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## Crossing Disciplinary Lines to Engage Students in Cross-Cultural Learning During Short-Term Study Abroad

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## **Cover Page Footnote**

The authors would like to thank Roric McCorristin, who provided invaluable assistance in developing the course and short-term study abroad program described in this article. His extensive knowledge and experience working in the area of sustainability contributed enormously to make both the course and program a success. We were grateful for his eagerness to share contacts and set up site visits in Germany. Special thanks go to his contacts in Germany who took extra time with us and our students: Andreas Wieg (Deutscher Genossenschafts- und Raiffeisenverband e.V.), Micha Jost (Energiegenossenschaft Starkenburg), and Christopher Holzem (Bürgerwerke). The authors also gratefully acknowledge the ongoing support for cross-disciplinary business language/culture innovations by the Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) at the George Washington University.

## **Crossing Disciplinary Lines to Engage Students in Cross-Cultural Learning During Short-Term Study Abroad**

**Margaret Gonglewski & Anna Helm**

### **Introduction**

Within the last decade, an increasing number of American students are opting to study abroad, and among these students is a notably large percentage of business majors. According to the 2016 *Open Doors* report, 2014-15 saw a 2.9% increase in study abroad participation by American students over the previous year, and of the total number of participating groups by field of study, business students make up the second largest group with 20% (Institute of International Education, 2016). Many assert that the impact of our globalized economy has inspired business schools and faculty to integrate into the curriculum more experiences that give students both business skills and the opportunity to gain cross-cultural competence to make them more competitive in today's job market (DeLoach, Kurt, & Olitsky, 2015; Fitzsimmons, Flanagan, & Wang, 2013; Loh, Steagall, Gallo, & Michelman, 2011; McKenzie, Lopez, & Bowes, 2010).

An additional driving force towards an internationalization of business education stems from professional organizations such as the AACSB, which calls for schools seeking accreditation to cultivate "sensitivity toward and greater understanding and acceptance of cultural differences and global perspectives" so that students are "prepared to pursue business or management careers in a diverse global context" (AACSB International, 2017, p.7). Short-term study abroad (STA) programs have proven to be a popular response to this call in the U.S. (Hallows, Wolf, & Marks, 2011). Short programs—ranging from seven days to seven weeks—have been claimed to have the kind of impact associated more often with longer (semester- or year-long) programs (Mills, Vrba, & Deviney, 2012), while offering distinct advantages over them, such as affordability, thereby making them more accessible to a wider range of students (Gullekson, Tucker, Coombs, & Wright, 2011).

Despite the abundance of new STA programs developed specifically for business students, results regarding their effectiveness for gains in the realm of cultural competence remain largely unclear (Eckert, Luqmani, Newell, Quraeshi, & Wagner, 2013; Gullekson et al, 2011). It is often tacitly assumed that students' cultural sensitivity will grow simply by virtue of participating in a study abroad program, often termed "exposure" (see e.g., Carley, Stuart, & Dailey, 2011). Yet studies indicate that in order for effective gains to take place in the development of cultural competence, more is needed than just being abroad. Learning abroad is less effective when students are "left to their own devices" and more effective when faculty "intervene" by providing guidance and structure, co-curricular activities, and opportunities for critical reflection (Vande Berg, 2007, p.394). When crafted by an expert in the language and culture of the STA program, such interventions can help programs have the desired impact on students' acquisition of cultural knowledge and awareness specific to that target location. There is a

problem, though, of divided expertise. While some business faculty teaching STAs originate from the country of study and/or have research or consulting experience there, they “generally do not have experience or expertise in fostering intercultural skills in students” (Pilon, 2017, p.143). Similarly, foreign language/culture faculty intent on developing a business language STA can fall short on integrating business content and skill-getting, due to a dearth in business training or experience (McCain, Ray, & Ellsworth, 2010). We posit that mutually filling the disciplinary gaps is possible when faculty collaborate in developing and running a STA program, so that expertise is contributed from both disciplines—business and language/culture—to capitalize on the knowledge and skills both can bring to the table.

