

A Fascination With Immigration

By ERIN STROUT

Growing up in Houston, Joanna Schenke developed an interest in how the state's large Mexican population influenced the culture of the region. She learned to speak Spanish in high school and studied immigration and immigration policy in the United States.

Her fascination with immigrant cultures grew as Ms. Schenke moved on to Pomona College, where she majored in international relations and German. She studied abroad in Berlin, where she learned about immigrants from Turkey, the largest ethnic minority group in Germany, through course work and her own observation.

"I think I'm predisposed to this subject," she says, days after moving into an apartment in Berlin, where she has returned as a Fulbright scholar.

During her previous stint in Berlin, Ms. Schenke says, she was "astonished" that the university where she studied did not offer Turkish-language classes. While there, she picked up some of the language informally. But as part of her Fulbright grant, she received a Critical Language Enhancement Award, which she used to learn to speak fluent Turkish.

The award, which is given to a selection of Fulbright recipients, was created by the State Department in an effort to encourage greater proficiency in languages such as Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Korean, Turkish, and Uzbek.

Ms. Schenke plans to put her new language skills, acquired during a three-month program she just completed in Ankara, Turkey, to use while in Germany.

Her Fulbright focus will be the study of Turkish immigration and integration in the country, an extension of her senior-year thesis at Pomona.

She plans to visit areas of the city where there are high concentrations of Turks, frequenting their cafes and shopping at their markets. She wants to understand the economic and cultural impact that immigration policies have had on the group since World War II.

"Knowing the language will really help me broaden the scope of the research I can do," she says. "It helps to be able to connect with people, and it helps my credibility and understanding of their cultural background." Her newfound Turkish-language skills have already come in handy. Just a few days after arriving in Germany, Ms. Schenke went to a cybercafe and heard the cashier conversing in Turkish. She took the opportunity to try it herself.

"I asked him which computer was free," she says, "and he actually understood me."

<http://chronicle.com>

Section: International

Volume 53, Issue 9, Page A42

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