

## **EDUC 497 Special Topics - International Field Experience: Germany (1-4 Credits)**

### **Instructors' Information:**

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**Course Prerequisites:** EdPsy 014, EdThP 115

### **Rationale for the course / General Information:**

The goal of the International Field Experience Course is to provide pre-service teachers with multiple opportunities to observe and participate in culturally and socially diverse classrooms, to engage in political dialogue regarding education in Germany, and to develop student perceptions through conversations with international peers.

Such experiences are intended to:

- Provide pre-service teachers with a firm framework upon which to develop rich and informed perspectives of education in America in relationship to the world as a global competitor and educational partner.
- Facilitate student reflection regarding the purpose and perspectives of public schooling and establish an understanding of learning assumptions that occur across the two societies (U.S. and Germany).
- Aid students in identifying and discerning differences and commonalities across German educational environments to better reflect on their own personal teaching perspectives and experiences.

To achieve this, students will:

- Observe and participate in German classroom activities in Kindergartens, elementary, middle, and high schools depending upon student choice.
- Meet with political figures for discussions.
- Engage in teaching experiences with seasoned teachers and students.
- Visit Freiburg University to dialogue with international peers regarding teacher preparation, pedagogy, curriculum design, teacher-student relationships, and to facilitate professional networks.

### **International Field Experience: Germany Course Overview**

Synopsis: The International Field Experience course will encourage students primarily enrolled in the Education program to consider the purpose and foundations of education in the U.S., their role as global citizens in the profession of education, and how traditional education occurs by providing a context for comparison through international travel to Germany. Students will enroll in a spring pre-trip course, then travel to Germany at the end of the spring semester for a two-week period. They will visit classrooms of various educational levels and disciplines (e.g., Kindergarten education, elementary education, secondary education, science education etc.) and evaluate policy and instructional methods while building a deeper understanding of how education in the United States differs from (and is similar to) that of Germany. The itinerary for the course will include visits to several schools across several cities in the country. To maximize learning with

consideration to the social structure of the country, students will be housed in private homes to the fullest extent possible. Such accommodations are intended to enrich the experience in terms of cultural insight that can be gleaned through private conversations with families and to reduce costs.

*Justification:* It is important for pre-service teachers to reflect on the purpose and perspectives of public schooling to establish a firm understanding of learning assumptions that occur across societies. Such reflection is ideally facilitated as students synthesize information from various sources including personal experiences; however, given that pre-service teachers are rarely exposed to teaching methods that differ substantially from their own educational background before they enter the teaching profession, their ability to deeply reflect is severely limited. Therefore, it seems critical to present students with planned experiences in education that differ significantly from their own past experiences (Putnam & Borko, 2000). To facilitate processing the experience, it is important to provide diverse environments of inquiry and opportunities to reflect among peers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2010). First, classroom observations will naturally provide a plethora of visibly noticeable differences in the physical environment (e.g., classrooms, desks, textbooks, school buildings, length of instructional day). As such, students will observe multiple sites to ensure that students discern differences and commonalities among the settings that are inherent to the country (as opposed to the grade level and socio-economic structure of the school's location). Second, communication with political figures, seasoned teachers, young students and university peers (i.e., Freiburg University, with whom Penn State University holds a partnership) will be planned so that Penn State students receive opportunities to dialogue, gather and process information regarding teacher preparation, pedagogy, curriculum design and teacher-student relationships which will allow Penn State students to reflect on a deeper level, and facilitate professional networks.

*Domestic* field experiences are valuable in that pre-service teachers are able to observe slight differences in teaching strategies and classroom management techniques that vary by teacher. Comparatively, *international* field experiences offer richer opportunities to critically analyze how relationships among family, community, and society influence the nature of learning and the issues that affect education along multiple dimensions on a deeper and more complex level. For example, only when exposed to diverse societies will similarities and differences that exist among societal values and goals, educational content, teaching philosophies, political influences, and classroom methods become obvious as noticeably different from what students experienced. It follows then, that only after such exposure can students begin to analyze how political, environmental, and social influences interact to affect a country's philosophy and structure of education. As such, the goal of the proposed course is to provide pre-service teachers with multiple opportunities to observe and participate in culturally and socially diverse classrooms, to engage in political dialogue regarding education in Germany, and to develop their perceptions through conversations with international peers. Such experiences are intended to provide pre-service teachers with a firm framework upon which to develop rich and informed perspectives of education in America in relationship to the world as a global competitor and educational partner.

**Internationalization Impact for Penn State:** The global exchange of educators is valuable along three dimensions. First, the initial field experiences will allow the Penn State participants to create a global network with fellow teachers, schools, professionals, international peers and families in the spirit of service as students seek to internationalize classrooms. Second, students will develop strategic professional partnerships in Education on an international level. Third, upon return to Penn State, follow-up dialogue with their international peers is likely to be prolific given the technological tools available. Such connections will foster short and long-term international bonds as students seek support during their professional teaching experiences and seek to share their impressions of education as it relates to global challenges. Considering the personal and professional relationships that will be cultivated through the course, potential professional

outcomes may include classroom videoconferencing exchanges for elementary students as they visit international classrooms, exchange of teaching methods and philosophies, and potential research opportunities using international classrooms. In terms of personal connections, return visits to extend experiences and learning can be anticipated as well as the potential for diverse students to consider Penn State's educational offerings to supplement their international education.