This article presents a recently developed innovative cross-disciplinary (business/culture) course at a U.S. university that featured a STA component in Germany. The course and its STA component were co-developed by two faculty members—one in International Business and one in German language/culture—in order to take full advantage of the knowledge and skills from both fields in a way that is arguably less viable in a program developed by only one faculty from one of these respective fields. Here we describe the course itself, from its content focus on green business in Germany to its logistical setup (class meetings, requirements, assessment tools), as well as curricular goals and expected learning outcomes. Details are provided about the STA trip itself, including site visits and student engagement, particularly within their cross-disciplinary teamwork. It is worth noting that while the present discussion is grounded in our experience at a U.S. institution, there are undoubtedly aspects of the course and program that will be relevant and applicable elsewhere.

Before presenting the specifics on the course and STA program, we examine the very notion of a cross-disciplinary approach in a context for which both business and culture play crucial roles.

### **Innovations in Short-Term Study Abroad: The Cross-Disciplinary Approach**

Developing a course with a STA component can be a daunting task for one faculty to take on. This challenge is acknowledged by Eckert et al (2013) who described it as nothing less than “a significant undertaking that can quickly become an overwhelming struggle” (p.441), and one that demands faculty’s round the clock attention (Sachau, Brasher, & Fee, 2010). Stakeholders like schools and business employers set a high bar for what STAs can and should achieve, including giving students qualifications and skills relevant for a career in international business. Carley, Stuart, & Dailey (2011) point out that business students investing the time and money into STAs expect that their “participation will lead to educational and career outcomes beyond what they could receive in a

traditional classroom setting” (p.45). When faced with the high pressure to meet such expectations, one can easily see the benefits of not going it alone when creating a STA program. Working together, even with just one partner, can lighten the overall workload throughout the entire process: identifying an appropriate program theme or content area, connecting with or making contacts for in-country site visits, setting up travel logistics, and being responsible for both students and program during the travel abroad. As with any project, collaborators benefit simply from being able to bounce ideas off of one another.

When the collaborative partner comes from an entirely different discipline, these advantages are compounded in a variety of ways, perhaps most notably through the deepening of content and skill development due to the contact with another field’s vantage point. In first working across disciplines on course program development, and then by virtue of co-teaching the program, collaborating faculty themselves learn from one another both outside and inside of the classroom. Moreover, the actual work can be inspiring for further expanding one’s own scholarly scope or for instigating joint research projects. The potential advantages for students are equally impressive. Watching faculty from two distinct disciplines working side-by-side allows students to observe the ways in which these different fields can inform understanding or interpretation of the course topic. Students see how faculty challenge each other and complement the other person’s insights while benefitting from their different teaching styles, assessment methods, and more.

These points underscore that cross-disciplinary collaboration is a boon in general, merely by alleviating some of the pressures associated with course development and execution, and by cross-fertilizing disciplinary perspectives. We would further argue that for business-focused STA programs with a commitment to fostering cross-cultural competence, such an approach is not only potentially interesting but strongly advisable, as it allows equal attention to the development of both business skills and language/culture competence. Yet a true cross-disciplinary collaboration, i.e., an actual partnership between business and language/culture faculty, on STA program development, is rare. Instead, cross-, inter-, or multi-disciplinary STAs are developed by a faculty member from one field, working single-handedly to merge content and skills from the two disciplines of business and language/culture. There are cases where this approach is successful. Reisinger’s (2013) ”Duke in Montreal” program, for example, is a four-week stand-alone STA program developed and run by a French language/culture faculty member but interdisciplinary by design: It is set up to immerse students in an intensive foreign language and culture context while studying “marketing, advertising, and branding in both public and private sectors” in Quebec (p.34). McCain et al (2010) describe a model that uses “business professors who are capable of teaching a full business Spanish course” as part of

the “Mexico for Credit” program with study tour (p.4). However, such a model requires highly unusual qualifications, e.g., dual degrees or additional training in teaching language for international business, and is thus not a realistic goal for most programs.

Although the partner-based cross-disciplinary collaboration model we are proposing is not without challenges, it may be fiscally more viable than ongoing retraining of business or language/culture faculty, and, as the following description reveals, it promotes an enriched engagement on the part of faculty and students alike.

