

Creating Diverse Encounters Within an Established Short-Term Study Abroad Program



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Abstract

Utilizing a short-term German study abroad program as a case study, this article examines how—and the impacts of—making small programmatic changes to increase student exposure to diverse German speakers. It further builds upon scholarship regarding language usage in study abroad programs and makes the case for an experiential program focus over a strict L2 linguistic focus.

Keywords: study abroad, German language learners, multilingualism, short-term study abroad program

Introduction

Study abroad programs play a prominent role in many post-secondary language programs. While study abroad can allow teachers and students to create stronger connections and community outside the classroom, it also plays an increasing role in financially driven student recruitment and retention strategies in language programs (McGregor, 2020). The programs' form and function necessarily differ, as do the value perceptions for administrators, instructors, and students. Study abroad allows students in places where (presumably) the classroom-based second language (L2) is taught to experience the language and associated culture first-hand. In the expansive scholarship on study abroad, numerous scholars have written to characterize program types, in some cases trying to standardize the language surrounding study abroad discourse. On the more straight forward end, program types are described as either island (where students study abroad in a program run, often, by their home institutions), third party (where students take some local university-based coursework in tandem with work facilitated by a group aware of the demands of a student studying abroad), or direct-enrollment (where students enroll directly into a university abroad and take on the same roles as local students) (Sally, 2015). Other classifications look at the differing ideologies behind the reasons for study abroad, e.g., educational tourism, personal growth, professional training, etc. (Trentman, 2022).

In an attempt to create a guide for both students surveying potential programs and study abroad professionals, Lilli and John Engle created “a hierarchical classification of program types” as a way to assign value to different program structures (Engle and Engle, 2003, p. 2 and p. 15). Citing Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (2017), which describes how individuals respond to cultural difference along a continuum of development from denial to integration, their model’s stated goal suggests that study abroad programs should aim

for student integration (Engle and Engle). Bennett's integration stage is one in which the self can move between different cultural views, and which promotes cultural mediation and, thus, the Engle and Engle study prizes interaction with the host culture. Their taxonomy takes into account six factors in study abroad programs, such as student housing, program duration, and linguistic entry level of participants, organized into five categories, with a study tour as demonstrating the least value and a cross-cultural immersion program the greatest value. It arrives at the conclusion that such a system ultimately will assist students in understanding the value of global education. However, categorizing study abroad programs according to the Engle taxonomic system is problematic. In their valuation of the full student integration, they assume a homogenic approach to language and culture in host countries, which potentially ignores—or, at worst, denies—the many different lived experiences within a country in which a program occurs. Such a taxonomy privileges a monoculture that assumes encounters with only one dominant language and cultural (ethnic) experience. Valuing programs in this manner ignores the support that some students may need when studying abroad; from homesickness to culture shock to being away from support systems, study abroad can be a difficult endeavor for some students. It also says nothing of the economic pressures of students who want to and/or do study abroad. Personal financial situations may dictate whether one has the opportunity to study abroad at all and, if possible, whether students with little to no financial means may opt for short-term programs, which might demand, for example, less time off of work, or offer a lower cost than a semester- or year-long program (Kinging, 2004; Trentman, 2022).

In attempting to categorize program types, which may indeed result in a useful tool for some study abroad administrators and researchers, the value of the program often seems to belie a loyalty to linguistic or cultural standards that see strict language usage and authentic

experiences as the programmatic apogee. In coming to my position in August 2019 at a large public Midwestern research university in one of the United States' most populous cities, I inherited the German study abroad program from a retiring colleague. Housed within a World Languages and Cultures department, the German program began its "island" study abroad short-term program to Heilbronn, Germany about a decade prior, developed and led by one faculty member with roots in that region of Baden-Württemberg. To honor the existing relationships our program had with the Hochschule Heilbronn and to learn more about the study abroad systems at my university before changing the current program or proposing a new one, I chose to adopt the pre-existing syllabus and most of the programming created by a former colleague who conceived of and ran the program through 2019. In this iteration, however, the language learning objectives of the program syllabus remained vague, emphasizing immersion and engagement with language and contemporary culture.

