



Deutsch-Amerikanisches
Institut Tübingen

German-American
Institute Tübingen

Deutsch-Amerikanisches Institut · Postfach 1360 · D-72003 Tübingen

Tuebingen, October 19, 2022

“Ambassadors in Sneakers 2022 – A Young Leaders’ Transatlantic Summer Academy on Human Rights”

“Ambassadors in Sneakers 2022” brought together 24 youth council members between the ages of 15 and 22 from Germany and the USA for a four-week transatlantic summer academy on human rights. The participants (twelve male and twelve female) qualified for the program through a competitive application process. Twelve students from all over Germany and twelve from the U.S. states of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Iowa were selected to take part in the program. Together, they first spent one week in Saarbrücken and one in Berlin (June 4-18, 2022) and later one week in Reading, PA, and one in Washington, D.C. (July 30-August 13, 2022). During their travels, they met activists, contemporary witnesses, media representatives, and politicians with whom they explored the topic of human rights together in order to learn from and with each other.

In Saarbrücken the participants completed an intercultural training with Dr. Bruno von Lutz, director of the German-American Institute Saarland, and received an initial overview of the topic of human rights through a workshop of the Adolf Bender Center. At the "Youth Council Fair" they introduced each other to the work of their youth councils in their home communities and exchanged views on the differences and similarities of their volunteer work. With American attorney Tom Rentschler, winner of the "Defender of Democracy" award, they discussed the manipulation of electoral boundaries in the U.S. known as "gerrymandering." A guided tour of the city focused on Saarbrücken's National Socialist past. The conversation and tour with the cantor of the Synagogue in Saarbrücken, who also reported on current community life, left a special impression. With Allison Haskins from the Atlantic Academy of Rhineland-Palatinate, the young ambassadors discussed the historical and current significance of German-American relations. They visited the Völklingen Ironworks World Heritage Site, where forced labor was carried out during World War I and World War II. During the day trip to Luxembourg and Schengen, the group not only learned about the history and significance of the European Union, but also about the scholarship recipients from the START Foundation for young people

Karlstraße 3 · 72072 Tübingen
Tel. +49 (0) 70 71 - 795 26-0
Fax +49 (0) 70 71 - 795 26-26
mail@dai-tuebingen.de
www.dai-tuebingen.de

Direktorin: Dr. Ute Bechdorf
Vorsitzender: Klaus Tappeser,
Regierungspräsident

Kreissparkasse Tübingen
IBAN: DE88 6415 0020 0000 1090 42
BIC/SWIFT-Code: SOLADE51TUB

with an immigration background. At the workshop with Saarbrücken-based anti-racism activist Justin Hayo, many participants shared their own experiences of discrimination and received tips and strategies for anti-racist action from the founder of Change Network e.V.

In Berlin, the students visited the organization Reporters Without Borders, with whom they discussed, among other things, state repression of freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Russia. Its massive human rights violations in connection with the war in Ukraine were also illustrated by the young Ukrainian activist Nina Bondar. The group met Max Lucks, a 25-year-old member of the Bundestag, as well as the activist duo Herr & Speer, who, among other things, gained public attention as initiators of the "Free Interrail" initiative and as ambassadors of the "HeForShe" women's rights campaign. A special highlight was the visit to the U.S. Embassy in Berlin: Ambassador Amy Gutmann took plenty of time to talk to the students about human rights, transatlantic relations and her personal biography. The program also included a visit to the Jewish Museum and meetings with representatives of the disarmament initiative ICAN and the education and empowerment project Each One Teach One.

Six weeks later, the Ambassadors met again in Reading, Pennsylvania, the sister city of Reutlingen, which neighbors Tübingen. Since one of the goals of the program was also to strengthen and rejuvenate this sister city relationship, nine U.S. students from the Reading area and two German students from the Reutlingen Youth Community Council participated in the program. At the invitation of Alvernia University, the entire group stayed for a week on campus, where they found optimal conditions for the summer academy. They met a journalist from the local Reading Eagle newspaper as well as a Planned Parenthood staffer. A German teacher from a local high school gave a lecture on the cultural heritage of German immigrants in Pennsylvania, which is reflected linguistically and culturally in the "Pennsylvania Dutch." The Barrio Alegria organization, which involves youth in community development through local arts projects, designed a dance and theater workshop. During a visit to the local cultural center "Goggleworks," participants exchanged ideas with peers who volunteer locally as part of the Youth Volunteer Corps. At the Berks County Community Foundation headquarters, program director Kevin Lugo spoke about local sustainability and environmental protection projects and provided insights into how social change can be promoted not only through activism and politics, but also through foundation work. Another perspective on human rights was provided by Judge Theresa Johnson, who reported from her daily work. The non-profit organization Berks Connections/Pretrial Services is committed, among other things, to the resocialization of convicted offenders. The meeting with their employees, most of whom work on a voluntary basis, made a particularly lasting impression

on a participant from North Rhine-Westphalia: After the meeting, he applied for an internship there, for which he will travel to Reading again in the spring of 2023. During the day trip to Philadelphia, the group not only saw the well-known sights, but also learned about the city's special history with regard to civil rights in the Gayborhood as well as women's rights and history throughout the city. Finally, at the LGBT Center in Reading, they discussed community engagement and support for LGBT people and demonstrated great trust in and solidarity with each other as they confided in each other about their own experiences.