### **Finding Common Ground in the Theme of Sustainability in Germany**

Our cross-disciplinary course and STA program in Germany was born out of a long-standing academic relationship between two faculty members—one in the School of Business (International Business) and one from the College of Arts & Sciences (German language/culture). We had already collaborated on multiple cross-disciplinary projects, including writing several business case studies applicable for both International Business and Business German instruction (see e.g., Gonglewski & Helm, 2013). Our collaborative relationship is in and of itself unique since faculty today are typically not rewarded for venturing out of their disciplinary silos and their own narrow academic field of inquiry. Thankfully, such cross-disciplinary work is supported through the Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) at our institution, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, which made our course with the STA program development possible. The mandate of all CIBERs is to conduct activities and offer programming that address “issues of importance to U.S. trade and competitiveness” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). While each of the CIBERs has its own unique mission, all of them engage in some way in activities related to research, education, and outreach. Much of this work relies on faculty across multiple disciplines, including business, language and area studies, and international affairs. Since one of the distinct funding areas for CIBERs is to “provide instruction in critical foreign languages and international fields needed to provide an understanding of the cultures and customs of U.S. trading partners,” an innovation such as this cross-disciplinary STA program was the perfect candidate for support (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Three aspects were crucial in the development of the course and program. First, it was critical to find a way to capitalize on both of our areas of expertise; second, we needed to ensure that the theme of the course was distinctively relevant to the STA destination; and third, we wanted to align the theme with expected student interests. These considerations helped us narrow down the course and STA topic almost immediately to the theme of green (sustainable)

business in Germany, as that hit the mark in all three areas. With one German Studies faculty on the team, the choice of a German-speaking country was already a given. Germany itself quickly rose to the top of the selection list, because environmental awareness and social responsibility are critical cultural values in the country and its local communities. German national leadership has enacted bold renewable energy-embracing laws, and the federal government has made a commitment to eliminate nuclear power by 2022 (*Facts about Germany. Energy reform*, 2017). Many city governments have taken additional, far bolder steps towards a higher level of sustainability. The city of Freiburg in Germany's Black Forest region, for example, set a target "to reduce CO2 emissions by at least 50% by 2030, and the long-term goal is to achieve climate neutrality by the year 2050" (*Green City Freiburg*, 2017, p.7). This impressive record of commitment to a sustainable future inspired several of our projects focused on Germany's brand of sustainability, and thus this topic area would allow us to capitalize on our background knowledge, our previous research, and our contacts in the country as we set up the course.

Finally, the topic aligned with the interests of our target audience, undergraduate students in both IB and German. As a private university of about 26,000 students (11,000 undergraduates) situated in the center of the nation's capital, our school attracts a politically aware student body keenly interested in social issues such as sustainability, as it pertains to their personal sphere (like living in the dorms and getting around the city) and to their academic and career goals. Not more than a decade ago, students initiated an organization to encourage recycling and facilitate donations during move-out week. This same population of students has flocked to the newly created Sustainability Minor, which "allows students to explore the challenges of sustainability and to think about how to develop solutions to pressing issues at the local, regional, and global scale" (*Sustainability at GW*, 2017).

The theme of sustainability not only aligns with deep-rooted German values, but it also begs for analysis using different disciplines and perspectives, thus allowing for cross fertilization of knowledge and insights from faculty and students in both disciplines (Gonglewski & Helm, 2014). For example, the German language/culture expert would be able to bring to the table an understanding of how sustainability in Germany is influenced culturally by values geared towards preserving community, and a strong sense of connection with nature. She would also understand how significantly embedded the concepts of sustainability and its three pillars (economic, social, and environmental) are in German history: More than 300 years ago the German, Hans Carl von Carlowitz, first proposed the idea of sustainable forestry, only harvesting as many trees as one could replant/replace within a given period of time (Grober, 1999). This concept later spread to other industries and to society as a whole, and current

norms and expectations around sustainable behavior in Germany were formed by these historical events and cultural preferences. The German language/culture expert contributes knowledge of the German language, which is at the foundation of understanding the culture, and affords access to non-translatable components, such as beliefs and attitudes towards sustainable business and green living, e.g., as reported by the government or media, or as expressed in candid informal conversation with everyday people.

