

STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE

“Wir Schaffen Das:” A Comparison of Initiatives for Refugee Integration in Franconia

I resolve to complete a master’s degree in political science at the Friedrich Alexander University (FAU) Erlangen-Nuremberg that will culminate in a master’s thesis comparing how two nearby communities in Bavaria—metropolitan Nuremberg and the small district of Tenennlohe—respond with unique approaches to large-scale refugee resettlement. Strategies for approaching the current wave of asylum seekers is a critical discussion cutting to the core of Germany’s national identity and its commitment to humanitarian

obligations.¹ The Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act, a federal initiative, governs the admissions procedures and distribution of refugees settling Germany. Such tasks are managed by the federation; however, the obligations that the right to asylum imposes on individual communities is a more complicated puzzle.

Until 2006, there was little consolidated effort to manage refugee resettlement and integration standards across the Länder and municipalities.² In many ways, recent initiatives to mainstream these standards and programs have succeeded. But despite these successes, individual German communities—which exhibit notable cultural, political, and socioeconomic differences—vary in their responses to refugee resettlement.

FAU’s two-year master’s program balances rigorous coursework with the flexibility ideal for independent research. Professor Petra Bendel has offered to serve as my academic advisor and research sponsor. She serves as Academic Director and General Manager of the Interdisciplinary Center for Area Studies. A political science professor, she is currently leading a research project on best-practice models for the integration of refugees. Most relevant to my project, she serves as chairwoman of the Academic Advisory Council of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Nuremberg. Dr. Bendel’s advising and resources will be valuable to my study of integration initiatives both in Nuremberg and federally.

If I am awarded the Fulbright, then I will enroll in Professor Bendel’s master’s colloquium from late September 2017 to February 2018, seeking to answer the question, “How do the citizens, civil organizations, and municipal governments in Nuremberg and Tenennlohe respond to refugees and utilize unique approaches in order to fill jurisdictional gaps in federal and state initiatives?” Professor Bendel engages and evaluates her students' research on a weekly basis, and at her request, I will deliver an in-class presentation on my work.

The standard semester of my master’s degree program would begin on October 11, 2017, during which I will be enrolled in the colloquium and two of the following six modules:³

¹ See “Current Numbers on Asylum,” a monthly publication by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge) (German). According to data released by the BAMF, Germany received a record-breaking 476,649 applications for asylum in 2015, and had, as of June, received 396,947 in 2016.

² The Nationaler Integrationsplan is recognized as the first major and cross-cutting effort to coordinate integration standards for immigrants in their communities. See Bendel, Petra, “Coordinating Immigrant Integration in Germany: Mainstreaming at the Federal and Local Levels.”

³ See master’s in Political Science course book (German), available at http://www.polwiss.uni-erlangen.de/documents/studies/ma_modulhandbuch.pdf

Political Philosophy and Theory; International Relations; Politics in Regions outside of Europe; Comparative and German Politics; Politics of Human Rights; and Methodologies. The summer semester (April 9 to July 14, 2018) offers International Political Economy; Methods of Empirical Social Research for Political Scientists, and one unit of open study to facilitate independent research. During the second year, I will submit my completed master's thesis and enroll in four of the remaining, above-listed courses.

In order to observe the programs that assist and integrate refugees in Tennenlohe, I will complete a part-time job shadow at the city government under the supervision of Mr. Amil Sharifov, Social Worker and Coordinator at Erlangen's Municipal Office of Refugee Work.⁴ Their locally and federally mandated job training, language, and integration programs are available on-site to refugees residing in Tennenlohe.⁵ I will have the opportunity to meet refugee individuals and learn about the impact that these initiatives have on their lives.

My prior experience taking courses in German, use of German in my current job, and conscious effort to continue its practice enhance my confidence toward my coursework. I anticipate contributing significant time and effort to comprehend complex subject matter in German, and I therefore find it crucial that I enroll in the first year of my master's program as a full-time student. The Fulbright grant would provide me with the resources to do so. Additionally, prior to the commencement of the semester and upon my arrival in September, I resolve to complete the 3-week advanced (C2) German course offered by FAU.

Admission to the FAU Political Science master's degree program requires a bachelor's degree in either political science or another relevant field.⁶ I fulfill this requirement, as my philosophy coursework focused largely on political theory. For my bachelor thesis, titled "Medical Professionals and the Right to Leave," I examined the right to exit one's country versus the obligations professionals may have toward the fulfillment of human rights of their compatriots. Additionally, I enrolled in an introductory and an advanced course in political science, both of which inspired me to focus my coursework on issues of political philosophy.

After my completion of the Fulbright, I plan to earn a law degree and practice both immigration and data protection law. Germany is a world leader in implementing sweeping data protection standards, forcing companies and governments with German ties to follow suit. The nuanced understanding of German and European politics provided by FAU's master's degree will enable me to contribute meaningfully to the negotiation of a powerful new framework in both fields.

The Fulbright is a perfect opportunity to gain expertise I will apply as an immigration and data protection lawyer while fulfilling my dream of contributing to the expansion and improvement of refugee resettlement regimes. Dr. Bendel's expertise is an invaluable resource, enabling me to contribute to Erlangen's assessment of effective integration strategies. My goal is to complete a project with the rigour necessary to encourage more successful models for integration, causing citizens to be more willing to accept refugees, and save lives, in crises such as the one we currently face.

⁴ *Übergeordnete Koordination der Flüchtlingsarbeit*

⁵ Though a distinct community, Tennenlohe is formally a district of Erlangen.

⁶ Admission requirements are specified in FAU's general information packet on master's studies in Political Science, available in German at http://www.polwiss.unierlangen.de/documents/studies/ma_allgemeines.pdf