

## SIP Report

September 2008 – February 2009

By Shell Holland

I got to Hamburg about two weeks early, after a two week Europe trip with my family, and lived in a hotel for that time. I met my German buddy and she helped me with the things that I needed to do to get settled in. The German buddy program was very good; I don't know what I would have done if there wasn't anyone to help me out when I arrived. She also had a job though, so we couldn't do things together that often. I had a second German buddy, because my first one wasn't the same major as me. One time all three of us went out to eat. It was hard for me to follow the conversation though, because they ended up talking to each other a lot. But it was still great practice for my German trying to understand what was going on. I also met some friends through a church and the Christen an der Uni club. I got a lot of practice with my German in those first two weeks and I made a lot of friends, but during the day I was always really lonely and homesick because my friends had to work during the day. Living alone in a hotel was a bad idea, but it was worth it for all of the new friends that I met. I also met a relative of mine who lives in Niedersachsen, but is reachable with the bus. Throughout my time in Hamburg, I've visited him once or twice a month and learned a lot about my German heritage. We even went to the heather together and saw the German sheep called "Schnuckies" that my mom had told me all about.

When September was finally here, I moved into my apartment in the Studentenwohnheim and started my three week intensive German course. I was placed into the right level and I could participate enough as well as learn new words. It was about ten people or so, not too small, but small enough to get to know each other a little better and participate enough. It was very long though and sometimes hard to sit through the whole five hours. We got a couple of breaks and had two teachers. Both of the teachers were very nice and helpful. The German course was another source of my great improvement in the German language. During the three weeks of my German course, I had a lot more to do and wasn't always all alone during the day. Despite this, I still found myself homesick on the way to the U-Bahn, when I was in my room in the

Studentenwohnheim, and even a couple times when I was in German class. It was hard on me having to hear so much of a foreign language every day and I felt like I needed a break. But by the end of the semester my German was so good that I didn't have this problem anymore. Now German barely seems like a foreign language to me.

On one weekend, there was a Berlin trip with the other international students. This was good because I got to know some more people, as well as see Berlin again. I was there earlier with my family, except my dad was always too tired so we didn't get to see as much. This time I got to see a lot, through a three hour long walking tour! I learned a lot about Berlin's history and it was really cool to see so much of the city. At night everyone went to clubs and drank and stuff so because I don't do this, I stayed at the hostel. Luckily there was free internet there, so I could chat with friends from the United States before I went to bed.

September was also the month when I met my wonderful Hauskreis through my church. We met once a week, ate together, prayed, and discussed the Bible. Through my Hauskreis I met some of my best friends in Hamburg and they are probably the ones that I will miss the most; I will also miss my relative in Niedersachsen a lot – he was like a grandpa to me.

My German buddy also helped me to sign up for my classes and exams. At first I was signed up for three classes in German (Digitaltechnik, Numerik & Stochastik, and Algorithmen & Datenstrukturen) and one class in English (Algebra). I ended up staying in all of these classes except for Algorithmen & Datenstrukturen. During the first lecture, I had no clue what was going on. This was because the professor didn't have all of the information written on the board or in a presentation. This is a great way to teach in one's mother tongue, but in a foreign language it's impossible to follow what's going on. After the lecture I went to talk to the professor, I was really upset because I really wanted to take all the classes that I had planned and

understand them. The professor was really nice, he even started speaking English to me. He didn't think that the class would be a problem – he suggested getting books on the subject from the library and finding a lab partner who could speak English. It was really convenient too, a girl from Russia was waiting and asked me if I had a lab partner yet. So I decided to try out the lab with her and look for books and then decide afterwards if I should really stay in the class. I attempted writing the program for the lab and then met up with my lab partner. When I saw her program there was so much stuff that I hadn't learned yet that I decided I really shouldn't be in this course. I had asked my German buddy for advice too, and she said that *Algorithmen und Datenstrukturen* is a class about the algorithms, not about the programming language, and one really needs to know Java well in order to understand the class. So I decided that I would just take Java in English, even though it might not end up counting for credit at my university in America, it would serve as a good refresher for my Java. Luckily, I had no problem in the other two German classes. I could understand mostly everything because the numbers and terms are very similar in German, and they had scripts to follow along with. The professors were also very helpful when I didn't understand something. In *Digitaltechnik* there was always a lecture in German, but the script was in English, which made it much easier for me. This was followed by a period of time where we could work on exercises, check our answers, and ask questions. The German group was so big that the professors didn't really know people by name, but my *Digitaltechnik* professor knew who I was, in that I was an American and I was good at the problems. I always sat in the front because I thought that I needed to be close so that I wouldn't miss something because people around me were talking. *Numerik und Stochastik* was also good. The professor always wrote the script on the board, and we had to copy it down. I like this way of teaching the best because then it's easier for me to concentrate. He also always had some

interesting demonstrations and a small video clip or something for us. I thought that my two lectures in German were much more interesting and easier to pay attention to than the English lectures. In the English classes it was harder for me to concentrate and less interesting. This might be because learning in a foreign language is fun and requires a lot of concentration or just because the professors were teaching in a foreign language and didn't concentrate as much on making the lectures interesting. I didn't have any problems with Algebra, it was a simple class with many things that I had already learned. One problem, though, was that it was the same group of people and the same professor as Calculus, which I wasn't taking. The professor tried to combine a lot of things with Calculus which was hard because I wasn't in it. But I explained the problem to him and everything ended up working out. There was also a tutorial. I went sometimes, when I didn't understand problems from the problem sheets. The tutorial was also annoying though, because it was combined with Calculus. But when I went, I asked if he could do the Algebra problems first so I didn't have to sit through the Calculus part. I didn't go to the tutorial that much until the end when the material was a bit more difficult, and it did help a little with the more difficult material. The tutor was also very nice and helpful when I had questions. Finally, in my Java course I learned a lot, but my Java professor had a very strong accent and was sometimes hard to understand and hard to listen to. When he typed out labs for us I had to read through them a couple of times before I understood what he was actually asking for. The script was also hard to understand and when I really didn't understand something I would Google it because I wasn't sure if I would be able to understand the professor's English if I asked.