While the business side can benefit from accessing these insights and knowledge from the language/culture expert, the IB expert, in turn, can contribute her own expertise. The notion, for example, that business opportunities are influenced by laws and regulations is salient in the realm of renewable energy in Germany, where feed-in tariffs have allowed for a steady and predictable income stream for those who generate solar and wind energy. The discipline of IB can use renewable energy as a case study to illustrate how diverging regulatory environments steer the development of a certain industry in different directions. The business side can also help explain how the cultural affinities for environmental issues translate into distinct consumer behavior as studied in marketing.

We selected Frankfurt as the specific geographic destination of the trip because, aside from its prominence as the financial capital of Germany, it is also a model of sustainability, having been ranked number one in the world in the “Sustainable Cities Index” in 2015. That ranking looks to the way that cities “find ways to balance the demands of generating strong financial returns, being an attractive place for people to live and work in, whilst also limiting their damage to the environment” (Arcadis, 2015, p.9). Frankfurt scored well in all three areas of sustainability: The city “leads in the Profit ranking,” while also excelling especially in waste management and low air pollution (Planet), and maintaining affordability for its People (Arcadis, 2015, p.9). While in Frankfurt, the class could easily meet with government representatives and with industry participants and stakeholders in sectors ranging from green building and sustainable living to renewable energy and green engineering and design in the auto industry. Once both theme and exact destination were determined, we focused on setting up the course and preparing for the STA component, described in the following sections.

### **Setup of the Course and STA Program in Frankfurt**

The course we developed that featured the STA component was titled *Germany in the Global Business Context: Focus on Sustainability*. The course was cross-listed in the Business School and the College of Arts & Sciences, allowing students from either school to register and have the course count for their respective programs of IB and German. Course goals merged the learning needs and

expected outcomes of both groups and ranged from the gaining of background information (*understanding the development of the German CleanTech industry and identifying the factors that contribute to Germany's competitive advantages in the industry*) to stretching their research muscle (*demonstrating a thorough understanding of sustainability in the German context and of the socio-cultural drivers of the strong focus on this concept in German society*). Much of the learning was required to take place at the interface of the two disciplines, where students would use insights and practices from their own discipline to illuminate the other:

- Synthesize knowledge and skills from their own discipline with those of students in the other discipline; and
- Actively involve peers -- both within and across disciplines -- in team management and employ strategies to enhance productive team collaboration.

Regardless of their field, students were expected to *engage and interact at a professional level in a globalized business environment*.

Because the expectations for contact hours differed in the two schools, the course design was not identical for the students from each school. As a general overview of course and STA program set up, the course included pre-travel class meetings, the trip itself, and post-travel sessions. From mid-January until spring break travel time, there were three extensive face-to-face seminars as well as asynchronous online interaction on the course Blackboard site and in reflection journals kept in Google docs shared with the instructors. Some session time was conducted conjointly with students from both schools, so that they could get to know each other, form collaborative teams, and begin to engage in peer learning. Several separate sessions focused on language instruction were held for the German students. These students were also deployed in the joint sessions to engage in peer language teaching with the business students. A large portion of the work for this course, both in terms of hours and work required, took place during the spring break trip (described in more detail below). Upon return to the United States there were debriefing sessions during which student teams gave formal project presentations. Throughout the course and regularly during the travel week, students were given reflection prompts to guide them through in-depth exploration on their learning and take-aways from the study abroad portion of the course. At the end of the course, each student created a multimedia presentation with photos and reflections on their personal experience.

### **Course Cornerstone: Cross-Disciplinary Teamwork**

In order to create a truly cross-disciplinary learning environment, the course included a substantive amount of group work. Indeed, almost half of the course

grade was based on assignments related to the cross-disciplinary team research projects. Students worked in teams of three to four students, with a mix of business and language/culture student participants, each leveraging their particular research capabilities and merging perspectives from different disciplines in order to forge connections within their research projects. The research topics centered on sustainable business and included renewable energies, green automotive, sustainable banking, and green building/urban development. All of the projects fundamentally exposed differences in policies and circumstances across borders and students were expected to make salient in their analysis how the U.S. and German conditions differ and thereby impact the maturity and success of the industries that were explored in the projects.

