
College of Charleston Graduate

CHRISTIAN PERSICO '15

EXPLAINS HOW DOUBLE MAJORING IN GERMAN AND
THEATER CHANGED HIS LIFE FOREVER



What would you say the main benefits of double majoring in German and Theater were?

"Germany is at the forefront of progressive theater! What I've seen in Berlin is worlds different from that what I was used to in the States. It's certainly a matter of taste – and if you want something different, weird, exciting and new, come to Germany. Or Switzerland. Or Austria! The German-speaking world has a very particular (and deep) relationship with the cultural industries, and has some of the highest theater attendance in the world to prove it.

For example: there are around 170 state theaters in Germany alone, and they each receive a good 70% of their yearly budgets (in the millions) from public funds. Every year, guaranteed. Why? To make sure it's accessible to everyone, no matter what. So students, for example, only have to pay 9 € to see world-class productions in the country's most influential theaters. Because access to the arts is a right, not a privilege."

How did your internship abroad prepare you for your later academic and working life?

There's the obvious answer: I received a job offer through my internship. Beyond that: my German was by no means amazing when I first came here through Cultural Vistas, and I came to a city where I knew no one. That's almost as 'square one' as it gets. The experience of really (and I mean, really) pushing myself to improve my language capabilities, to learn how to actively contribute in a foreign working environment, how to meet new people in a huge, chaotic city, and – most of all – how to adjust to and learn to love a radically new place: it taught me how to adapt, and that flexibility is something that will benefit you in every aspect of your life.



Where did you study and work during your time abroad?

During the program, I studied at a language school for the first month in central Berlin and later worked for an arts management startup with a German theater producer and director in the former East Berlin.



In what aspects did your experience with cultural vistas mold who and where you are today? What is it that you do currently?

As I mentioned earlier, the flexibility and adaptability that I gained from the internship program has helped me immensely in every aspect of my life, as did (and do) the friends who I met back then, and who I still see on a daily basis. People are a sum of internal and external influences, and Berlin has a knack for attracting immensely interesting, compelling and free-thinking people. As far as my work goes, I'm a freelancer who works primarily at an NGO that promotes and produces art projects that center around cultural integration (in response to the refugee crisis), and just started a Master's program at the University of Zurich that teaches executive directorship for artistic & cultural institutions.

What advice and suggestions would you give to students who are interested in or are planning to do the internship program?

Do it! Even if it seems a little daunting. Some of the best things in life are daunting. You will have an amazing time, and will not only learn skills for the workplace and develop your language capabilities, but – more valuable – you will learn loads about yourself. Get out of your comfort zone. Go somewhere new and foreign. Experience foreign cultures first-hand, enter into a dialogue with others about your own and view your culture from an outside perspective. You will thank yourself, hands down. Trust me!

Why should arts majors double major in German?

Learning a foreign language has deeply impacted my life in more ways than I probably even realize. It's funny, they say that multilingual individuals express different personalities and ways of thinking depending on which language they're using, and I totally agree. I think that experiencing life in a different language (parallel to being completely immersed in a different culture) has deeply influenced and, in many ways, expanded how I interact with art. So really, I'd advocate learning ANY foreign language. But learning German gives you access not only to an ever-changing landscape of truly inspiring contemporary art, but also gives you a much deeper frame of understanding of the German speaking world's cultural and artistic contributions over the past few centuries (which, let's face it, is a very, very, very deep rabbit hole).



In your opinion, how could a German major benefit other majors?

If we're looking at this from a purely practical perspective, Germany is experiencing an all-time low in unemployment and EVERY major sector of the German economy has been growing – steadily – for years (especially the so-called creative industries!). And the best part: most of these sectors have a workforce deficit. You, as a bilingual German-English speaker, have immense amounts of opportunities and a leg up (especially in Berlin, every job posting I've ever seen here requires at least basic English!).

But it's the social-cultural benefit that's much more compelling. We're currently living in a time with increasing isolationism and single-minded nationalism. Learn a foreign language! Enter into the global market! Represent the ideological message that we're open to the global community, regardless of what our government tweets. Be a cultural ambassador and show that we're not all isolationist fire and fury. The shift to a global community is coming, whether some people want it or not. And learning a foreign language, experiencing a foreign culture, is the best preparation.