



# Passport to OPPORTUNITY

## German Language Internship Program

Like many American college students, Audra Rowley spent her summer working at an internship where, in addition to more professional duties, she performed routine tasks like answering phones, typing memos, and preparing mail. Unlike most interns, however, Audra answered her phone by saying “*Guten Tag*,” rather than “Hello,” peppered her memos with *Umlauts* and *Es-tsets*, and sorted mail delivered by *Deutsche Post*.

That’s because as an undergraduate in the internship program sponsored by UM’s Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, Audra landed what she calls her “dream internship” working at the German-American Institute (*Deutsch-Amerikanisches Institut*) in Nürnberg, Germany—a non-profit cultural exchange program dedicated to fostering cultural and educational exchanges between the U.S. and Germany.

Rowley, a senior from Auburn Hills, Michigan, is pursuing majors in German and Communication Studies, as well as a creative writing and literature major through LSA’s Residential College. Although she had already studied abroad, Rowley says working abroad added a valuable dimension to her education.

“It’s been a great experience because I was able to use my German much more, I met wonderful people, and I became more independent and competent,” says Rowley.

Her experience represents just one of many successes the department has had in recent years helping UM students find internship opportunities to match their unique abilities, interests, and career goals.

Another UM intern concurs. Oliver Stauffer, a senior in the School of Natural Resources and the Environment, wanted to improve his German language skills while doing something both interesting and relevant to his studies. He says the program helped him find the perfect combination in an internship with the Nature Park of the Bavarian Forest

in the German state of Bayern (*Naturpark Bayerischer Wald*), the second-largest nature reserve in Germany.

Like Rowley, he says his experience was extremely rewarding—especially given the complexities of global politics following September 11 and the recent Iraq war.

“I feel as if I’ve spent the last several months as a diplomat here in Germany, explaining our government’s actions, our people’s lifestyles, and such. On two occasions, I’ve had unfriendly encounters with people, but hundreds of others have really embraced me, and that has been an awesome experience,” he says.

Since 1997, the program, initially an ad hoc effort by a department secretary to help a student find a German-speaking internship (see sidebar), has helped place nearly 300 students at nonprofits like the German-American Institute and the German National Park system; at major companies such as BMW, DaimlerChrysler, Siemens, Volkswagen, and Deutsche Bank; and at many smaller, local firms. Diverse internship opportunities have included jobs in manufacturing and biotech, as well as in law firms, an art auction house, and even a wig manufacturer.

With assistance from the program, one talented UM student even beat out dozens of native Germans to win a coveted internship with Germany’s sole remaining shipbuilding company—leading to a permanent job after graduation.

In addition to matching students with suitable jobs, the program assists with developing resumé’s, obtaining visas, making travel arrangements, and numerous other details.

“We feel it is important that students arrive well-prepared and that internships have a strong academic component,” says Department Chair Frederick Amrine. “Thus, we provide orientation courses, and students may earn up to three credits





by extensively documenting their experience.”

To further extend internship opportunities for UM students, the department has also recently begun collaborating with the internship organization CDS International. Founded in 1968 to advance international internships, the nonprofit now serves approximately 1,500 students, graduates, and young professionals from over 50 countries each year.

As part of the collaboration, the department hosts CDS’s Midwest regional office, making the department a hub for students from UM and beyond seeking overseas internships. In return, CDS offers UM students substantial discounts on fees and other costs associated with internships.

Amrine explains that in order to make internships available to as many students as possible the department offers subsidies for all interns, funded in part by generous donors. Notable among these benefactors are Sallie Mae Executive Vice President Robert R. Levine and his wife Susan C. Levine, who recently pledged \$100,000 toward an endowment to support internships in German-speaking countries. Included in the gift is a match by Sallie Mae. Still, Amrine says he wishes the department could do even more.

“Robert Levine and several other alums have donated generously to this cause, for which we’re very grateful, but the need for funding remains great.”

Meanwhile, program participants like Rowley, who return from the experience with valuable work experience, improved language skills, and increased confidence, feel especially grateful to have had such a resource available.

“The department really promotes going abroad, whether for study or internships. I was lucky enough to do both, and I am very grateful to the department for all their support,” she says.

Glen Sard is Associate Editor of *LSA* magazine.

### Mechthild Medzihradsky’s Legacy

In 1997, a student looking for internship opportunities in German-speaking countries asked Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures secretary Mechthild Medzihradsky for help. Careful research—and many transatlantic phone calls—eventually led to a successful internship match. Other students soon sought similar assistance, and Medzihradsky gladly obliged. Thus began an effort that today has helped nearly 300 students find a wide variety of internships in several German-speaking countries.

What began as an ad hoc effort quickly grew into a major draw for the department.

“The internship program has become a centerpiece of our undergraduate curriculum,” says Department Chair Frederick Amrine. “Many students not able to study abroad for an entire year or semester are grateful for this option, which integrates them fully into the life of the host country and teaches them valuable skills. In some cases, our interns have gone on to work for their host companies after graduation.”

Medzihradsky (wife of Fedor Medzihradsky, a former professor of Pharmacology and Biological Chemistry) was appreciated by students and faculty alike for her tireless efforts to match students with suitable internships—sometimes even calling from home as early as 3 or 4 a.m. to overcome time differences—until shortly before her death in late 2001.

“I will always remember the professionalism and dedication she brought to our internship program, which she created single-handedly,” says Amrine. “She loved talking with the interns and took a deep, personal interest in their success. We shall not see her like anytime soon.”

In spring 2003, undergraduate Filip Fracz traveled to Germany with fellow residents of the German Department’s Max Kade German House, taking many photos along the way. Left to right: Students in Salzburg. A picturesque castle. World War II concentration camp near Dachau. Munich’s Marienplatz. Students in Munich. Salzburg. A soccer game in Munich’s Olympic Stadium. Frankfurt. Interior of Schloss Neuschwanstein. A banner in Stuttgart that reads “No to War.”

To find out how you can help support the German Internship program, contact the UM Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at 734.764.8018.