

Law School Application Personal Statement for UC Hastings College of Law

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In what would have been my senior year of high school I took part in a scholarship program sponsored by the US Congress and the German Bundestag to live with a host family while attending high school in Germany. The World Trade Center attacks occurred during my exchange, and I came to realize that renewed cultural stereotypes and anti-foreigner sentiment might result from those attacks. As an exchange student one has to be prepared to overcome cultural barriers in order to adapt to a foreign environment, but I never would have imagined that I would be the one being stereotyped. During the wave of anti-American sentiment in Europe, I often found myself the target of such unnecessary and illogical stereotypes, however harmless. This combined with news of hate crimes breaking out in the US as a result of 9/11 made me realize that the cultural exchange could not simply end with the exchange students going home and resuming their lives as they were. At the end of the exchange I wrote a speech to relate how the experiences of that year influenced me to want to continue building bridges between different cultures in order to overcome harmful stereotypes. In my speech I expressed that the three-hundred exchange students who received the Congress-Bundestag Scholarship would be influenced by their exchange experiences to affect the cultural relations between Germany and the US on local, national, and universal levels. As I addressed my speech to members of the German Parliament on the impact of the exchange program, one of the parliamentarians came to tears. He introduced himself as Dr. R. Werner Schuster, a representative for the Social Democrats from Cologne. Motioning to where I just stood, he mentioned how just years ago a more youthful version of himself stood at the microphone in Bonn giving a similar

speech. Referring to the speech I just gave, Dr. Schuster concluded that a life time of dedication inspired by an exchange program would most certainly affect cultural relations on a universal level, much as his experiences growing up in Africa influenced him to work with Third World development. He finished by recommending that I apply for the International Parliament Internship, a Bundestag sponsored internship for American college graduates, fluent in German, to work with a member of the German Bundestag--a role he would gladly have taken on. Whether I would have taken up contact with Dr. Schuster is fairly certain, however, four months later Dr. Schuster died of a heart attack. Looking back at that speech now and the levels to which an exchange student might impact cultural relations, I can say for certain that I have positively affected relations on some, but not all of those levels; however, my goals are evermore directed toward that end.

So far, the resulting impact of my exchange experience has been directed largely toward the local level. For instance, much of my free time in college has been geared toward the German Club. As a freshman I was entirely disappointed in my university's German department for not hosting a stammtisch, a weekly forum where all levels of German speaking students could meet to speak German. As a result, I founded the German Club in order to facilitate one. The creation of a weekly stammtisch has allowed students to exchange their cultural experiences with each other as well as improve their German speaking abilities. In addition, the German Club has attended monthly lectures at the German Embassy which encompass topics of a historical, cultural, linguistic, and political nature. While it has proven more difficult to motivate students than I ever would have imagined, the German Club has remained ever vigilant in providing a forum for cultural discourse. My role as a member of the GW Language Center Student Advisory Board has

also proven useful in broadening a forum for cross-cultural understanding by hosting and advertising film, lecture, and musical events on campus. In promoting cultural understanding, I feel that these activities bring a certain diverse atmosphere to my university which otherwise would not exist.

Although the exchange program has not yet led me to affect cultural relations on a national level, I have made attempts in that direction. At first I planned on spending my summer after freshman year interning for the Office of Special Investigations in the Department of Justice. This small office collects evidence to prosecute possible Nazi war criminals who remain free in the United States. Although I made it to the semi-finalist interview, I was turned down, because the office was looking to hire college students in their last years of undergraduate studies. As of that time, I had but one semester recorded on my transcript. They encouraged me to reapply when I got near the end of my studies. Although it was an immense setback for me not to qualify for a job that seemed to hit the core of my being, I decided I would reapply in my senior year. Instead of interning during my summers, I took summer courses in order to speed toward graduation. I also intensely traveled Europe in order to broaden my understanding of various European cultures, their histories, and their governments. By visiting specific cultural regions in Europe such as Brittany, Catalonia, and Lorraine, I observed how national politics have drastically curbed regional cultural identities in pursuit of a single national identity. As shocking as it was to encounter racist hatred in the US after 9/11, it was just as appalling to find that modern democratic states attempt to reduce regional cultural identity as policy. To affect that sort of policy making, the German Bundestag Internship has remained a central goal of mine ever since Dr. Schuster informed me about it. The invaluable experience of working with a

German parliamentarian will grant me an unparalleled understanding of the interworkings of the German and the European political processes as well as put me in a place to affect positive change on the national level.

The universal level of impact on cultural and international relations is entirely representative of my long-term goals. Because Germans are determined to rectify the inhumanity of the Nazi era by emphasizing the equality of all human beings in their social and political institutions, my exchange experience in Germany instilled in me a deep sensitivity to prejudice and stereotypes that has increasingly become an interest in human rights. Whether through learning about the atrocities of Nazi Germany or of the recent successes in European Union law to effectively enforce human rights legislation, I am drawn to this field due to these experiences. Hastings School of Law offers a unique semester abroad program to Heidelberg, Germany to study EU law, and this is a major pull factor in my decision to study law here and to apply as an early decision candidate.

Dr. Schuster's response to my speech left me feeling confident that progress can happen if you dedicate yourself to it, as he did. In researching Dr. Schuster to find out why he took the universal level of cultural impact so much to heart, I recurrently came across his work with Third World development. Born in Tanzania, he apparently devoted his whole life to breaking down walls of cultural stereotype in order to help aid underdeveloped countries. I understood then why the affects of an exchange program were so dear to him, as they are to me. The affects of his cultural exchange influenced him to help direct German foreign policy to aid underdeveloped countries. I drew inspiration from his response to my speech, and since that time I have directed my studies and free time toward facilitating forums for cultural understanding and toward finding out all I can about

diverse cultures, minorities, and nationalities throughout the world.