

Interview with Felipe Caetano

Judith: Hi my name is Judith Berns from the management-team of the Cologne Global Study Program and I have Felipe with me today. He is one of the program participants and he is actually joining me from Brazil right now. Felipe it is good to see you. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Felipe: Hello. My name is Felipe. I am talking directly from Salvador. I am currently studying law at the Federal University of Bahia. It is a public university. I am enrolled in the Cologne Global Study Program as a student. I was in Cologne but due to the whole Situation of the Covid-19 I came back home and I am taking the classes online now. Which is actually a pretty interesting experiences so far. Even though I would rather be in Germany exchanging cultures. I am enjoying the program. And the classes pretty nice so far.

Judith: That is good to hear. Positive feedback. A little bit about the background. What happened was you arrived in early March if I recall correctly.

Felipe: Yes. I arrived march first. In the first two weeks where you start to get set up, you have to do your home registration in the government and bank accounts. Everything was starting to get together and I was starting to get organized. Suddenly everything closed and people said there would not be more flights for me to come back. So I decided to go back.

Judith: Usually during the pre-semester phase, which is broadly covering march just before regular classes start in April, the German classes started in March, did you still catch the first classes?

Felipe: Yes. I started the German class like its normal for the pre-semester. But I think they were having it online (later) but I did not notice. And then I was too late. I preferred to restart. It was kind of a tricky German class because the first part was still present and the second part virtual. So I restarted. And my German is not that good.

Judith: So you were caught in transition for some of the classes. We were very happy that students just like you are still joining classes from very far away. Lucky enough that the time change is working out.

Felipe: The funny thing about the time differences. I was very lucky because all of the classes, I don't know if it was planned like that, there are all at the noon or afternoon. And here it is morning then, so it is very feasible. I wake up do my classes and then they day starts.

Judith: Fortunately, you do have a bit more flexibility with digital formats. Some people do join at some very late ours for them. And for some people it is working out in good way. What is the big advantage you see in digital format or distance learning?

Felipe: I think the flexibility would be the big advantage. I was always a bit pre cautious about online classes because I thought about myself as someone who really needs the actual contact with the professor to get going. But it turns out that the zoom meetings did their work pretty well. It is still not the same thing but I didn't think that the zoom meetings would do their job so greatly as they are doing. It has be possible for me to interact with the professors and answer my questions in a way I didn't think it would have been possible.

Judith: Do you feel in those zoom meetings while the teacher is still able to answer questions and seems somewhat presence that you still have interaction with the other students?

Felipe: We do. But I would say, not the best one. It is still a really different format. Especially in the first classes we had audio problems. Now the standard is that everybody is muted and you only unmute when you have a question. This kind of creates an environment where is much more like we watch the teacher and we only ask questions directly when he asks us to. We don't ask questions that much. I don't know if that is a more general or cultural thing in Germany. But here in Brazil normally classes would really heat up and be more active. Even though the teacher tries to do that. I think in online it get's lost a bit (the interaction between the students). But like I said it is really better than I thought it would be. But still not the ideal.

Judith: Usually we both would be here in Cologne, on campus, the same city. And now we are talking with miles between us. Does it still feel like a semester abroad for you?

Felipe: It definitely feels like a different semester and something that I am getting a lot of experiences in internationally way from. Especially the subjects of the program which is really international leaning. We learn about international history, national law which is the part I am most fond of. So it feels something different, it feels something international but I wouldn't probably say a semester abroad, because I am back home.

Judith: You were mentioning the program, maybe even a step back. What made you choose Cologne in the first place?

Felipe: One of the main reasons that got me to Cologne was this program. The University (of Cologne) is a partner university of mine and I started to search a bit. They have a list of all the partner universities and I found the University of Cologne. Now that we are talking about it. I remember I have an uncle of mine that went to Germany and he loved Cologne. And he always talked about how Cologne is nice. So this kind of had some influence. When I see the name Cologne I remember this uncle. I started to research about the university and I found this program. Which was pretty ideal for me. Because of the whole set up with international law which I am most interested in. Also the thing about the language. Where you have the classes in English but also have the German classes. Now I can speak some words in German. When I arrived in Cologne, I couldn't speak any.

Judith: You choose quite specifically this destination/ university due to the program and you mentioned the combination of European and international studies combined with the German classes. In which way do you feel this program will enhance your academic future?

Felipe: In a real way because it is already influencing. I am already getting inside views here in Brazil. I am part of a team who do "moot courts", especially international moot courts with only international law. And in this classes I am already seeing topics that I went through during the moot courts and I am discovering new things. So it has an influence more specifically on the international law part. I am gaining knowledge to help me with this. And also the other things I thought I wouldn't enjoy that much, like the history parts. We are currently at the topic of post-communism, where we learn about the iron-curtain and the revolutions that happened. I thought I know things about it, but turns out there are a lot of things happening there. I find it really interesting. Actually I would say I even studying for this subject more as for the international law one. Due to the number of texts the teacher is giving me, but it is nice. I am reading all of the texts and doing the discussions. It is pretty interesting.

Judith: Do you have plans to redo the semester abroad or at least come back to Germany to experience Cologne and Germany?

Felipe: Yes I do. I still think about that. Currently with the whole things that are happening it is really hard to make predictions. But I would like to come back. Possibly not the semester that is coming but the other one, because I think things would be like more stable. I would like to comeback and continue this program. Because you have this extension where I can do the advanced program.

Judith: The real semester abroad.

Felipe: Yes the real semester. I am kind of doing this pre-semester thing. And then the real one.

Judith: You will have the perfect comparison later on of the digital version and the normal.

Felipe: In mostly those formal parts, like how classes work, the essays, the administrative things you have to do. I would already know so it would be more easier for me with this formal part. And I will just do the fun part.

Judith: Perfect. Thank you for sharing your experiences. And I will keep my fingers crossed that everything works out and we will see each other in person hopefully next year.

Felipe: I hope so.

Judith: Thank you for your time.