

Northern European Studies – and then what?

A video series on career prospects by j o l n e s

Transcription Episode 2: Press and Public Relations

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I am Victoria Gramatke, I studied German and Scandinavian Studies as well as Philosophy at the University of Cologne and graduated with a Master's degree.

WAS THE TRANSITION FROM STUDIES TO WORKING LIFE DIFFICULT?

After my studies, the direct entry into the field I wanted to do was not quite so easy, but I think that's a typical thing with humanities. Humanities graduates are not the ones who are sought after on the market for certain jobs because they are simply so broadly based. You gain qualifications in the course of your professional training, so to speak: when you're in the job, you have a qualification that you can use in your next job.

And that doesn't make it easy to find a job, but once you're in, you're always admired for how broadly you are positioned in terms of knowledge.

HOW DID YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAREER PROGRESS?

I started my studies because I really wanted to do something with writing later on, in the press/media area, and then I realized after my studies that newspapers are no longer where I want to go, because the whole media world has changed a lot. But I still wanted to go in that direction, but first I made a stopover in the practice management of a cardiological medical practice, because I didn't find the job that fulfilled me right afterwards. Then I simply turned my student part-time job into my main job and then applied from there and went to a metalworking company, did press work there, and from there I went to the Federal Language Office and now do press and public relations work here.

HOW IS YOUR EVERYDAY WORKING LIFE?

I have a lot of tasks in the press and public relations department of the Federal Language Office: for example, I deal with media enquiries, so that I can find protagonists, make an appointment with the journalist, and find out what kind of project is intended. Advertising materials are part of my job: to procure them, to select them, to design them together with a graphic artist, to fill flyers with content, to go to trade fairs. It's really unbelievably much and that's incredibly great, because: for me, no day is like the other.

HOW DOES YOUR WORK RELATE TO SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES?

At the Federal Language Office it is not the case that I only have Scandinavian references, I have practically the whole world, in miniature. The Federal Language Office teaches German as a foreign language, for example, or sends interpreters abroad, on foreign assignments, and so there is always a lot of world in a very small space. I simply love this internationality, this togetherness, this cultural exchange. Yes, and occasionally soldiers do indeed come from Scandinavia and take a German exam. So, I am always happy to be able to experience this togetherness.

WHAT SKILLS HAVE YOU ACQUIRED DURING YOUR STUDIES THAT HELP YOU IN YOUR WORK?

I dare to talk. It doesn't matter if I suddenly have to speak spontaneously in English, but can't, because I simply lack the vocabulary. But then I just do it. And I do not care if I make mistakes. As long as I'm understood, I'm satisfied, and that's definitely something you learn when learning a language: that you don't have to speak perfectly, but that exchange is more important. The other person may not know all the vocabulary he or she needs right now. And breaking down that barrier - that's simply very important if you can get it out of your head.

WHAT TIPS DO YOU HAVE FOR GETTING STARTED IN PRESS RELATIONS?

If you already know as a student that you want to work in press relations, then you should definitely do internships. It doesn't matter which medium you work in: whether it's a car magazine or a language magazine, that's all the same, even a daily newspaper. The experience and what you learn there, and the work processes you learn there, will help you get ahead afterwards. They will help you in your studies and they will also help you later when you are looking for a job. Press work is simply something living, you can't learn that from books. You learn it because you do it, and internships are very important.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF STUDYING A SMALL SUBJECT LIKE SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES?

The advantage of a small subject is that you get to know each other much faster, that you can do a lot more together because you have a lot more courses together, and so you grow together very quickly and are a kind of family. You know every lecturer, you've somehow seen everyone who studies with you. It just makes you feel very familiar. And you also learn things that at first sight are not in demand on the job market, but at second glance they make you incredibly interesting. So everybody asks: "Oh Scandinavian studies, man, what do you do there? What language do you speak?" Then you can actually always say, "Hey! I don't only speak one language, I can understand two more!" It's just a gimmick you don't get very often. And somehow there's always someone who says: "Wow, Sweden, or Denmark, or Norway, I find that really exciting. Tell me about your studies."

Credits

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