

Wege in den Beruf

#11 – Working as an international student in Germany

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Intro: (Musik) ... Studieren? Check. Karriereplan? LOL. Keine Ahnung, wie es nach dem Studium weitergeht? Als Career Service unterstützen wir euch, Antworten auf diese Fragen zu finden. In unserem Podcast Wege in den Beruf befragen wir dafür unterschiedliche Menschen zu ihrer persönlichen Berufsbiografie und den Ups and Downs auf ihrem Weg - für mehr Orientierung und Tipps zum Berufseinstieg. Los geht's!

Emilia: Hi and welcome to a new episode. Today, we will talk about working as an international student in Germany and I have a guest here, as usual, who will tell me all about it. Welcome and please introduce yourself.

Berfin: Hi, thanks for having me. I'm Sema Berfin Karınca. I'm doing my master's in Anglophone Modernities in Literature and Culture. I'm working as a student assistant at the examinations office at ESMT Business School in Berlin.

Emilia: How did you find a job? Was it what you were originally looking for or was it like a different job?

Berfin: I found my job from Praxisportal, from our university's website. Actually, it was kind of one of the fields that I was looking for. I was searching for, in general, marketing or jobs in educational sectors. Yeah.

Emilia: You said that you were working at the Business School in Berlin. What is your job like? What are your tasks as a student assistant there?

Berfin: I'm preparing all the necessary materials for on-campus and now for online exams. I'm preparing attendance sheets, protocol sheets, practise briefing and I coordinate with faculty prior to the exams and I'm posting exam instructions on Moodle. During the semester, this is what I'm mainly doing, like the focus is on the exams. But other than that, I'm also helping the preparation of graduation documents and the process of education verification requests.

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Emilia: Your study field is open to many directions and you told us about your assistant job. My question is if you know where your fellow students work. Do you have similar jobs and do the same tasks or do you know where they work?

Berfin: I already know a lot of people who are studying in the same or similar programme like me in the educational sector and I also have friends working in the marketing sector. And other than that, I have friends working in hotels and shops or restaurants, cafes.

Emilia: And what are your tips for other international students who are looking for a job? You mentioned the Praxisportal on the Career Service website. If you hear this right now, please check it out. It's really good. And of course it was for you successful. But yeah, do you have any tips for people who are like in the same situation as you were?

Berfin: I'm going to be honest in this question.

Emilia: Yes, please!

Berfin: I think it took me around six months to find this job, so the first tip that I can give is to be patient and please don't be discouraged just in a couple of weeks by all the rejections that you're getting or even for the times that you're not even hearing any response. Yeah, this is going to be my first suggestion. And the second one is, be flexible. Because this is what I've noticed while I was searching for a job. It is always good to be flexible.

Emilia: By flexible, do you mean like timewise or in which department you're going to work? What do you mean?

Berfin: I think I mean timewise because I think, about the sector or the department that you want to work, you have to be more confident about this subject. You should know what you want and you need to be sure about this. Not flexibility on that sense, but actually on time.

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Emilia: Okay, let's get on what you said about being confident. Did you have any counselling or preparation before you applied for this specific job you're working now? Did you have some experience with that beforehand?

Berfin: Yes, I joined the UPtransition programme prior to this job and as part of that I've got counselling sessions. I attended workshops and I actually learned a lot about myself in those workshops because mainly what we do until now was studying. The major time of our lives was trying to go through this educational system.

Emilia: It's good to develop a sense of what you want to do and how you can get the job you want. You told me about the workshops you did beforehand and we talked about it before we did this recording today. You told me that you learned how to know about your soft skills and how to present yourself or present these soft skills in the job interview. Maybe you can tell me a little bit more about that.

Berfin: Yeah, actually, those are the questions or the skills, or maybe it was just me or someone else is also having this problem, that we don't think about too much because we're more focused on the experience part, which we don't have at this point. But it really helped me because it's not only about knowing ourselves even better, but since you know yourself better and you know the things you're good at, it also gives you confidence and you can project this confidence in the interviews as well.

Emilia: Yeah, that's really good. And you told me that you talked with your colleagues about that, right? And they told you that they noticed in the job interview that you were confident about yourself.

Berfin: Yes, they told me I was looking confident, I knew what I wanted and I've acted on it. So yeah, it was pretty visible in a sense.

Emilia: You mentioned the UPtransition project, which is a project from the career service and at the University of Potsdam. So, if you're interested, I will link it in the description in the show notes. But maybe you can tell us a little bit more about that. How did that help you find a job or find yourself?

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Berfin: At the end, we are all coming from different countries and different cultures. And after coming here, it's really good to have people around you that can help you to understand a new culture, new rules, new regulations or new understandings in general.

Emilia: It's really nice that there were people for you that could do that and offer you some perspective about the German job market and what is going on here. So, I'm really happy to hear that. Maybe we can come back to your job that you're doing right now. What is the work language at your job? Is it mandatory for you to speak German?