After meeting most of the students that participated in the May 2019 program, the same kind of terms arose in our informal discussions to describe the experience and, particularly, with reference to the city of Heilbronn: "nice," "cute," "quaint," and "safe" to name a few. They spoke of eating traditional southern German foods, *Maultaschen* and *Spätzle* (foods, of course, with their own histories of region and class), and of visiting the *Weingärten* in the area. While these terms are seemingly innocuous and conversations demonstrated a clearly positive experience for the students, such descriptions did not indicate a wide-ranging experience of German culture. The language students utilized after this study abroad program failed to address the many diverse types of German-speaking communities and representations of Germanness found throughout the country.

When we look to language to describe cultural or ethnic differences in the United States, we often see or hear words in the media or from politicians that act as a type of short-hand to “describe communities impacted by racism, disinvestment, physical destruction, and economic exclusion,” such as “high-crime areas” or “distressed places” (Vey and Love, 2020, para. 3). Media critic Eric Deggans (2012) highlights this issue in the U.S. differently in recalling a broadcast by conservative commentator Bill O’Reilly. O’Reilly had dined at Sylvia’s Restaurant in Harlem (a Black-owned soul food restaurant in New York City) with Al Sharpton, a civil rights activist, and, as Deggans explains, O’Reilly expressed surprise that the patrons of that restaurant acted in a manner that he would have found in any restaurant in a predominantly white suburb. His point was that Sylvia’s diners lacked what he perceived as “Black” culture, which meant it adhered to a restaurant culture with which he was familiar. And he continued to argue that there was no difference between restaurants (and cultures) in the United States, that everyone acted the same in dining spaces. However, underneath O’Reilly’s comments there is an implicit understanding that correct (dining) culture is associated with a white population. The absence of what O’Reilly termed “craziness,” which he associated with Black mannerisms, makes explicit the link between coded language (negative descriptors) and race¹. O’Reilly did not—and did not need to—describe white culture in his comments with further adjectives, as it was understood as the de facto culture. If, in German Studies, whiteness and national identity are seen as a de facto pairing (Gallagher and Zenker, 2020), such adjectives as used by white students could suggest an experience presumably unmarked by difference, be it racial, religious, economic, or otherwise. This is not to suggest that the students were unaware of diverse populations in Germany or that they had not had experiences with minoritized or racialized

¹ See also: López’s *Dog Whistle Politics* for discussions of coded language shaping racial and ideological discourse.

individuals. Rather, whiteness is manifested precisely in its unremarkable ubiquity (McGregor, 2020).

These encounters inspired me to integrate small, feasible changes to the existing program to see if one could attend to incorporating more diverse situations within a short-term study abroad program. The point of these small programmatic interventions was to begin to step away from a program that, even if unintentionally, mostly engages a monoculturalist notion of German culture (with one important exception, mentioned below). The remainder of this article will explore the changes made to the program, student reactions, as well as criticism and steps toward further changes to maximize the types of German culture and identity to which students can be exposed during a short program.

Program Overview

Study abroad participation at my institution has grown significantly in the twenty-first century, expanding by 182% from the 2000/2001 academic year, with 209 students to 591 in 2016/2017 (the last year for which data was available; IUPUI Study Abroad). Although in the 2019/2020 academic year, approximately 31% of all students participated in short-term programs (eight weeks or less, including summer programs), that number jumped to 64% the following year. Study abroad, broadly classified, to Germany accounted for 3% of all American student sojourns in 2020/2021 (Institute of International Education, 2022), compared to 4% of all students abroad in the final academic year before pandemic disruption (Institute of International Education, 2018/2019). Our German summer study abroad program typically accounts for only a very small portion of students engaged in international education: This year's program (May 2023) had four students. The last iteration offered in 2019 enrolled seven students and thirteen

students in 2018. As support for upper-level classes and the overall German program diminishes, so too does interest in our summer program.