The Ambassadors spent the last week of the Summer Academy in Washington, D.C. At the center of American politics, they spoke not only with 85-year-old Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, but also with congressional staffer Austin Hacker, who reported on his daily work as well as on the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021. During the visit to the think-tank Center for Strategic & International Studies, the topics of energy security and climate change were discussed, as well as lobbying in general as a means of influencing political decisions and public opinion. The young people were deeply impressed by the life stories of two formerly incarcerated women who criticized abuses in the American judicial and penal system. Alexandra Bailey then introduced the participants to the Sentencing Project, an organization that actively works against these very abuses. As the person responsible for their political strategy, Ms. Bailey was well qualified to work with the youth in a workshop to develop effective campaign strategies and ways of arguing for causes they want to represent in their home communities. The group visited the Capitol as well as the National Museum of African American History and Culture. German Ambassador Emily Haber was also eager to meet the Ambassadors in Sneakers in person. She provided insights into German foreign policy and how she works with various U.S. administrations. The young people, many of whom are particularly interested in diplomatic careers, also had the opportunity to ask a young embassy employee about this afterwards. They were delighted when she revealed that, until recently, she had also belonged to a youth council.

Ambassadors in Sneakers 2022 was already the fourth summer academy for youth councillors that the German-American Institute Tübingen has held in ever new locations, and the first after a two-year interruption due to Covid. One of the special challenges for the project coordination this year was to pedagogically support the effects of the pandemic situation on the development of the young people. Moreover, in addition to price increases due to inflation and the strong dollar exchange rate, the implementation of the program was made even more difficult by the fact that the difficult global economic situation limited the possibilities of potential third-party sponsors.

At the same time, however, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, which was the main cause of this development, made the urgent need for our program particularly clear: not only does it sustainably promote transatlantic relations, but it also supports and empowers young people who are involved in local politics for human rights and free democratic societies. This is emphasized by the fact that both the American and the German ambassador accorded our project with such high priority.

The young people who participated in the program not only formed close friendships, but also take with them a wealth of knowledge, skills, networks and ideas for the future work of their youth councils, youth parliaments and for their own personal development.

We sincerely thank this year's U.S. coordinator Natalie Bartush as well as numerous sponsors, supporters and program partners who made Ambassadors in Sneakers 2022 possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Ute Bechdorf' in a cursive script.

Dr. Ute Bechdorf
Director
German-American Institute Tuebingen

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Felix Weinmann' in a cursive script.

Felix Weinmann
Project Leader Ambassadors in Sneakers
German-American Institute Tuebingen

Project Sponsors and Supporters:



Pictures:



Congress Visit, Washington DC



German Ambassador Emily Haber, Washington DC



Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC

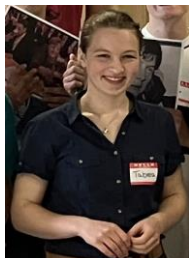


Saarbrücken



U.S. Ambassador Amy Gutmann, Berlin

Feedback from Participants



Having immersed myself in German news about America, I thought I was well-informed. However, I did not understand why exactly things worked or did not work the way they did in America. Unfortunately, this is something that history class does not focus on. I only slowly understood when meeting and asking Americans during the program. (...) It was so much more than I expected! I did not expect such high-profile speakers, I did not expect to be challenged so much, I did not expect to find such good friends.
Tabea (20) from Friedrichshafen, Baden-Württemberg.

The leaders of this trip made sure we felt safe and happy and appreciated. When a lot of us arrived we were so unsure of ourselves and our potential. It all unfolded with this program, I saw members go through a metamorphosis that made them even more amazing than before. I have never felt so appreciative, and inspired. The things I took away from this program will take me far in life.
Sommer (20) from Orwigsburg, Pennsylvania



I will definitely get more involved in more human rights spaces and use my new-found knowledge to educate those around me. After this trip I have joined a human rights club at my university. It's an unforgettable experience - truly life-changing!
Edward (19) from Sinking Spring, Pennsylvania.

Feedback from Speakers



It was a pleasure speaking to them and hearing their takes on our sustainability and climate efforts, both as an organization and as a community. I was very impressed by the students' questions – especially the difficult ones. It is important for everyone, especially our next generation faced with so many global challenges - to understand the very different cultural and political landscapes that shape how we see, interpret, and react to challenge.
Kevin Lugo, Berks County Community Foundation, Reading, Pennsylvania

Thanks for bringing your group to CSIS. They had thoughtful questions and it's clear they are getting a lot out of your program.
Morgan Higman, Energy Security and Climate Change Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC



The time with you organizers and the Ambassadors was really special and rewarding for me and I have really taken you as a team and the students to heart.
Justin Hayo, Change Network e.V., Saarbrücken