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10 students go to Germany through exchange program

By Lisa Williams
Reporter

As part of a cultural exchange program between Texas A&M and a West German university, 10 students and one staff adviser from A&M left for the University of Gottingen last week.

The MSC Jordan Institute for International Awareness is sponsoring 10 students from the University of Gottingen in Gottingen, West Germany for one month, which will end March 11. In turn, the MSC Jordan Institute is sending A&M students and an adviser to spend a month there.

To prepare for the cultural experience, the Jordan Institute last week presented a program, "Modern Germany — The People, The Land, The Culture," to focus and teach an overview of Germany before the Gottingen students arrive.

Barbara Wilson, vice-consul of the Federal Republic of Germany assigned to the consulate general of the FRG in Houston and guest speaker, said people often view Germans as harsh people.

"Germans have always been known as rough boys, hard guys and combative people," she said.

Sarah Yuronka, Jordan Institute's travel and exchange director, said a lot of people have "inborn prejudices" about Germans and their country.

"I've found that some people don't know Germany is divided," Yuronka said. "Others have the image of the Nazis and that's it. I expect college students to be more open-minded and knowledgeable, but I'm sure some prejudices still exist."

Melissa Underhill, Jordan Institute's director for programs, said the barriers of prejudice can be broken down by exchange programs.

"The exchange program is an opportunity for first hand exploration. Breakdown (of prejudices) comes with knowledge."

— Melissa Underhill,
Jordan Institute's director for programs

"The exchange program is an opportunity for first hand exploration," she said. "Breakdown (of prejudices) comes with knowledge. This kind of lecture is the exact kind of supplement to an exchange program that increases the breakdown. 'Modern Germany' was specifically designed to dispel these images."

The idea behind the Jordan Institute's exchange plans is by design a cultural experience — an exchange of culture. There is no obligation to study during the exchange. It is simply an opportunity to learn about another culture.

Wilson refers to Germany as "a vital cultural scene."

"Germany is a good starting point for international travelers from the United States," she said. "You don't get the shock of being in a foreign country there because it's very similar, probably the closest, to the U.S. culture."

"Germany is a small country in contrast with the superpower countries. However, it is important enough to host the superpowers in summits and other engagements."

Wilson, who was born in Dresden, Germany, said Germany is like the United States in its search for peace.

"We want freedom," she said. "We want to help other countries want to be allies. However, you remember, because the shoulder our country borders on communist areas, we are sometimes forced to do things we don't particularly want to do."

Wilson also adds that there are Socialists party in West Germany.

"Although there are followers of radicals who believe in the communist theory, there are not enough communist activists to form an alliance or to build a communist state," Wilson said.

"Germans are outspoken as compared to Americans," she said. "Young Germans have been brought up to be thankful to Americans. Younger community is willing to discuss straightforwardly and may seem somewhat aggressive. They are engaged to openness because a generation is now allowed to express and exchange ideas."

"If you get a chance to meet a German exchange student during your visit, don't be embarrassed by lack of tact. They don't mean anything by their frankness. They don't package their ideas as tactfully or neatly as Americans. Expect them to even correct you German."

"You know, if they embarrass you too badly, just remind them they take a bath and change clothes a day if they like."

Wilson said this because it is expensive in Germany, and as a consequence the Germans are taught to conserve it carefully.

But she warned the A&M students not to underestimate the German students.

"Never challenge them to drinking matches," she said. "You see, they are allowed to drink a very young age and have great tolerance. They'll be the ones with the advantage then."

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