The original course consisted of ten total days in Heilbronn, including arrival and departure days, meaning eight days of instruction and excursions and one half-day of evaluation and presentations on the final program date. It also had two one-hour pre-departure orientation sessions focusing on practical travel and German cultural tips. Students are required by the study abroad office to complete a post-program evaluation, as is the instructor, which are reviewed by upper-level administration.

As mentioned, the university has a strong relationship with the Hochschule Heilbronn (HH) that extends beyond this program to student and faculty exchanges, particularly in the areas of engineering and tourism. Each year, the program receives assistance in coordinating the onsite logistics of studying on the HH campus, a *Mensakarte* to allow students to eat at HH's cafeterias for the significantly discounted student price, and a classroom and access to technology for the instruction portion of the program. After a welcome meal with colleagues in the international office and engineering department on arrival day at a German restaurant, the program generally was split into mornings of grammatical and cultural history instruction by the home institution instructor, and afternoons of regional excursions to sight-see and/or learn regional history in museums and on tours. One feature of this program was a getting acquainted session with the *Aufbaugilde*, a social service organization that works to support disadvantaged individuals in the greater Heilbronn region. I will discuss this affiliation in more detail later, but note here that the partnership between this study abroad program and the *Aufbaugilde* also grew out of my former colleague's personal relationships to individuals in the region. Students usually would tour the organization's second-hand shop one afternoon to understand some of their functions in the

region, as well as attend an afternoon of German language instruction with students in their language courses for immigrant and refugee populations.

Within the aforementioned Engle and Engle taxonomy, the program did not fit neatly into their categorizations, demonstrating both fewer desirable and strongly preferred elements. For example, according to their taxonomy, the program it would count as a study tour, being only, initially, ten days long, requiring only one year of basic German language study, placing them on the Novice High or Intermediate Low of the ACTFL scale or A1+ to A2 levels of the CEFR scale. Students bunk together in double hotel rooms or two-to-three-person hostel rooms (i.e., collective housing). The work within the *Aufbaugilde* counted toward occasional integration activities, and in addition to the pre-departure sessions, students reflected on their time through a cross-cultural reflective presentation. Course work was conducted in German, working out of two texts (*Übungsgrammatik* and *Zur Orientierung: Basiswissen Deutschland*, both from German publisher Hueber), and students were intended to use German in non-classroom interactions.

Before departure, students were to complete an assignment that spoke to their interests in German culture and the study abroad program, along with a brief biography in German. Throughout the ten-day period, students completed two other assignments on site: a portrait of the city of Heilbronn and a daily diary, both of which had to go through a first and second draft. Finally, after return, students were required to write two essays about education in Germany and an intercultural reflection. Each written assignment was a minimum of 250 words, in German, and graded on content and grammar. Students also completed short term assignments on site, had a written midterm and final exam on grammar and culture, and needed to create a final presentation on a cultural experience.

A secondary program goal was for the students to get to know and connect with the southern, host city of Heilbronn, its history and culture, and region and state (Baden-Württemberg). With 130,870 residents at the end of 2022, Heilbronn qualifies as a *Großstadt* (metropolis). Dating back to the Middle Ages, Heilbronn was first mentioned in documents in 741 as a spring source. Positioned on both sides of the Neckar River, the city was an important site for merchants and would continue its prosperity through the nineteenth century, when it was known for its industry. Although heavily bombed during World War II, the city recovered and is today known for its higher education institutions (five in total, such as HH) and the educational opportunities afforded to citizens through the largesse of its patron Dieter Schwarz (founder of Lidl and Kaufland grocery stores). In May 2023 (the month of the program), the city had a 3.3% unemployment rate (*Heilbronn*). When it comes to the make-up of the citizenry, an oft-touted fact in our university tours was that approximately 40% of the people living in Heilbronn had migration backgrounds or were immigrants or refugees. However, statistics from 2016 reveal that number to be much lower; approximately 11% of residents in the Heilbronn region were foreign nationals and 16% of residents Germans with migration backgrounds (*Statistisches Monatsheft*). It is important to note that the *Statistisches Bundesamt* defines someone as having a migration background when they themselves immigrated to Germany or when at least one parent was born without German citizenship, which means that children born and raised in Germany of one immigrant parent could be considered as having a migration background. In May 2019, Heilbronn hosted 976 refugees (*Statistisches Monatsheft*). That number is likely to have fluctuated in the intervening years, particularly owing to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

