleeping well.
One Step Back, Two Steps Forward
by Esteban Paulino

My time in Berlin has been quite the adventure that I expected yet underestimated. Specifically, I underestimated the impact of the language barrier on my experience. An experience that highlights this was on my first day of orientation when I was heading back home. I entered the 186 bus heading to Roseneck, Grunewald, yet I was surprisingly confused when the bus ride ended at an unfamiliar place. To make matters worse, I could not call anyone since my sim card was not activated. Fortunately, thanks to the maps I received from my host and Tin and Lina, I was able to get back home in what was a calm 20-minute walk. It turns out that buses and trains may still take you to a different destination even if it is the same line.

In addition, I had many failed attempts to activate my E-Sim card on my phone since the activation call was only in German. Each time, I would join the call and ask for English, yet with the little German I knew, I could tell they could not help me in English. Eventually, Tin and Lina helped me with this, but it did not help that my activation email did not have a QR code. However, thanks again to Tin and Lina, I was able to get that solved too.

I bring up these events not to criticize but to show that not everything has gone as planned. However, my takeaway has been that this is normal and OK. These experiences are a part of the learning that comes from being in a new country and make me find creative ways to solve problems, whether that be solving them myself or asking for help.

On a more positive note, my host, Shahwali, has been great so far. I really appreciate his ability to speak German and English since I can conversate with him comfortably and still ask for translations for new words and phrases. The same can be said for my professor, Laura, who has made my super individualized class exciting and helpful. Overall, it has been a unique experience being here in Berlin. I have already explored so many museums and monuments, yet there still is so much more waiting for me, including the German language.

Feel free to email us at duke@international.fu-berlin.de with any questions about the program or to get in contact with one of our current (or former) Duke-in-Berliners.