**Contribution to Strategic Plan of Campus/College:** The initiation of this course supports Goal 1 of the Campus Strategic Plan. Goal 1 (Student Learning and Educational Excellence), initiative 2 that states: "Improve co-curricular (e.g. community service, service learning, internships, study abroad, leadership development, student organizations) learning experiences." This course will provide students with an opportunity to study abroad in natural settings and intends to help students gain skills in varied settings to promote leadership. This new course will define a new global perspective to the course offerings in the Kindergarten and Elementary Education Program, which will help foster a sense of global citizenship at Berks. Finally, the proposed course will present students who otherwise would not be in a position to experience international learning in a structured format with the unique opportunity to broaden their understanding of education in an unparalleled way.

**Contribution to University Office of Global Programs (UOGP) Strategic Goals.** The course will target travel to Germany for two reasons. First, the unification between East and West Germany is historically relevant for students of this age and politically relevant to education. For example, although the former East German culture continues to rebuild, the ramifications of the politically disparate governments still remain visible in architecture, economic struggles, and social issues such as education. Exposures to such stark comparisons are most valuable when offered within the same context (i.e., a single country) allowing students to discern differences in social structures. Second, personal connections within the political and academic arenas have agreed to participate in the initiation of this course. Enrollment will be open to University Park and to other campuses solidifying and unifying Penn State. The proposed destinations, goals, and curriculum support the UOGP strategic goals under Education Abroad in the following ways. Goal 1 (Partner with Academic Departments) 1.3.1 is supported given that faculty from various campuses will be encouraged to participate understanding the ongoing focus of broadening geographic boundaries in education to reflect global unity. Further, the proposed course will serve to solidify the new Partnership with Freiburg University by strategically planning for extended visits to the town and university as outlined in the course agenda. Goal 1.3.3 is also addressed with the class components identified in the syllabus. Given the anticipated visits to Universities, faculty will be paired with international faculty to foster the potential for professional collaborations. Goal 3 (service-oriented study abroad) 1.5.1 is supported by the notion that students will be focused on aiding German teachers to expand the artificial classroom boundaries set by geographic borders, and offer insightful and practical ways to foster a more global network of learners and teachers. Further, relationships will be solidified between the two universities by repeated visits each year as anticipated through the logistics of the course.

**Learning Objectives for Students Traveling and/or Related Course:**

Instruction during the spring semester will include critical background information on Germany such as German culture, history, politics, economics, and education. Further, students will receive instruction on critical skills (e.g., purchasing, cultural etiquette, key German phrases). Then, over the two-week trip and the debriefing upon the return from the trip, students will use guiding questions to direct their learning (e.g., "how does teaching occur," "how do we know learning has occurred," and "what are the purposes of schooling?") in the context of varied educational settings

(i.e., the comparative of U.S. elementary, middle, and high schools). All students completing the course will be assessed on the following objectives:

- Students will use field experiences to reflect on the guiding questions “what is teaching,” “what is learning,” and “what are the purposes of schooling?” Reflections will demonstrate an in-depth understanding of **cultural issues** that have contributed to the current educational structure in a comparative manner (i.e., discussing the United States and Germany).
- Students will identify **social and political variables** that have influenced Germany’s educational system and will discuss these in comparison to similar variables in the United States.
- Students will explore **educational theories of pedagogy** during the field experience and offer personal posits that will **focus on the differences** in school structure in terms of German educational foundations comparatively to the United States.
- Within the context of classroom learning and pedagogy, students will demonstrate an **understanding of global citizenship** concepts and reflect critically on **internationalizing classrooms**.
- Students will offer **future directions regarding education in the U.S.** that critically and creatively consider political, social, economic, educational, and international perspectives.
  - Students will identify **similarities and differences among the schools visited** in relation to: school social climate, academic offerings and expectations, academic rigor, student competencies, academic reporting methods, and assumptions about child development and individual differences.

To help students address these objectives, the course will include opportunities for pre-service teachers to observe classroom dynamics, participate in various classroom activities, engage in conversations with students, professionals, city officials and policymakers regarding curricula, student expectations, assumptions regarding learning, and school and classroom structure. To provide a balanced perspective, students will visit at least three schools that represent various levels of population density (e.g., a large city school, a mid-sized school and a small town school). To help synthesize material, students will engage in group-conversations with the instructor(s) chaperoning the trip to debrief routinely and share insight and perspectives. Also, students will visit Freiburg University to dialogue with international peers on issues in education (e.g., pedagogical philosophies, best teaching practices, current issues in education with an international perspective).