An interview with Natalie Hollister:
Natalie Hollister is currently a senior at Duke from Leavenworth, Kansas. She is a Neuroscience major, with minors in psychology and German. After graduating from Duke in May, she will begin working towards a Master of Social Work at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Hey, Natalie. Thanks for participating in this interview. First, could you just tell us a little bit about which program you participated in?

For the Fall Semester of 2016 I participated in the Duke in Berlin study abroad program. For four months I lived with a host family and took Duke-managed classes (intermediate German, environmental policy, and art history) with other American students in the program. More than just being in the classroom, we also collectively explored the city through various outings and activities.

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Sam Frederick, class of ’19, is the president of German club. We ask him about his experiences with the department as a learner of German, a member of the German department community, and a leader of German club.

**When did you start taking German? Why?**

I started taking German in 7th grade. I had taken Spanish for about four years in grade school and didn't feel that I connected with the language very much. My middle school offered German as a foreign language, and I had heard that the German teacher was really good—very talented and very passionate about the craft of teaching. I also knew that some of my great-grandparents came from Germany, so I guess there was an aspect of wanting to learn more about my roots, about where my family came from. I think I learned more in my first semester of German than I did in four years of the other language. I felt a real connection with the language and have been taking German ever since.

**Why have you chosen to pursue a German major? What does the German major mean to you?**

German was a big part of my high school and middle school experiences. I looked forward to German classes everyday. I spent a lot of time working in the German Honor Society. Perhaps most importantly, I genuinely enjoy the language and culture. It just seemed natural to me that I would continue in college.

I went to Germany for a few weeks in high school—a trip that involved two weeks staying with a host family and then a week of travel. In just three weeks, I felt my German improved immensely. I was hooked. After that trip, I wanted to go back to Germany. I thought studying abroad in Germany would be a great way for me to do this. A study abroad experience in Germany fit right into the major, so I felt that the major was ultimately the right choice for me.

The German major means a lot to me. It's been a big part of my Duke experience. I've met some of my closest friends in German—whether participating in the Duke in Berlin Summer Program or just taking German classes. Some of my fondest memories were made in Berlin, experiencing the culture firsthand and being surrounded by the language. The German major offers a great opportunity to learn. In other classes, you can get lost in the shuffle sometimes. Classes are large. You might not recognize or know anyone in your class. In German classes, you get to know a small group of people well. You’re taking classes with a consistent group that really helps you grow and become better. As class sizes are usually seminar size or smaller, you have a lot of opportunity to hone your language skills, to delve into the material and explore it fully. (Continued on p. 6)
Founded in 1988 at the Freie Universität in West Berlin, Duke-in-Berlin offers several programs for undergraduate students to study in Berlin. Today, the program offers courses at three universities: the fall program is based at the Humboldt University in former East Berlin, spring-summer at the Free University in former West Berlin, and Engineers may take courses at the Technical University, which is a great route to balancing an Engineering degree with a German Studies major or minor. The program requires no prior knowledge of German to attend and offers intensive German courses so that students may take advantage of being in a German-Speaking city and enter into a near language-immersion experience. In addition to support of students’ linguistic skills, the program helps students deepen their understanding of German culture and broaden their knowledge of the social sciences, humanities, and technology within a German and European context.

In addition to the longer, semester-length programs, Duke-in-Berlin also offers a 6-week interdisciplinary summer program in cooperation with Rutgers University. During this program, students enroll in two Duke faculty-led courses and take German language classes (offered at the elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels). Students have the choice to take one of three tracks: English only, German only, or one course in German and one in English. In addition to fulfilling German Studies course requirements, classes offered in English often satisfy requirements in Public Policy, Jewish Studies, History, ICS, Literature, Theater, Art History, and other departments.
Interview with Natalie (Cont. from p. 1)

Why did you choose to participate in Duke in Berlin?

In my application I had to answer this in an essay, and here is what I said: “As a person I am fueled by the pursuit of my passions and throwing myself head-first into what matters to me, and at this point in my life German is one of the things I am the most passionate about. I want to learn more about the country in which I partially grew up, I want to be able to speak German and be understandable to natives, I want to gain the lexicon necessary to express all the thoughts that run through my head in my favorite language. I want to be immersed in a different culture and gain perspective about other parts of the world, and I want to meet others who are just as passionate about German as I am.”

What was your favorite experience in the program?

This is such a difficult question to answer. My favorite day in Berlin was when everyone in the program went to see a play, a modern adaptation of “The Sorrows of Young Werther”, in this beautiful theater. Afterwards the actor held a special talk with us, and later my German professor and a group of my friends and I went to a nearby canteen and had the best conversation. It was the first night I felt like I belonged in Berlin, and I can remember feeling overwhelmingly grateful to be there and know everybody in the program. I also absolutely loved (and still love) my host family, and I am beyond grateful for how loved and welcome they made me feel. My experience in Berlin just would not have been as amazing or fulfilling without them.

What was your experience with the academic side of your study abroad experience?

The academic side of Duke in Berlin was nothing short of fantastic. I learned so much about how Germany relates to important fields such as history, public policy, and art, and this helped me appreciate Berlin and the German language significantly more. The professors are amazing and highly knowledgeable people – my German professor and I became friends and still email each other!

How did life as a student in Berlin compare to life in Durham?

Being in a different country, and in the middle of a large city, necessitates significantly more independence than life at Duke. My host family was amazing and involved me often in their family life, but I also very much had to learn how to run my own life and be with myself. At Duke, you are surrounded by other people who tell you what to do in your spare time, your studies, your life – but in Berlin I made my own decisions and became as involved as I wanted to be. It was so freeing.

