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Learning German Culture

Courtney McGrath
Linfield College

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Courtney McGrath

Nürtingen, Germany

October 4, 2018

Learning German Culture

I chose to interview my German buddy provided to me by the NGU university; however, I included experiences I have had with other German students as well, because I don't think my perception of Germany and the norms here were formed by one person alone. A few norms that surprised me about Germany were the concepts of meal times, Sundays as a day of rest, and the concept of friendship. A large part of the German culture is a specific and unbothered lunch hour. It is their largest meal and offices almost everywhere close for at least an hour to allow employees to eat in peace. In addition, on Sundays everything is closed in Germany including supermarkets, most bakeries, and public transportation is cut down as well. This is backed by the cultural belief that every person should have a day of rest. This has been an adjustment for me, because in America we have access to stores every day of the week whereas here I have to ensure I have my grocery shopping done beforehand. The third cultural norm that is specific to the Swabian culture in the south is the concept of friendship. My German buddy studied in California for a year, and she commented how in America everyone seems to be your friend, but here it is not like that. Friendship is more authentic in Swabian culture. Although tough at first, once you make a friend they will be with you for a lifetime.

There are definitely many cultural differences between living in Nürtingen vs. the United States. To start, people here seem to care about the environment so much more than we do. In my dorm, we sort our trash five different ways and recycling is expected from everyone. Another preferential difference is the expectations of a bakery. Susanne commented that when she was in

California, she went to a bakery expecting bread, pastries, etc. and was disappointed when all she found were cakes and sweets. In Germany, the bakeries are very busy in the morning and consist of mostly bread, which is a huge breakfast preference for the Germans.

From living here for more than 2 months now, I feel like a more capable and independent person. I finally feel like I understand a few of the little cultural norms that are unwritten (such as laying down bottles on the belt at the grocery store), and I have become fluent in public transportation. In addition, I have learned what specific things I love and miss about being home, such as good coffee, spicy food, and driving. One day a week I also volunteer in a Kindergarten, which is changing my perspective on progressive education and allowing my German speaking abilities to improve. Overall, I have had an extremely valuable experience in Nürtingen thus far and expect to continue learning and growing as a person throughout the time I have left.