As mentioned, the *Aufbaugilde* (ABG) is the city's premier organization supporting disadvantaged individuals in the greater Heilbronn area. The organization's roots are in the

postwar period, when a collaborative organization focused on youth was formed by the evangelical *Aufbaugilden* to help care for war veterans. Soon after, it began caring for young refugees from the newly formed German Democratic Republic, i.e., East Germany. In addition to care, initial services focused on training and job placement, first in agriculture and later in industry. As the ABG continued, its purview widened, eventually expanding to care for children and youth and Hungarian refugees. In the 1970s, they again expanded their mission to focus on people experiencing homelessness. Today, the reach of the ABG's social services is vast, including education, childcare, refugee and immigrant support, employment assistance and training, debt counseling, addiction counseling and support, housing support, onsite vocational training, and language classes. They have strong partnerships with both city administration and local businesses and connect with other citizens through their second-hand retail location (similar to Goodwill Industries in the U.S.).

Students in our program have been able to tour the retail location and learn alongside adult language learners in ABG's language classes. These classes typically train students to pass exams with questions about German history and culture so individuals may obtain visas, and to provide them A2 language capabilities so the individuals in the class can integrate into (work in) society. Classes are generally teacher-centered and focus on teaching grammar rules.

Reshaping the Study Abroad Program

Upon taking over this course as the only remaining faculty member in 2023 (with planning beginning already in 2020), I knew that I wanted to reshape some of the experiences to offer students more diverse encounters to highlight different aspects of German culture. With the existing program, students' experiences focused on traditional narratives of (white and often Christian) German culture and history, excepting random museum didactics if they happened to

encounter them. Indeed, the city and museum tours we booked following the previous program did not speak of minoritized individuals in the region, unless to mention them briefly in relation to persecution during the Second World War. But, as the work of, for example, Black Central Europe shows us, German history has not been comprised of a monolithic German identity. How, then, to counter the lack of narrative difference students regularly encountered during their excursions into Heilbronn, the region, and other major cities?

One significant aspect of course revision was to add a four-day stopover in Berlin. Germany's capital and largest city with circa 3.8 million residents, Berlin's incredible history and cultural and social composite offer a counterpoint to Heilbronn. In addition to being a significantly more populous (though dense) city, Berlin is the site of myriad historic events, from the Berlin Conference outlining European imperialism through the partitioning of Africa to the emblem of a divided Germany during the Cold War. As a much larger city, too, Berlin offers forty-two universities and colleges, significant cultural offerings (175 museums; dozens of symphonies, operas, theater venues, and movie theaters; art galleries; and historical monuments in every neighborhood), as well as a different social and cultural fabric. For example, Berlin's unemployment rate in May 2023 was 8.9% - over 5% higher than during the same period in Heilbronn. In February 2022, approximately 811,000 individuals or 21% of the Berlin population were foreign nationals (compared to Heilbronn's 11% or 14,395 people; Hauptstadt, 2021), and about 570,000 (15%) Germans had migration backgrounds. And, during this past year, Berlin hosted 90,000 refugees and asylum-seekers (again, largely owing to the Russian invasion of Ukraine).

Beyond the facts that Berlin's population eclipses and differs greatly from Heilbronn's and would, for those reasons, provide a different experience of German culture, starting the tour

in Berlin offers other advantages: dozens of affordable food options; a well-developed transportation network; a night life culture, which students tend to enjoy; buskers and free entertainment at the parks, as well as myriad gratis exhibitions and events; free tours of Reichstag; free (or greatly reduced) entry for student groups to the *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin* (state museums of Berlin). There is yet another reason I chose to begin the program in Berlin, which has to do with language, both for student production and reception. If students were only required to complete a second semester course (Novice High to Intermediate Low), focusing on German-only tours in museums and other city sites (as occurred in some of the site visits in the Heilbronn section) may impede comprehension for the sake of language exposure. At almost every site (excepting the *Gründerzeitmuseum*), students could either choose to read didactics or have audio guides in German or English. This choice empowers them in their own linguistic engagement with German, which also gave them flexibility if, for example, overly tired or frustrated without excluding anyone from accessing the knowledge presented. Similarly, after engaging in tours of the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe) or in the reconstructed *Nikolaiviertel*, students could converse with the class and reflect in a manner that felt right for them in that moment—be it in German, English, or a mix of the two.