From the onset of the work on the team research projects, students were conducting research that capitalized on their own disciplines. For example, the German language/culture students were required to use sources in German to help the team access materials and insights otherwise unavailable to the group. Although many large German companies have an English version of their website, information relating to SMEs, considered the “heart of the German economy” (*Facts about Germany. Lead markets*, 2017), or community-based organizations—a fundamental component of the success of the “Energy Transition” in Germany—is often only available in German. The business students, on the other hand, supplied previous knowledge and experience applying IB frameworks and theories and were expected to steer the analytical work using appropriate tools, such as the PEST analysis, which helped the teams leverage the political, economic, socio-economic and technological environments relating to each respective country. The students from both disciplines were expected to come together and synthesize their findings to ensure productive cross-disciplinary synergies in their final research outcomes.

Not only within the scope of the group research projects but also during the in-country portion of the trip it was an advantage that teams were organized to have at least one German speaker. These students were able to represent their teams and the class as a whole by serving as “site visit leaders” during the site visits in Germany. They acted, at times, as translators in key moments, e.g., filling in a term in English when a speaker could not think of the appropriate translation from German, or assisting with navigation of the city and taking full advantage of the free time in the evenings, attending events, and going out to eat together.

### **Pre-Departure Class Activities**

The STA portion of the course was set up to be a “sandwich” program, which Pilon (2017) defines as a program set in the middle of a semester rather than one that occurs as a stand-alone course or at the end of a course. Prior to the trip, there

was a good deal of preparation that took place during the class meetings. As noted previously, the German language/culture students met for separate sessions to focus on language development in order to meet their additional goal of honing their German advanced language skills (e.g., analyzing, debating, negotiating) while building their competencies in the content and terminology of green business. These sessions drew on the notion that “language studies and skills acquired are often related to the development of the soft applied skills of business communication and workplace competence” (Ainsworth, 2012, p.1).

In joint class meetings, the entire class worked on the development of business-related knowledge and skills. Numerous readings and active-learning lectures introduced students to frameworks that they could use within their research project. A key goal was to ensure that students grasped sustainability as a holistic concept, and not merely as an environmental phenomenon. Throughout the course and the STA trip to Frankfurt, it was critical to showcase the interplay between economic (profit), social (people), and environmental (planet) sustainability, and thus the important considerations for the so-called triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997).

Students’ content knowledge was further bolstered by local site visits, which also provided them with their first brush with German organizational culture. We are particularly fortunate to be in Washington, DC, a location replete with abundant resources in terms of international organizations, political agencies and actors, and foreign business headquarters. In order to prime students on German culture and business, and especially as both topics relate to sustainability and green business, we took advantage of local resources by scheduling pre-travel site visits. Two that we found to be productive and meaningful were the visits at the German Embassy and at the Representative of German Industry and Trade (RGIT). The Counselor for Energy and Climate Policy at the German Embassy presented data on Germany’s Energy Transition and drew students’ attention to the concrete differences between U.S. and German policies and attitudes about renewable energy. At RGIT, the representative spoke about the interdependence between the U.S. and German economies and differences in business and sustainability culture that he had observed on his post in the U.S.

### **The STA Program in Frankfurt**

The actual travel portion of the Frankfurt STA program was intended to cement the lessons and insights already addressed in the pre-travel part of the course and therefore had to be planned to make careful and deliberate connections to the overarching course theme and the specific course objectives. In our particular case, the student research projects also helped guide the design of the in-country experience. Especially during the travel portion of the course, we wanted to fully

capitalize on the opportunity to provide students with unique experiences and interactions with German experts and business people in the field. Direct interface would allow student teams to meld business-driven and culture-specific perspectives.

In order to ensure that our students took ownership of the experience and engaged directly and meaningfully with our hosts and the topics covered at the site visits, we appointed research team “site leaders” for the visits that most aligned with their research interests. During “their” visit, the German-speaking student of that particular team took the lead during the visit and introduced the group in German, explaining our background and interest in the topic of green business in Germany. The idea was for them to deploy their German skills and build rapport with the host through the attempt to engage in his/her mother tongue. The entire site leader team was responsible for ensuring a productive question and answer period by coming prepared with insightful questions based on what they already knew about the research topic and the company or organization. Last but not least, the team’s German speaker thanked the host on behalf of the entire group and gave the host a small gift as a token of our appreciation.

