

## **Doing a Teacher Exchange in Germany**

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There are many aspects of an exchange that require attention and much depends on specific situations. However, the following information should prove helpful.

Starting Point - Your direct contact person is Liz Todd-Lambert, Assistant Dean, Academic Programs, in the Administration Building. Her e-mail is [elambert@towson.edu](mailto:elambert@towson.edu) and her telephone number is 410-704-2919. It is important to keep all involved people in the communication loop.

1. Duration of the exchange - Exchanges can be arranged for short-term periods or for an entire year. Short-term exchanges offer advantages for those who are not able to be away for long periods of time because of children, pets or other restrictions. One semester exchanges are normally satisfactory, but faculty often find that they are just beginning to understand the system and learning about their environment and would like a longer stay. A full year exchange is usually the most beneficial if it can be worked out. There are a number of factors to consider. First, the full year will allow time for a more comprehensive experience. The year will afford more time for travel and touring the region. Language skills will certainly be improved. And, finally, a full year out of the country will provide a tax-free paycheck that will come in handy for extra expenses. See further information on taxes below.

2. Teaching schedule - Your exchange partner is normally assigned a teaching load from the department chairperson. Your teaching assignments may be assigned in a similar fashion; but, in both cases, the assignments are done based on individual background. In Germany, you are more than likely to be asked what you want to teach and you might expect a slightly lighter teaching load than your normal assignment at Towson. You should encourage correspondence between your exchange partner and your department chairperson to ensure an agreeable teaching assignment.

3. Other teaching information - Your exchange partner should try to make preparations for such things as office assignment, computer use, library card, information on dining, faculty identification card, parking, and other special arrangements including office supplies, mail boxes, keys, Xeroxing procedures, materials and equipment, and classroom assignments. Introduction to the secretarial staff is helpful as well as introduction to other administrative staff including such persons as the dean or even the president, if appropriate. A good map of

the campus is helpful. Any special fees required, such as parking or other costs, should be mentioned.

4. Exchanging homes - In most cases, both parties concerned will exchange their respective homes. There is much to be considered. Will the entire families be exchanging and what are the sizes, ages, etc., of each family? Will the home satisfy the space and needs of the family living there? Are there pets involved? A good way to help overcome any problems in regard to exchanging homes is to send detailed photographs of the exterior and interior of the home, explaining any special conditions. Remember, you will be living in your exchange partner's home for a full year and you must accept the conditions or request what ever alterations possible to make the exchange feasible. Once you know your exchange partner, make contact as early as possible to discuss the situation. E-mail is quick and helpful, but telephone calls can be more personal and direct. It is quite helpful to make a room-by-room check list, explaining such details as how the thermostat works, where the switch is for the garbage disposal, how the shower works, what to do about trash and garbage, how the heating and air conditioning systems work, special notes for the telephone, television, computer, tape and CD player, lawn mower, and so forth. It is a good idea to remove and store away any clothing you are not taking with you so that your exchange partners will have space for their belongings. If you have any very special items in your home that you would rather not leave out, pack those items away also. If your exchange partner has young children, make sure there are no safety or health problems in their reach. It would be helpful if you designated a friend, neighbor or relative as a contact person to solve any problems. That person should also be at your home when your exchange partner arrives to show them around the home, give them the necessary keys and other important information concerning the operation of your home. You should make clear provisions for how you want your exchange partner to handle any monthly, bills and other correspondence. It is usually best to have your mortgage and other bills paid for by direct debit. The telephone bill is another item that must be worked out. In some cases, both parties pay their respective exchange partner's telephone bill and keep a running account. If, at the end of the year, there is a large enough difference, that amount can be settled with a check or some other pre-arranged tradeoff. There should be a list of such names, addresses and telephone numbers for local plumbers, electricians, police, ambulance, hospital, and others. If school age children are involved, it is important to contact the local educational authority and inform them of the grade level and ages of the children and get necessary documents sent to the respective schools so that the children will be able to attend without problems. Some schools in the Baltimore area have special language study groups for foreign students. Make it clear about smoking in your home. A map, which indicates how to get from your home to the campus, is helpful. The list could go on and on depends upon individual circumstances. Try to include every possible situation and be clear

and direct. Finally, as in all other aspects of an exchange, things in another country are not necessarily wrong; they are simply different. We must be patient, understanding, and flexible. We may have become quite used to certain aspects of how we live in our home, but we can also become used to different arrangements and, in fact, learn a great deal from those differences.

5. Personnel contact - You should make contact with the Office of Human Resources to inform them of your exchange. You will want to make necessary adjustments to your W-2 form for tax purposes, health coverage and other personal needs.

6. Health Insurance - You will find that in Germany all people have a health card and get free medical coverage. You must provide adequate health coverage while abroad. It is advisable to have a full medical check-up and a dental examination before leaving the country. You will not be required to have any special inoculations. Should you require special medication, consult with your doctor in order to be sure you will have the proper medication available. An eye examination before you leave would be helpful as well.

