

Cameo Lance ☺
Essay for the VDAC
2016-2017

Moin! Ich heiße Cameo und ich komme aus Florida. Ich lebe seit fünf Monaten in Hamburg, Deutschland. Ich studiere Mathematik und Physik und forsche beim DESY. Ich genieße meine Zeit hier. Ich habe viele Dinge gelernt, und gute Bekanntschaften gemacht.

I took one year of German language courses at university before I came to Germany, I became familiar with 'haben' and 'sein' and the ordering of words in a sentence, otherwise I have learned my German skills while living in Germany. Upon my arrival I did not struggle much, since the majority of people in Germany can speak English. However this comes two fold, since it reduces ones opportunity to speak German. I find that often when I make a mistake while speaking to a native German speaker, they will switch to English! In order to force the conversation to remain in German I have engaged in courses for learning German, meeting with a tandem partner for several hours every week, going to the public libraries to engage in speaking groups, and I am in a university club for language learners in which once a week there is an hour long meeting equip with coffee, tea, and snacks. I also attend the kung fu club which is taught in German, I read childrens sci-fi novels in German and I tutor an 8 year-old in English –this too helps my German. Learning German is an important goal of mine during my stay in Germany. Among other applications, German is a gateway to appreciating original works by, for example, Goethe. The original texts contain much more beauty than do the translated version. German as a language is a skill, and like many tools its versatility is often not appreciated until the opportunity arises to utilize it and I look forward for such opportunities to arise throughout my life time.

My time in Germany outside trying to learn the language is spent studying and traveling. I attend the University of Hamburg and I participate in research in dark matter phenomenology at DESY. The courses in Germany are structured differently than in the US, for example the course type 'proseminar' is unlike anything I have experienced in the US. During my first semester I attended 2 proseminars in physics – the point of them both was to become fluent at communicating science proficiently. There were no multiple choice or sit down exams, in both courses the exam was a presentation! This required me to know the information well enough to teach it to others, which takes much more understanding than to take an exam. Furthermore, studying at DESY has lead me to insights to the theory of dark matter, a subject which I had only encountered experimentally prior to my arrival. I spend 3 days a week in the office at DESY, in doing so I have found myself close with the graduate students and advisors. We have had cook outs and parties to celebrate students being awarded their PhDs, and we frequently each lunch together. I would like to spend my life researching hence I find not being monetarily paid for this work unimportant since the knowledge I am gaining is a much more fulfilling imburement.

Moreover, we students of the VDAC receive a stipend each month used to pay rent, buy food, cover semester fees, and with whatever is left – travel!! I am frugal when grocery shopping and

semester fees are a mere 300€ per semester, additionally traveling (i.e. FlixBus, eurowings) in Europe is cheap!! So weekend trips are more than manageable for me. I have bussed down to Vienna, Austria to meet other VDAC students to attend a coffee festival, I have taken day trips down to Berlin and spontaneous weekend trips to Copenhagen, Denmark and Amsterdam, Netherlands all for between 30-60€ roundtrip. When visiting new cities I go on free walking tours, and use couch surfing in order to save money and engage more with the culture both past and present. Soon I will be ice climbing in Norway and taking a road trip up to see the northern lights with some German friends. The opportunities to travel are endless, and in doing so one gets a perspective of the plethora of world cultures and a sense of how old civilization really is.

My experiences thus far have been fulfilling to a degree that I could not have anticipated. During several meetings with the other VDAC students, bonds have formed which will last through my life time. The organizers are people, and very personable people at that. After reviewing my application, they chose to place me in Hamburg due to my interest in science. Each student is put into contact with a club member that lives in the town they will live and this person is helpful when you need to find a doctor, are having issues with uni, or when, perhaps, you're feeling especially lonely. My point is –they care. As a student here with the VDAC I feel safe, secure, and protected. I would suggest this program to literally any student because I believe any one could learn from this experience.