In order to ensure that students gained insights into the overarching context of Germany’s role as a leading world economy, as well as the very particular facets of green business with all of its cross-disciplinary perspectives, we developed four overarching categories of site visits and activities:

1) We began by providing a general **introduction to Germany as a global economic power** with a focus on Frankfurt as one microcosm or case study. This happened at the start of the trip, before delving into site visits that were of more specific relevance to the research teams. We first launched into a visit to *Messe Frankfurt*, the gigantic Trade Fair Center in the city. The trade fair at the time was on “Light and Building” which focused on construction and lighting design and inevitably touched on sustainability issues. However, beyond input on sustainability, this visit showcased Germany’s, and particularly Frankfurt’s, premier role in the global trade fair industry. With almost 3,000 employees, *Messe Frankfurt* organizes more than 130 trade fairs in approximately 50 locations globally (*Messe Frankfurt*, 2017). The experience of attending *Messe Frankfurt* was to give students a glimpse into Germany’s role in the global economy as one of the major generators of industrial output and one that heavily relies on international trade for its success. Like other countries in Northern Europe, Germany has been able to expand its GDP while also reducing carbon emissions (*Facts about Germany. A pioneer*, 2017). In other words, the business case for sustainable business practices, including the renewable energy generation and usage, is evident here. Such insights provide an important cross-cultural lesson for American students, especially when compared to how today’s dominant

political narrative in the United States frames economic development as being in conflict with sustainable business practices and renewable energy aspirations.

2) The second category of site visits addressed the political context: We wanted students to recognize the **political driving forces behind sustainability and green business**. To that end, we set up a visit with the City Council in Frankfurt, and specifically with a representative of the local Green Party, “Alliance 90/The Greens.” This was valuable for all research teams because the laws and regulations enacted by the political system of a nation, state, or city, along with their institutions, such as the banking sector and transportation infrastructure, both shape and define the business opportunities available to its business community. Renewable energy and those industries associated with that sector provide a revealing example of just how critical the political and legal environment have been to its development and structure. To illustrate this, the representative discussed how the targets set by the government cause industry to align with these mandates.

3) The third category related to students’ understanding of **innovation and entrepreneurship in green business**. It was useful for students to see first-hand how these innovative sectors gain traction as business models, particularly those businesses that fall under the social pillar of sustainability. Therefore, we included a visit to the *Social Impact Lab* in Frankfurt, where we spoke with entrepreneurs who drive their innovative business ideas with great attention given to both their environmental and social ramifications on society as a whole. To further help students identify with their own potential to become green entrepreneurs, we brought them to *Unibator*, a student incubator at the Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt. After a short overview presentation, our students were deployed in a rotation with the student entrepreneurs to afford them the opportunity to ask questions and engage directly with them about the thinking behind their business ideas.

4) The last category of site visits revolved entirely around **companies and organizations directly involved in industries related to team research projects**:

*Green banking: DZ Bank.* For the team that studied cooperative, green banking, the visit to DZ Bank was illuminating. While some of our business students were familiar with the concept of cooperative banking, it was clear that they also could not quite translate what the speaker referred to as “values-based banking” back into U.S. terms. Largely the students were left unconvinced that this system could become a serious contender in the U.S. banking system, even though the speaker discussed some significant benefits derived from its organizational model. For example, during the financial crisis in 2008, cooperative banks like DZ Bank were largely unaffected and thus did not receive any public funding to keep them afloat, because the business model is set up in a

way that involves low risk and minimal leverage of their assets. In contrast, the German language/culture students had an easier time grasping the cooperative idea since they were well aware of the German cultural value of “Gemeinschaft” (community).