The German University system is very different from the American because they did not require us to do homework at HAW Hamburg. They did give us a few exercise problems in

some classes, but it wasn't nearly as much as I'm used to. At first this wasn't a problem for me, but later on I started to get lazy because of this. There was also a Mensa at HAW Hamburg. I ate there once or twice a week, whenever I had to stay for more than one class. The food there was okay, but I also ate at the big Mensa from the Uni Hamburg once and that one had a lot more of a selection. Another difference between German courses and American courses is that the German courses are only once a week for about three hours. In America only our labs were three hours and the rest were a little over an hour but met two or three times per week.

In October we had our Career Workshop. It was very good because it helped me to finish up my resume and to learn what else was expected in the cover letter and the interview. When I actually had my interviews, though, they were nothing like my practice interview. I applied for about ten to fifteen different positions throughout October and by November I already had three interviews. I was applying for positions in South Germany because I wanted the chance to see another part of Germany. So I had an interview with EADS in Ulm, Fraunhofer Institut in Nuremberg, and Audi in Ingolstadt. Audi and Fraunhofer wanted me for sure, and EADS seemed like there was a pretty good chance too. I decided on Fraunhofer because the position sounded most like what I was looking for and they offered me enough money to live on.

In October I also joined Sportspaß so that I could participate in some fitness courses. That gave me something to do during my free time, as well as helped me to burn off all of the yummy German food I was getting. I had a lot of free time during the semester because I was only taking four courses. Most students have about eight courses per semester.

In October and November, I also got the chance to visit some more of my relatives who don't live so close to Hamburg. I have relatives near Bonn, so I got to see Bonn, Cologne, and Münster. The other relatives live in Erlangen, which is close to Nuremberg, so I stayed with

them when I had my interviews. It was good to stay with family for a change instead of being in the Studentenwohnheim. I never really did get to feel at home in the Studentenwohnheim. There were always parties at night and it was too noisy. Most of my friends were from my church and my classes at HAW Hamburg. I did become really good friends with one girl who I lived with, though. Still I really wish that I could have lived in a host family. There are some things in German that I haven't learned because I haven't had to speak German where I lived.

By the time December came along I was starting to get really homesick because I was looking forward to Christmas and finally seeing my family. I still did some fun things though before I went home. I baked cookies with some other girls from the church and I looked around a little bit at the Christmas market. Before I went home, I had a traditional German Christmas dinner at a restaurant with my relative from Niedersachsen and another relative who lives in Hamburg who I hadn't met before. We had goose stuffed with chestnuts, almonds, and apples, plus red cabbage, baked apple with marzipan, and a type of potato dumpling. It was a very delicious Christmas dinner! After that it was almost time for my flight home. I started packing and I filled half of my suitcase with German treats to bring home and share with my family.

Being home for Christmas was great. I stayed there for two and a half weeks, even though I missed one or two lectures because of that. But on the day that I came back I was so homesick that I couldn't even sleep because all I wanted to do was cry. I eventually did get to sleep, though, because I was jet lagged. The jet lag only lasted for a couple days. Once the weekend was over and I was back into the swing of things the homesickness was gone. The homesickness didn't come back for the rest of the semester. I always talked to my family and friends on the internet, so it wasn't really that bad to be away from them.

In January I didn't really have that many lectures or anything. There were just a couple of reviews and then I had to start studying for my exams. I had tried to study while I was home for Christmas but I couldn't really concentrate. But I studied enough and passed all of my exams. My lab exams were very easy. Then I had my Digitaltechnik exam, which I was a little worried about, but it ended up being very easy. Then I had Java and Algebra in the same day. Java was very hard because the professor made it too long. But I still did better than I thought I would on it. Algebra was easy like I thought it would be. Then my last exam, Numerik und Stochastik, I thought would be easy, but it ended up being different types of problems than what was on the review sheets so I didn't do as well as I thought I would. But I still passed.

I liked the exam system at HAW Hamburg better than that in America because we were allowed to use a lot of resources. In America nothing was ever open note. What I didn't like though, is that our grade is based off of only our final exam. I like having midterms and homework to boost up my grade if I don't do as well on the final.

After I was finished with my last exam I started visiting relatives again. I visited some in Nattheim, near Heidenheim and Ulm, who I hadn't met yet. They were really nice and let me stay there for ten days. They spoke a strange dialect called Schwäbisch and I had a hard time understanding half of what they said. I was lucky that they speak Hochdeutsch in Hamburg, so I had an easier time understanding them at the beginning when my German wasn't so good. When I was with these relatives, they took me to see Ulm, Rothenburg, a Steiff stuffed animal exam and the castle Neuschwanstein. It was very pretty in the mountains with all of the snow. After I was done visiting those relatives, I visited my relatives in Erlangen for a couple of days and I left a box of stuff there so that my move to Nuremberg would be easier. Then I went back to

Hamburg to say my goodbyes and get ready for my move and the second half of my year in Germany.