

GACC NY Partnership with University Alliance Ruhr: A Cultural Exchange Success Story

For the third consecutive year the GACC NY has partnered with the University Alliance Ruhr to provide ten motivated students from Germany the opportunity to participate in the Transatlantic Ruhr Fellowship Program. In this cultural exchange program, students participate in workshops at the Rutgers University in New Jersey, and attend a one-week skills seminar conducted by the German American Chamber of Commerce New York which is followed by a six-week internship to learn valuable skills to further their career. During their time in the United States the fellows get the opportunity to network with driven start-up founders and well-established experts representing prestigious companies such as BMW Group.

On Monday, the GACCNY welcomed all Ruhr Fellows to their New York office and introduced them to the organizational structure of the German American Chambers in the United States. The students also received insights into the different projects and daily tasks of the departments of the GACCNY as well as their mission as a facilitator to support transatlantic partnerships and businesses. Further the students were enlightened about their role as J-1 Exchange visitors and citizen ambassadors. They are representing their home country and engage in people-to-people diplomacy. The rest of the first day revolved around cultural differences between Germany and the United States. By explaining the coconut and peach theory, the students were made aware of the cultural differences in the workplace as well as in the private sphere. The Ruhr Fellows learned about the American values and society and the different traditions, like holidays that are being celebrated each year.

On Tuesday the GACCNY hosted guest speaker Robert Napoli, who founded his own company and is consulting and coaching groups on staying connected on social media channels. He talked about the power of social engagement and how it relates to standing out in a hyper-connected world and the power of personal and professional brands. The fellows were also made aware of the importance of social media accounts and how their online activities translate into establishing a great personal brand. This presentation was rounded up by helpful networking tips and book recommendations. In the second part, Cindy Klarwasser, Senior Manager Careers and Education, gave a workshop on how to write an American-style resume and how to prepare for a job interview. She gave advice on how to effectively prepare in advance and how to conduct research on the company you are applying at as well as how to gather significant information for the position on all channels, be it Glassdoor, TED talks, or the company's annual reports. The most interesting piece of career advice was to get your own personal "Board of Directors" meaning that each fellow should have critical people in their circle who can give constructive feedback and act as a sounding board.

On Wednesday the skills seminar started with Anna-Lena Baumann from BMW Group who explained the U.S./German differences in the workplace. During the workshop the international HR manager introduced Geert Hofstede's different dimensions of cultural differences and the Ruhr fellows held a short presentation on one of the dimensions in groups of two. Since all fellows are exposed to the American working culture, this seminar provided them with the basis of an open-minded mindset and intercultural awareness. After this interactive workshop the students were invited by the German

Accelerator to gain an insight into how startup accelerators work and what is essential when founding a company. All students took the initiative to ask questions in a following Q&A and visited the different startups in the same building.

On Thursday Senior Manager Chris Gallagher further focused on startup culture and the differences and similarities between San Francisco and New York as startup hubs. He also elaborated on current trends and how the U.S. startup culture differs from the culture in Germany. Mr. Gallagher mentioned different characteristics of the U.S. market which entice German founders and make the United States an attractive market to tap into. After lunch the Ruhr fellows received an inspirational speak by John Sarno the president of the Employers Association of New Jersey. He focused on optimism, everybody's purpose and career success. By highlighting these important factors, John Sarno made the fellows aware that there is much more to search for in a career besides a job which will provide money. In today's age employer-employee relations are just as critical as lifelong learning to stay in a healthy mindset. To elaborate on the importance of connecting the dots in life, Ms. Klarwasser showed Steve Jobs' inspirational commencement speech at Stanford University from 2005 and discussed with the group the importance of forging one's own unique and personal career path.

On the last day of the GACC skills seminar, all Ruhr fellows received feedback on their submitted American-style resumes. Ms. Klarwasser took the time to review all resumes and gave detailed individual feedback. The second half of the day the fellows presented their elevator pitch/tell you story speech. All Ruhr fellows gave amazing insights into their own personal stories and how they overcame difficulties to reach the goals they had set for themselves. This exercise was aimed to prepare them for various situational interview questions for their future job searches.

All Ruhr fellows started their 6-week internships in the Tristate area and will get together at their farewell reception at the end of September to talk about their experiences in the United States, their host companies and the projects they worked on.