*Renewable energy: Bürgerwerke Heidelberg and Energy Cooperative Starkenburg.* The visits relating to the renewable energy research team included one to an actual wind farm and a biogas plant run by *Energiegenossenschaft Starkenburg* (Energy Cooperative Starkenburg). It was a powerful experience for the students to see the wind turbines up close and to hear about the origins of the grassroots movement that was behind the creation of the cooperative. To contextualize the role of energy cooperatives in Germany, we also planned a visit to *Bürgerwerke Heidelberg*, which in 2013 grew out of a student group at the university there. Their idea was to unify the over one thousand energy cooperatives in Germany to build a cooperative-owned energy supplier, bundling the energy and selling it back to the grid, and thereby taking advantage of the feed-in tariffs in Germany.

*Green automotive: Daimler.* For the green automotive research team we ventured to Stuttgart for an opportunity to visit Daimler where we learned about their global operations and specifically their efforts in the realm of sustainability. Our discussion focused on the different emerging technologies around fuel-efficient cars (electric, fuel-cell, etc.) and also on Daimler’s commitment to provide mobility without car ownership through their Car2Go initiative. All of the students were familiar with Car2Go’s Smart Cars, a common sight in Washington, DC, and many had personally used the service. A representative from “Integrity & Legal Affairs” broadened the conversation beyond environmental issues to corruption and political regulations that impact Daimler’s sustainability work internationally. A subsequent visit later that afternoon to the Mercedes Museum enabled students to follow the historical development of Daimler. The different car models through the years were juxtaposed with historical events in Germany and internationally, which provided a fascinating angle on the company and its history.

*Green building: ABG Nova.* For the research team focused on green construction and sustainable urban development we arranged a visit with ABG Nova, an energy-efficiency consultancy with expertise in so-called “passive houses,” a common phenomenon in new home construction in Germany and Northern Europe. The CEO of the company gave a thorough, technical lecture on the benefits of passive houses, which are hermetically sealed, low-energy buildings. He noted that in Frankfurt all new construction has to be passive houses. It was interesting for students to note that this building technique has not yet taken root in the United States.

The task of arranging such a variety of very targeted site visits was daunting at first, but with the help of our own contacts, an alumnus from our German Program who had worked extensively in Europe, and a travel provider who was able to supplement the visits we had arranged ourselves, we were able to secure visits optimized to the goals outlined above.

## **Conclusion**

There were numerous ways that students engaged each other across their disciplinary lines during the week-long STA, and particularly during the site visits. The cross-disciplinary engagement that we saw regularly was taking place among teams in their preparatory work to craft relevant and thought-provoking questions for site visits. Their questions were reflective of their research topic and had the potential to push the discussion into an interesting direction by building upon a cross-disciplinary foundation. But there were also a few occasions during the week when the teams surpassed that seemingly scripted work format and freely engaged in a series of tasks designed for them. This was the case at the trade fair: Students were given three hours at the trade fair and were asked to draw on the knowledge from their respective disciplines while information-gathering for their projects. Working in their teams, the business and German language/culture students immediately appropriated different types of roles: The business students, familiar with the concept of trade fairs, helped introduce their language/culture team members to the marketing aspects, including the facility offered by trade shows to connect with prospective and current customers. While the business students helped with this figurative navigation, the German language/culture students provided literal navigation by helping steer their team members through the multiple exhibit halls and initiating conversations in German with the German-speaking representatives at the different exhibitor booths. We surmise that the trade fair experience had the right mix of structure (a general task to complete in a limited time period at a specific location) and freedom to explore and take ownership over the knowledge and insights available to them through this exploration.

To be sure, there are numerous approaches to designing experiences for business students through STA programs with a cross-cultural component. We have presented one model with strong potential to achieve both business knowledge and cultural competence gains. This model creates authentic cross-disciplinary engagement by setting up team-teaching between faculty in those disciplines and by joining business and language/culture majors together in one cross-listed course. In such a course, cross-disciplinary exchange is modeled in the faculty partnership and collaboration, first in the background work, i.e., planning and design, and then in the actual team-teaching of the course and the

implementation of the STA program. Correspondingly, this palpable partnership opens up opportunities for students to learn how to effectively communicate within and across disciplines. Future research endeavors, including our own, will need to broaden to measure student learning outcomes and global perception changes based on such cross-disciplinary STA experiences, ideally leading to even further innovations in STA programming in the years to come.

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