What recommendations would you have for future Duke in Berlin students?

If I had to say one thing, it would be this: immerse yourself in as much of the local language, culture, and history as you can. Being in a new place with a foreign language can be terrifying sometimes, but the only way to get the most out of the experience is to overcome that fear and leave the American bubble. Berlin has so much to offer – you get out of this experience whatever you put into it! Do not let fear or shaky confidence prevent…
Hi Susanne! Thank you so much for participating in this interview! First, I was wondering if you could just tell us a little about your involvement in the Duke in Berlin program?

I’m happy to have the opportunity to talk about the program. I first participated in the Duke in Berlin program in 2012 as a program-assistant and co-instructor for the course “Berlin Since the War: A Cultural History”. It was the first time I had been to Berlin since the summer before the wall came down in ’89 and as with my first stay in Berlin as a Duke exchange student in 83-84, it was once again a life-changing experience. When former director Bill Donahue left Duke for Notre Dame in 2015, I was offered the opportunity to direct the summer program and I have been doing so ever since. I also work with recruitment for the semester programs.

Why do you think students should participate in Duke in Berlin?

I believe all students should spend time abroad during their studies, ideally for a whole semester, but if that is not available to them, definitely for a summer. I have never heard a senior say they regret going abroad but I’ve heard many express regret about not having done so. Berlin in particular, with its layers of history and multicultural population, gives students a broad perspective on the world beyond Duke. Luckily, we have a wide variety of programs which allow our students to explore this world while still being able to fulfill their Duke requirements.

What is one of your favorite experiences that you’ve had during your involvement with Duke in Berlin?

I can’t think of one favorite experience in particular. Spending time with students as they explore this city I love so much is my biggest thrill.

What are of few of your favorite parts about the city of Berlin?

I love the Kreuzberg neighborhood, where I could sit outside in a café and people watch all day. I also enjoy being anywhere near the Spree river or Landwehr canal and there’s nothing like taking a boat tour and seeing Berlin from that perspective. The parks, the museums, the flea markets - I’m into all of it.

What would be your advice for a student about to embark for Duke in Berlin?

For students attending the summer program, I always advise them not to plan to spend more than one weekend away from Berlin. Many of them are excited to be going to Europe for the first time and want to do a lot of traveling, but then they end up missing out on really getting to know Berlin.
When did you first get involved with the German club? Why? Why did you choose to get involved with the club’s leadership?

I first got involved in the German Club during my sophomore year. I had been really involved in German Honor Society in high school: planning events, helping the German teacher, working on displays, and raising money—organizing the group. I missed doing that in college and wanted to get involved in something similar.

I also felt German classes were important to me at Duke, so I wanted to give something back to the department and to the community. German Club was the perfect way for me to do this.

What does the German club offer to students at Duke? Why is this important?

German Club offers a lot to Duke students. Students at Duke have a lot going on most of the time. In the middle of a hectic week, Filmabend can be a chance to relax. You can sit back and watch a movie (not only a fun way to learn, but a great way to learn about the language and culture of Germany). Sometimes, reading about culture or doing grammar exercises doesn't convey the German experience, and sometimes, it can be kind of dry. Movies are a way to visualize the culture, to see German humor, and to hear the language being applied in realistic situations. Students can learn a lot from Filmabend while also having a good time and in an environment that's not stressful.

In classes, some of us might feel self-conscious speaking in a foreign language in front of the professor and a group of our peers. We might worry how mistakes in our speech could affect our grade. We might not know how to convey the thoughts we have in class discussions. Kaffeestunde offers more personal interactions with others. There's absolutely no pressure in Kaffeestunde. People of all levels come to speak the language, to learn, and to have a good time. You can talk about interesting academic subjects or you can just talk about your day. No one is there to judge you; everyone is there to speak the language and to get better. People are there to help you along if you need it. Kaffeestunde also is an opportunity to talk to other Duke students you might not know. A lot of times during the school year, we can get stuck in our bubbles, in our comfort zones, not realizing that there's a world outside of our classes, outside our friend groups, outside of Duke. Kaffeestunde can connect us with new people. While we're learning German, we can learn about other people's experiences and broaden our personal horizons. This is a truly unique experience.

German Club offers the chance to learn and grow as an individual and as a German speaker. It reminds us that there's a world outside of our daily routines. It teaches us about a culture other than our own. It helps us understand other people's experience and connects us to the broader world. Such a broad worldview is crucial for progress in our own lives and in society.

What would you say to a student in German 101 who is thinking about going to Kaffeestunde/a German club event but nervous about their language skills?

No one should be nervous about going to a German Club event. There's absolutely no pressure. People come with all different backgrounds of German language skills. There are students from 101. There are students who are higher level. Sometimes, German exchange students come. German Club events exist to help us get better at the language and to help us learn about the culture. No one is at a German Club event to judge your language skills. Everyone wants to help you improve. It's a very laid-back environment.
In addition to these content courses, the Department of Germanic Studies offers the full range of German language courses, from the introductory to advanced levels. Meeting times/locations vary. See the Fall 2018 Course Search.
Fall 2018 Course Offerings: Undergraduate

It’s the 200th anniversary of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*; Celebrate the mood!

**The Uncanny German Canon from Goethe to Kafka**

**GER 445S**
Tu/Th - 3:05pm - 4:20pm
Professor Stefani Engelstein
Taught in German

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**Fall 2018**
**Germany Confronts the Holocaust**

Mon./Wed. 4:40PM – 5:55PM

Ger 387
Hist 261 / Jewish St 369 / Lit 369
Taught in English
Professor Kristen Dolan

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