Because the focus of the program my colleague conceived in Heilbronn was L2 practice and engagement (particularly with daily instruction and tours), I also wanted students to have an experience of German that reflected their engagement with it during their regular semester classes. Study abroad programs often tout authentic encounters and the possibility of “native-like” language acquisition (McGregor, 2020, p. 158). But the question that follows is “Whose German?” Janice McGregor (2014) deftly points out that the native-speaker proficiency idyll in

language courses asks learners “to emulate an idealized monolingual other” (p. 111), here a native-speaker German monolingual. However, suggesting that students attempt to act in a strictly monolingual L2 context whilst abroad fails because of the essential multilingualism in which students exist, i.e., using multiple language systems is the norm for L2 users (McGregor, 2020). In the classroom, students regularly switch between the L2 and their L1 (or, in some cases, between their L2, e.g., English, and an L3, e.g., German). In everyday situations or within media, too, students encounter other linguistic and cultural structures. And Germany is neither a monolingual nor a monocultural society². The applied linguist Claire Kramsch (2009a) proposes a “third culture” pedagogy that embraces the liminal status of language learners and eschews the native speaker/non-native speaker dichotomy. The third culture space allows the student to make “meaning on the margins” and “in the interstices of official meaning” (p. 138). Embracing students’ status between the languages allows for a linguistic playfulness that destabilizes “native speaker claims of authenticity” (Kramsch, p. 138). The native speaker/non-native speaker construct creates an almost permanent imbalance of power, repositioning such interactions allows both speakers (or cultures) to bring unique knowledge to the interaction. Instead of valorizing the monolingual culture and its native speakers, language learners should be lauded for their ability to navigate others’ social and cultural surroundings (McGregor, 2014, p. 111). Put differently, language learners are in the process of becoming, which is its own state with its own, unique properties (Gramling, p. 4).

² See multiple examples within Gramling’s *The Invention of Monolingualism*, in which he makes the case for “Germany’s civic habituation to monolingualism” (p. 4).

In Berlin, with its many diverse German speakers and languages in daily use, students could both encounter Germans and German speakers of different abilities, race and ethnicities, ages, religious and socio-economic backgrounds, and even nationalities and begin to navigate their own multilingual identities while engaging with different types of German culture. The program in Berlin consisted of a mix of tours, independent (but structured) exploration, museum visits, walking tours led by me (the instructor), and some built-in free time to allow students to follow their own interests. Taking inspiration from a study abroad program activity developed by colleagues at Kansas State University's German Program, the students' program began with a challenge to find their way through the city to visit various sites we would revisit in the coming days of the program. The goals of this activity were three-fold: 1) to give them experience with the Berlin transit system of busses, trams, subways and city trains; 2) to give them a preview of important historic sites and allow them to explore facets of the sites on their own; and 3) to encourage them to approach individuals to ask for guidance or help or to casually engage them in conversation during that period. Students reacted positively to the activity, stating that, even while getting lost, they enjoyed seeing different parts of the city and improving their navigational skills.