7. Automobiles - There are a number of options in regard to automobiles. The most common advice is never exchange automobiles. Think well ahead and plan to either sell or store your present vehicle. Shipping your vehicle to Germany is an option. It will cost approximately \$1,000 each way to ship a car from the Dundalk Marine Terminal in Baltimore to Bremerhaven. You will need to make advance arrangements with the port authorities. You will also need to contact your automobile insurance agent. If you still owe money on your vehicle, you need to get permission from the lender to take your car out of the country. It is advisable to leave your Maryland tags on your car, so when you go to pick it up in Bremerhaven, you can drive it to your city of employment and go to TUV (an equivalent of the DMV) and get German tags and pay for an inspection. Then, it is very important that you send your Maryland tags back to the DMV and notify your insurance company so you will avoid costly charges. It is recommended that you send your tags to a close friend or relative and ask that person to return your tags, get a receipt and notify your insurance company that the tags have been turned in and to stop your coverage in Maryland to avoid any misunderstandings. If you want to purchase an automobile in Germany, that is possible and you can then sell it before you leave. It is possible to ship any vehicle from Germany to America, but you must understand that it is very costly to have this done because of restrictions on imports and changeovers to meet US requirements.

8. Driving in Germany - You must be aware of all driving rules and regulations in Germany. They are essentially similar to those of America, but there are some important differences.

The bicycle has the right of way and one must be careful when turning right to avoid on-coming bicycles, and to avoid opening doors into the pathway of bicycles. There are crossroads that have no obvious signage where the vehicle coming from the right has the right of way. Speed limits are imposed and posted. Even on the autobahn there can be posted speed limits. German drivers expect slower traffic to remain on the right side of the highway, using the left lane for passing only. On the autobahn one can expect to see automobiles traveling at very high speeds. Give yourself plenty of time to pass and keep a constant eye on your rearview mirror for vehicles coming at fast speeds.

9. Pedestrians - Walking is common in Germany and it is expected to obey all traffic signals. People do not walk against a light. Be patient and walk only at cross walks or at traffic lights when the signal says walk. Watch out for bicycles. Stay off bicycle paths when walking. Make a habit out of looking both ways when on the streets.

10. Banking and money exchange - Germany has converted to the Euro Dollar. They no longer use the Mark. The exchange rate varies. You should find out what that rate is and check it from time to time. All banks in Germany display exchange rates with the US dollar. Price tags on merchandise will probably continue to show the Euro Dollar amount in larger print and the Mark in smaller print. You should make arrangements with your bank and how you plan to have money while in Germany. The easiest way is to have your paycheck deposited in your bank in Maryland and to get an ATM debit card. If your bank has a limit of how much money you can take out per day, you might ask if that amount can be increased, usually from \$300.00 per day to \$500.00 per day. This method of getting local currency is usually the cheapest method and most convenient. As soon as you arrive at the airport in Germany, you can go to an ATM (Geldautomat) and get cash.

11. Food shopping - There are a wide variety of food stores available. Many of them similar to our supermarkets. The opening hours vary and should be noted. However, you will find that on Sundays and holidays, most shops are closed. There are small kiosks that are located in neighborhoods and are open longer hours. They are similar to our 7-Eleven shops. The grocery stores usually have carts that require coins usage. Produce is normally weighed and priced as you select it, before you take it to the check out register

12. Visa requirements - You must have a valid Passport, which will not expire while you are away. It is advisable to check any visa requirements before leaving the country. The International Exchange Office on campus may give you some guidelines on this matter. If you are a resident alien and plan to remain out of the US for more than one year, you will

need to fill out form I-131 (Application for travel document) from immigration. It will cost approximately \$100.00; but, if not complied with, you will not be allowed re-entry to the US.

13. Travel and other reimbursable expenses - Towson University will pay the faculty member only the cost of a return flight from Maryland to Germany. Normally, it is not possible to purchase a round-trip flight when you are staying for a length of time more than 6 months. Therefore, you have to purchase a one-way ticket to Germany and then a one-way ticket return. Work out how the arrangements for pay can be made with Towson University. Also, Towson will pay for the shipping of one small crate of books and supplies. Contact a number of shipping companies including UPS and Federal Express to see what limitations they have and the costs.

14. Maintaining contact with Towson - Check the procedure for getting e-mail while in Germany. Let your department know your mailing address, telephone number and other methods of contact where applicable. Stay in touch with your department and plan ahead for your teaching schedule upon your return as well as any other assignments.

15. Enjoying your exchange - Remember, all the preparation is worth the effort. Your exchange is meant to enhance you as a teacher, broaden your research and understanding of another culture, and enrich your contributions to your students and Towson University. Participate in local activities whenever possible, take lots of photographs, keep a scrapbook, and do not forget to have fun.

The above information is submitted as helpful hints and no way intended to be final nor official. Best of luck.

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Exchange experience: Three years in England, one semester in Italy, one year in Germany and another year coming this September 2002 in Germany.