Berfin: No, it's not.

Emilia: Okay.

Berfin: It could have helped me even more. But I'm not encountering with German too much, at least in my tasks. And it probably has been arranged like this because they didn't require me to know German.

Emilia: I can imagine that it has something to do with your field being in a business school. I can imagine that there are a lot of international people working there. Is it the case that you speak English with your co-workers or how do you communicate?

Berfin: Yes, we speak in English. There are a lot of people who are coming from different countries, not only as a student, but also the co-workers and my colleagues. There is a big variety of cultures. It's really fair to say it's international.

Emilia: Okay, good. That helps you a lot, I figure. And was it something that you would search for, especially when looking for a job that you don't have to speak German? Or did you apply also for positions that required you to speak a certain level of German? Was it something you excluded or were you like, no, it doesn't matter. I'm still going to try. Because I heard that some people just apply. Was it the case for you as well?

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Berfin: No, I'm just a beginner in German language. I'm trying to improve it. It's been hard. Again, to be honest, it's been hard both working and trying to finish my studies. But yeah, this is one of the parts that I want to focus on more. But since I didn't know German too much, it was a deliberate thing that I did.

Emilia: And with your job right now, is it flexible? Or do you have specific times you have to come in? How does it work? Do you have an understanding with your co-workers? Or how flexible is it? Because you mentioned that it's hard doing both studying and working.

Berfin: I'm working two and a half days. And those two full days are Mondays and Fridays. Most people are doing a home office for those days. So, most of the campus is not too crowded. And as examinations office, we are trying to find the less chaotic days to have our exams.

Emilia: Okay, so you can have a little bit of flexibility with that because you can build your schedule around that.

Berfin: Yes. And for the other half week, we can move it according to my...

Emilia: To your studies?

Berfin: Yes, according to my schedule.

Emilia: Okay, I see. In your experience, you talked about it for yourself, that it was the case that you found a job that didn't require any German skills. But is it the case for a lot of people? Or do you feel like it's the exception to find a job like that? Do you have some insights about that?

Berfin: I think being close to Berlin is a pretty big advantage about this topic. It's not impossible. But it's hard. Again, I have to be honest, it's hard. It's not an easy journey. Because there are a lot of people who want to work under those requirements. There are a lot of students both in Potsdam and in Berlin, they all want to work in English speaking jobs. Because we all have the common problem of not knowing German

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enough, not professionally.

Emilia: So, you would advise other international students to get on with their German skills and maybe master some.

Berfin: Yeah.

Emilia: Okay. When you were looking for a job, or even now working in the German job market, was there something that surprised you? It can be positive or negative. Was there something that was maybe unexpected? Or is there something like that?

Berfin: While searching jobs, I've noticed that all the job ads are very detailed. You don't even have any question in your mind, because you have everything. Sometimes it's too long, too detailed. But it's really structured. What I was expected, what are the requirements and what do they can offer. Especially this part, what do they offer? Seeing positive bullet points under this title, it really made me feel good.

Emilia: Okay, I see. Yeah, maybe that's another tip for people who want to apply: Read that carefully and look for your do's and don'ts and maybe your skills or your experience that apply for that specific job ad. I think it really makes a difference if you write that in your letter of motivation or your cover letter. And you work at the business school in the administration office? I got that right?

Berfin: Examination.

Emilia: Examination! Okay, difference (laughing). And in which field are you planning to work after graduation? Do you have a dream job or a dream job field that you would be working in?

Berfin: Actually, this is my first office job, so I'm still exploring my options here. Until now, from what I've experienced, I already know a couple of things, what I would like to have in the future in my job environment. I really like to work in an international environment and the coworkers or the team that I'm working

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with. I really learned the value of getting along and working with understanding people. I've never had that dream job or position that I would like to have. But so far, I have a couple of points that I would like to have in the future, but still, I'm still exploring.

Emilia: That's great. And maybe I think it can be a positive thing to don't have like a restricted view of a specific job field or job in general that you want to do. Because of course, it can be helpful to focus on that, but if you're open for many job fields, maybe that's even better for yourself to take the pressure off.

Berfin: Definitely!

Emilia: Thank you very much for sharing your personal experience. And if anyone who's listening right now has the need to talk about this topic further, please be sure to check out the website. And if you want to, you can book a counselling session. We were talking about that as well. And check out the UPtransition programme. I think we can help you regarding the job search in Germany. Thank you very much for being here today!

Berfin: Thank you for having me!

Emilia: You're welcome. See you soon.

Berfin: See you.

Outro: (Musik) Wege in den Beruf ist ein Podcast des Career Service der Universität Potsdam. Falls ihr Fragen habt oder euch eine persönliche Beratung zu Bewerbungsunterlagen oder Übergangsthemen vom Studium in den Beruf wünscht, schaut vorbei unter uni-potsdam.de/careerservice! Alle wichtigen Infos findet ihr in den Show Notes.