In the following days, we would have different types of encounters, followed by discussions reflecting on what those encounters meant. When visiting the Pergamon and Bode Museums, for example, students had the opportunity to view antiquities from around the world. They had free rein in those spaces to visit exhibits they found interesting, reporting back with images or leading us to exhibitions to speak on why they found those works compelling. Beyond discussing what was interesting or beautiful in these museum spaces, these visits also led to discussions of colonialism, stolen objects, and repatriation of items to home countries. We visited

multiple monuments throughout the city that spoke to Germany's role in the Holocaust—*Stolpersteine* (literally “stumbling stones,” or monuments embedded in the sidewalk), the aforementioned Memorial for Murdered Jews of Europe, the Memorial for the Homosexual Victims of Nazism, the Neue Wache (a memorial to the victims of war and tyranny), the Bebelplatz book burning memorial, and the room of stillness at the Brandenburg Gate. All these spaces were intentionally visited on our various walking tours or enroute from one destination to another *to show how memorials were built into the fabric of everyday German life and are found throughout the entire city*. Some memorials receive greater prominence in the city (the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe takes up a city block), while others are easy to overlook (*Stolpersteine*). We discussed which events and groups received greater memorialization and why, their symbolism, and the efficacy of each memorial space. This activity helped to show how memorials are found throughout the entire city and built into the fabric of everyday German life.

We also visited the *Gründerzeitmuseum* (a museum dedicated to the Gründerzeit, a brief time of economic prosperity in the Kaiserreich) and the *Knoblauchhausmuseum* (a family home museum that displays life in Biedermeier Berlin through the late 19th century for a wealthy family). Both institutions are in former family homes, though one is a three-story house, and the other a three-room apartment. The Gründerzeitmuseum highlights both the lives that lower middle class and impoverished families lived in fin de siècle Berlin, as well as how the same home could be a space for a well-off merchant or divided by room for tenement housing. Objects in the reconstructed home were donated by families and carry with them the individual familial stories imparted to visitors, accompanied by archival photographs and excerpts from diaries. In contrast, the Knoblauch family house shows the comforts and luxuries of a merchant family with ties to famous intellectuals and politicians, like the von Humboldts, who were family friends of

some Knoblauch family members. In visiting these sites back-to-back, students had the opportunity to compare living situations for three very different socio-economic backgrounds during the German empire.

Other site visits in Berlin included the Jewish Museum and a stop at Markthalle Neun Street Food Night. Much to the students' surprise, the Jewish Museum did not focus solely on Jewish persecution during the Third Reich and Holocaust, but on the history of Jewish life in Germany. The visit highlighted the 1700-year history of Jewish history in German-speaking regions and provided an important reminder that the Holocaust is not the entirety of Jewish experience in the country. It was here, too, that students first heard about Magnus Hirschfeld, an important sexologist who supported gay and transgender rights in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Markthalle Neun is a food hall that originally opened around 1890 for food vendors to serve the Kreuzberg neighborhood. Since 2011, the food hall once again acts as a daily market for individuals and, on Thursday evenings, hosts stalls of chefs selling food from many different food cultures (from pizza to empanadas, from BBQ to Fufu).

On the fifth day, we traveled by train to Heilbronn to begin the established program there. Mornings, we traveled to the HH campus and alternated grammar instruction and practice and culture and history instruction focusing on the sixteen German states, the current educational and political systems, and an overview of the Weimar Republic leading into the Third Reich. This work was led by me and conducted in German, though students spoke English to clarify questions or to confirm comprehension. After each session, we broke for lunch in the Mensa, where students primarily spoke German to one another until they settled down to eat and our lead administrator would join us, speaking English to the students. In the afternoons, we took tours and visited museums within Heilbronn and traveled to Bad Wimpfen, Heidelberg, Stuttgart,

Schwäbisch Hall, and Neckarsulm for sight-seeing activities (museums, walking tours, a boat ride on the Neckar), with one day off for individual travel and relaxation. Most tours were in German or a mix of German and English, and many of the small museums offered no or only some didactics in multiple languages.

Perhaps the most impactful encounter that is part of the program is the experience at the *Aufbaugilde*, where students experience a language class and tour the ABG's facilities (both their education centers and their second-hand store). This site visit is the only time during the Heilbronn portion when the experiences of marginalized and racialized individuals in the city are discussed and presented. During a welcome tour of the ABG's social services and facilities, students learned about some of the services the ABG offers to individuals experiencing homelessness, immigrants, and refugees in the region, and those with alcohol or drug addictions. The director of ABG explained that one cannot only address one facet of an issue, but must look at it holistically, e.g., by providing transitional housing or job training. That, the director stated, was also the goal of the language class we would visit. Immigrants and refugees could only participate fully in society if able to understand German language, history, and culture. The ABG's goals for language classes and all their programs reflected those prized by Engle and Engle for study abroad cultural programs integration.

