

Northern European Studies – and then what?

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

Transcription Episode 3: Higher Education Marketing

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I am Andreas Mai. I studied here in Cologne, graduated in 2010 and majored in Scandinavian Studies and I also studied Political Science and American History.

HOW IS IT THAT YOU STUDIED SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES?

Of course, I didn't have that on my screen at first as a subject of study, because it's one of the smaller subjects that you don't know, especially when you've just graduated from school, and then my friend said: "Why don't you drop by the Department for Scandinavian Studies. You are also a little bit interested in the Nordic area and you will surely like it. There are only nice people there. It's relatively small." Then, I had a look at that and the contact you have with the teachers, but also that you still had the opportunity to learn new languages, to do cultural studies besides literary studies, I found that really exciting and I haven't regretted it.

WAS IT DIFFICULT TO FIND A JOB AFTER GRADUATION?

It wasn't hard, it didn't take long with me either. But I think, because one or, because I also tried out myself in the beginning again and again and looked what suits me, what do I want to do afterwards, what possibilities do I have and also excluded many things for me, so that towards the end of my studies I already had an approximate idea where I wanted to go. So, I also started working for the DAAD, the German Academic Exchange Service, relatively immediately after my graduation in 2010.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU ENCOUNTER BETWEEN YOUR STUDIES AND YOUR JOB?

The first job I had taken was also a temporary job. It was temporary and it was also a supporting job. But I knew that I had to start at this point to show what I could do, to see if I would fit in there, so that the others could see that I fit in this business. And I think that the biggest obstacle for humanities students at the beginning is that you know what you can do and are convinced of it, but you have to prove it to the others first, and that's why you have to have the goal in mind, know where you want to go, but also be aware that you can't start right from the position where you see yourself, but perhaps you have to think about how to get there.

WHAT DOES A SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER FOR INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETING AT THE DAAD DO?

Most of the trade fairs we organise are not our own, i.e. we work together with service providers abroad. We take part in trade fairs that take place, but we organize the German appearance. This means that our main task is to support German universities in their internationalisation, to help them in their marketing abroad, so that they can find foreign students who will study with them, or even just do an exchange, or even enter into a scientific exchange. And for this we prepare the platform, so to speak, and then we organise a German pavilion, a German appearance at international fairs and exhibitions, and it's simply a matter of seeing first who among the German universities is interested, i.e. we have to select the event according to certain criteria. Then we have to advertise it. Then the German universities contact us and we plan a framework programme for the German universities, organise meetings with local university representatives so that they can exchange ideas. Sometimes, we also have to deal with embassies abroad because there are events that have to be prepared. It is simply organisation. We also accompany the universities abroad and then have direct contact with the universities that are travelling with them, but also with the target group of local students, so that we always know what they are looking for, what they want, what they want to know about studying in Germany, and how they see Germany in general. And that is very good, important feedback for us, because we can then focus our information work accordingly.

WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU GIVE STUDENTS?

In order to prepare for your job later on, I would still recommend doing and trying out as much as possible side during your studies, i.e. classic internships, of course, but also things like volunteering at a cultural association. You can also get a lot out of it because you get to know how such cultural events are organized, for example, what goes on behind the scenes. There are all kinds of things you can do. For example, during my studies, I worked as a student job at a television production company. I took part in university radio at the University of Cologne, because I thought for a long time that this was a possible path for me to take in the field of journalism, but later I was a bit torn apart because I realized that this was not quite the case. Nevertheless, I learned a lot from this time at the university radio and also from the time of student jobs in television, which helped me later on to find a profession. That's why I would advise everyone not only to do the classic waitress job perhaps during their studies, but also to try out these things.

WHICH COMPETENCES AND SOFT SKILLS DID YOU ACQUIRE DURING YOUR STUDIES THAT HELP YOU IN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY MARKETING?

Obviously, I'm working in a field where it doesn't hurt to have seen a university from the inside. Well, the DAAD is a science/exchange organisation and of course, people are preferred in these lecturer positions, actually only people who also have a university degree. The studies themselves, apart from the additional things you have learned, such as language, it is also the scientific work itself that has brought a lot, I think. So that you simply know how to get into a new topic and how to approach and deal with new unknown things and then pass it on to others, above all, not only how to handle it, but also how to write it in such a way that third people can understand it quickly, concisely, in a short time. But of course, also this intercultural competence that you might acquire. A) you have to deal with many different people during your studies, but also the experiences you make abroad when you go on an excursion, when you do an exchange. These are all things that have helped me, because you can put yourself in other people's shoes and perspectives so much better and realize that many people you deal with have a different background and therefore see things differently, from a different perspective and that alone helps, especially in marketing.

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

If something is bothering you as a student, it is much easier to go to the professor and talk about things. I always had the impression that this is never a problem at the Department for Scandinavian Studies. One has, concerning small departments, no compromises when it comes to the subject matter. You are taught the same contents and competences of scientific work as in all other programmes. I think you just have the advantages of the nice little social interaction. In this respect, I can only recommend to everyone, if the content is right, to look for smaller departments.

Credits

The interview was conducted on February 17 2020 at the University of Cologne, Department for Scandinavian and Finnish Studies.

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