

Interview with Chris Richards

Eva: My name is Eva Brans and I am part of the management-team of the Cologne Global Study Program. And I am here with Chris today for a little interview about the CGSP. Can you introduce yourself real quick?

Chris: My name is Chris Richards and I am from Canada. And I am a participant of the CGSP. This is my second semester now. I started the winter semester of 2019.

Eva: Why did you decide to come to Cologne and especially join the Cologne Global Study Program?

Chris: I wanted to come to Germany because my girlfriend is from Germany, I initially looked for places close to this area, and Cologne was one of the universities that my school had an exchange with. I was looking for programs and I came across the Cologne Global Study Program. Looked interesting to me. So I applied and I got accepted. That's why I came here.

Eva: So what has been your experience in your first semester here, the winter term 19/20? What has been going on so far?

Chris: I really enjoyed it. I like the CGSP because I can take German twice whereas most of the other programs you can only take one language course. I was able to take the pre-semester and the regular semester. Which is good for me because I am trying to learn German. And in the German classes I made a lot of friends and with some of them I still talk to and I will continue to talk to. That really made it enjoyable to be in Cologne with other people who are trying to learn German and I really enjoyed that experience. The classes that I took were also very interesting in terms of different perspectives to what I would normally take at my university back home. So I was really interested in the topics and how it was taught, because I had not really have that kind of experience.

Eva: So what do you normally study in Canada?

Chris: In Canada I study communication. With the CGSP I was able to do many different kind of areas.

Eva: So it does match your major normally. That's perfect. Maybe one or two highlights personal and maybe academic in your first semester.

Chris: I enjoyed the trip we made to Brussels. That was a really fun time because a bunch of classmates we all went together and organized by the CGSP. We got to taste the fries and the beer and the chocolate. It was a really good experience culturally and educationally. We got to see some of the exhibits they had there and they have the EU Parliament building there. It was interesting.

Academic highlight? Hard to say. I like my class "Back to the future" with Benjamin Naujoks. That was enjoyable because as a class we also do some outing where we would meet up and explore a bit of Cologne, a bit of some European type of views. He organized a trip to the Synagogue. There were some interesting opportunities.

Eva: So you saw a lot of places in Cologne. Which are your favourites? Or what is your favourite about Cologne? What is it like from an outsider perspective to come here and live in Cologne?

Chris: I really like the food but I think that's a German thing. I also like the biking. It's really easy to get a round with biking. Some cities (in Canada) also have it but I have never lived in one. So

it is really convenient to bike around here and the cars know that there are bikers so they always pay attention to bikers. That aspect I found really convenient. Just take your bike and go somewhere. And you can make it across town really easily.

I also really like all of the old style architecture. I mean Cologne kind of had most of it's architecture wiped out during the war but it is still a lot of bricks and stuff which is not quite the same architecture that I am used to. I enjoyed that historic atmosphere.

Eva: Your first semester I guess was pretty successful but during February and March a lot of things changed, I think everywhere around the world due to the Corona-Virus. How is your situation now? Because you are still here in Cologne right?

Chris: Yes. I am still in Cologne. Because the Corona-Virus it affected everywhere, so if I stayed or if I went home I kind of would be in the same situation. And here I am not alone that made it easier for me. I decided to stay because the courses were quickly offered online through the CGSP so that made it easier for me to either choose to go home or stay. And there was the possibility that the courses might return to in-session, if it was allowed by the officials. It was easy for me to stay because I am not alone as I already said and I enjoyed being here.

Eva: But isn't it hard to be so far away from your family during such a critical situation?

Chris: I talk to my family still and I have been away from them before. And I also don't have anyone who is like to old so in my family that I am worried who might be affected by this as much. So my family is all pretty healthy.

Eva: You already said all your classes are online. And you have experienced both semesters, one in classroom with your classmates and now one online semester. What is the difference? Is there still an advantage of online classes?

Chris: I think there are advantages and disadvantages. So during the online class I can either see everything typed out or everything will be uploaded online, so I can read it later. Where as in class if you kind of miss something you have to either ask someone or ask the teacher. Which you can still do in online classes as well. But I think the atmosphere is was is a little different. In class session I think it is easier to speak and be around the other students because get to know them more. Because walk to class to class with each other or talk to them a bit after class. The online classes seem to be a bit more instructive. It is a bit different to be socialising because you can't really whisper to your person next to you then you would talk to the whole class.

Eva: But do you still have the feeling you are doing something abroad in the classes? Or does it feel like a normal class you could also take from your own university?

Chris: Well the classes are still with a European-type of focus which I don't know how much of my classes back home would be in the same way. Because a lot of the classes have a focus with either the European Union or with history especially with Germany or with Europe. And it is just different courses offered then from my home university. But it still feels like I am in a more international program because there are still students in my class from say Brazil or there is also even German students. Which I would not really have that many back in Canada. So I mean can still talk to some of them. And some of them I have taken classes with last semester so I got to know the. I still talk to them, message them, like personally.

Eva: Do you still think even this semester will help you in your academic future? Or in general a semester abroad how does it affect you and your academic future?

Chris: I think that a semester abroad is definitely, if it is possible, something everyone should try. I mean even if you don't learn as much as you think you want to about your current major. You always learn something each day if it is culturally or just something you didn't know in your classes. I didn't have a lot of knowledge about the EU or about history in Europe in general. Our history classes quickly go over French Revolution and world wars and that's kind of it. And right now I am taking a class about Weimar, which is apparently something bigger than I really understood. In that aspect I think, it is a nice way to learn things you don't really have the opportunity to in your home country. Also just the ability to be in a different place with a different language changes your perspective how you think about things. Or even if you have people in your home country who speak different languages you kind of understand how things are for them. So I think that probably the most valuable thing is different perspectives. But in general is a great opportunity.

Eva: Do you have any last things to add about the CGSP or in general, you want to say?

Chris: I think if you have, the opportunity to study anywhere abroad you should do that. Obviously I enjoyed my time with the Cologne Global Study Program. So I can recommend that as well. But I think it is really more about going out experiencing something new. For me the Cologne Global Study Program is perfect, because they offer the courses in English. I want to learn German but I was definitely not ready to take any classes in German, at the beginning of my studies in Germany. Now I might be able to get by, but it would still be very difficult. That's why I really enjoyed that the classes were in English.

There are a lot of people from all over the world. If you know a bit of English a lot of people will just be having fun and enjoying meeting other people during the classes. It is a good program.

Eva: I guess you will be back in Germany at some point?

Chris: I plan to come back to Germany at some point. First I have to make sure I can make it back home.

Eva: Thanks again for the interview.