Student Participation and Program Reflections

This year's program consisted of four white students. Two were cismen and two were ciswomen. All have English as their first language and German as their L2, falling within the Intermediate High level, with the exception of one who would be characterized as having Advanced High listening. Three have declared German minors. Each student received an automatic \$1,200 scholarship from the Max Kade Foundation and a \$500 scholarship from a

center affiliated with our German program, which together covered all program fees. Three of the students applied for and received enough additional scholarship funding to cover tuition and their individual costs (flight, meals, souvenirs, additional travel, etc.). All students had GPAs between 3.224 and 4.0 and were either actively or had been on the Dean's List at some point during their college careers; two students were part of the Honors College. One student was entering their fifth and final year, another was a rising senior, the third a rising junior, and the other one was about to begin their second year, though with junior credit standing. Each student is from the state in which our university is located, though two grew up in small, rural towns (4,000 people or less); one grew up in a mid-sized town (32,000), and one grew up in the state's largest city (almost 1,000,000 residents). The university itself had a student population of 27,690 students, of whom 19,197 were undergraduates. Approximately 59% of the student population identify as women; 41% as men (only gender binary statistics appear). In 2019, our undergraduate population identified as 66% white and 29% identified as Students of Color. Though previous program years have included Students of Color, our program tends to have primarily white student participants.

As student participants in the ABG language class during a two-and-a-half-hour morning sessions, my students encountered twelve adult learners for whom German was (at least) their L3. At least three individuals were from Russia; another three were from Ukraine; one was from Georgia; one from Syria, and the remainder did not identify their national origin. The instructor was a native German speaker, working from a text on German cultural and history by the same publisher of the text we used in our classes at HH. While approximately half the class was there at beginning of class, the other half filtered in over the next hour. During the period, the instructor largely read aloud from the text, while asking questions outlined within the unit about

the transition from the Weimar Republic to the Nazi regime (approximately four pages of content were covered). The lesson was largely teacher-centered, with no group discussion or collaborative work amongst the AGB students. The American students were largely silent during the period, though listening intently. Because I attended class with my students and, as a German professor, was familiar with the content of the unit, the instructor ended up addressing many questions to me during the lesson.

Though I would not consider the class an especially productive one, both in terms of content addressed and student engagement, the encounter was an especially impactful and memorable one for my students. Before the class began and during the twenty-minute break, three of the women (two Ukrainian and one Georgian) in the AGB class were eager to talk to the students, learn about their histories, and get to know them. Conversations largely tended toward the invasion of Ukraine and the atrocities the students had themselves suffered or witnessed, but were interspersed with lighter topics about German culture, travel, and fashion. One student exchanged phone numbers with the most outgoing Ukrainian woman with whom she texted in the days after the class visit, and my student revealed that their subsequent texts also switched between German and English. These discussions contained continuous language (German and English) and code-switching from topic to topic, sentence to sentence, and even mid-sentence, allowing both participants to move between conversation topics in the manner that best allowed them to express themselves, illustrating in real-time the decentered nature of the multilingual subject (Kramsch, 2009b). Kramsch terms “a deep coordination of body and mind, of self and other” moments of “synchronicity,” in which one is “in sync with itself, its language, its environment, and others” (2009b, pp. 233-234). These encounters provided concrete examples to the American students of how German is used by many different people living in Germany,

whether that language is their L1, L2, or L3. Even in a much smaller town than Berlin, multilingualism is a reality for many living in Germany. And while many students expressed in course discussions and in their assignment diaries frustration at having English spoken to them, their multilingualism became an advantage that allowed to communicate more easily with AGB students.

