

# Fulbright Diversity Initiative

by Rolf Hoffmann

The Diversity Initiative is one of the new German scholarship programs in which the Fulbright Commission supports ambitious and qualified high-school graduates and young college students from Germany with an immigrant background to attend summer schools in the United States. The program offers the participation in five- or six-week long summer schools in Alaska, Nebraska, Philadelphia or California, with the aim of improving the knowledge of the English language and enhancing academic and intercultural competence. In addition, the participants are supposed to learn more about the “American Way of Life” by joining cultural activities and sport events, as well as getting to know academia and the American work environment.

An additional initiative supports the teaching of 20 American teaching assistants at German schools with a high percentage of students of immigrant backgrounds. The realization of those projects is co-financed by the US government, German public funds and donations from the Association of Friends and Sponsors of the Fulbright Program.

In the summer of 2006 the first group of students traveled to the U.S. The six-week Summer School of the University of Alaska at Anchorage offered 10 participants – German future teachers – the possibility to work on questions of the American school system. The multinational Summer Institutes of the Uni-

versity of Nebraska at Omaha and of the Drexel University in Philadelphia were host institutions for five students from Germany, joined by another 40 students with immigrant background from five European countries. Five other students participated in a five-week summer school at the California State University in East Bay where they gained their first international experiences. These young leaders reported very positively on the new perspectives that the program offered concerning the English language as well as cultural and academic topics. As highlights of their stay, the students named the hospitality of the American host families, the active integration into social projects by the host communities, and the many friendships that were built in this international environment. This program in East Bay was entirely financed by donation of Fulbright alumni for which the participants expressed their gratitude on the occasion of the annual alumni meeting in Munich. Diali Zhou, one of the participating students, noted:

“San Francisco is one of the most beautiful cities I have ever seen. Unfortunately, I had only a day to enjoy the beauty of Yosemite National Park, and to visit Berkeley University I also had just one day. These are places that I will definitely come back to.”

A joint meeting after the return to Germany in November 2006 and the Fulbright-Thanksgiving – celebrated by 400 German and American guests –

offered all students the possibility of a lively exchange of experiences. The Diversity Student Leaders will definitely stay in touch, in fact, some of them met for a reunion in Copenhagen in December 2006, and they have developed close ties with the Fulbright Alumni Association.



One of the most moving statements of the participants after their return addressed their identity; many said that only abroad had they experienced a common national identity for the first time.

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