One interesting aside that arose during class, though, is how moments of multilingualism within the course space did not necessarily contribute to a conceptualization of individual multicultural identity. The instructor mentioned at one point, in relation to *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers in West Germany from other countries; Italy, Greece, Turkey, and more) who helped the country rebuild after WWII and contributed to its economic recovery and prosperity), that those individuals would never really be German. When I challenged his assertion, asking about second and third generation citizens, born in Germany, he maintained his position, saying they haven't abandoned "their" culture and thus could not be German. To my surprise, a few of the AGB students supported his claim, saying that they could never truly become German, even if living in Germany the rest of their lives, because they couldn't give up their own culture, and because, for example, Ukrainian culture was so different to German culture. It was clear that, for this group, culture was closely tied to identity and that each were indivisible, even if actively living and speaking between cultures daily.

In a post-class, anonymous survey completed by three of the four students, all mentioned their time at AGB in a positive light, with two reflecting on their privilege at choosing to learn German:

"We were also fortunate to be learning German as a choice unlike these people who needed to learn it to live in the country." Another said: "It caused me to reflect on what

led to me participate in study abroad. I did it as an experience for pleasure and to try and learn and experience another culture, but the people I was in class with were there out of necessity and sometimes forced to flee there”. A third student stressed: “The personal encounters made it far more realistic and human to me. I was able to hear from people who were going through the process of immigrating to Germany, learning the language, and trying to work there. I would consider this a positive impact.”

In addition to providing students’ perspectives on why, when, and how individuals choose to learn German, students found their time at AGB to be a low-stakes environment and saw themselves in a learning community with peers versus the native speakers who “often had an accent or spoke too fast” (survey student comment).

In reflecting on their entire study abroad program on our final day, students’ preferences skewed largely toward Berlin because there was more to do, places were open later, and, plainly, it was more fun. However, their comments regarding Heilbronn (“boring,” “quiet,” “nothing to do,” “clean”) hearken back to the comments of their program predecessors from the 2019 cohort. Yet, in comparing linguistic experiences, they all preferred Heilbronn because they felt they had many more opportunities to speak their L2, especially with non-native speakers. What I also glean from those comments, though, is that they understood that multilingualism and multiculturalism are part of the fabric of German identity.

Conclusion

Although the steps integrated into our short-term study abroad program were, initially relatively minor, I believe there was enough anecdotal evidence to support continuing to create more diverse encounters for students in our program. As one survey respondent put it, “Learning the extent to which immigrants were a part of German society ... impacted my understanding of

Germanness.” An important change will be to reframe the syllabus’s course objectives in terms of experiencing many facets of contemporary German culture over experiences of authentic culture. In addition to expanding pre-departure readings (students read excerpts from Brian Ladd’s second edition of *Ghosts of Berlin*, entries from Black Central Europe, and poetry from Germans of Color, among others, May Ayim and Halit Ünal³), my intention is to have students further reflect on their understandings of Germanness and what in their classes, experience, and even American culture have framed those views. Within the Berlin context, my intention will be to work with Querstadtein, an organization that employs people experiencing homelessness and refugees, to lead students on tours that provide insight about contemporary social issues in the capital city. In Heilbronn, I also intend to focus more on contemporary German culture and move away from the grammar training. Because students responded well to their time at the ABG, I plan not only to include more sessions in their language courses, but to seek out service-learning activities in their second-hand store. Such activities will provide space for students to have authentic German experiences and utilize their L2 with a variety of individuals. Alongside these changes, I intend to restructure assignments to focus on ongoing reflection that ties into on-site experiences and their academic and personal interests over linguistic assessment. My hope is that with small steps toward providing more social engagement of different lived experiences in the German context, I can provide students with not just language and culture, but meaningful connections that shift their perceptions of Germany within our short study abroad program.

³ May Ayim (1960-1996) was a poet, educator, author, and activist. Her work as a scholar helped to found the discipline of Afro-German studies.

Halit Ünal (b. 1951) is a Turkish born German author whose work examines migratory experiences and living between and in multiple cultural and linguistic contexts.

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