Universität Hamburg
Fakultät für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften
Fachbereich Sozialökonomie
M. Sc. Interdisziplinäre Public und Nonprofit Studien
Prof. Dr. Silke Boenigk

Praktikumsbericht
Studienbüro Sozialökonomie Universität Hamburg
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Vorgelegt von
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1 Introduction

I received my bachelor’s degree in International Relations and completed minors in German and Women’s Studies. I pursued these degrees as they align with my passion for social justice as well as my interest in international cultures. When applying for master’s programs I found that public and nonprofit management were fundamental to my goal of creating positive change. During my time in Germany as an international master’s student in Interdisciplinary Public and Nonprofit Studies, I was fortunate enough to be allowed to work. I was employed as a student assistant by the Academic Office of Social Economics at Universität Hamburg from 16.03.2021 to 31.01.2022.

As I had some experience with nonprofit organizations and their functions, I was interested in experiencing professionalism in the public sector. I saw an opportunity to complement my studies by getting experience in public management through my student assistant position at the university. It exposed me to the essential functions of the public sector and gave me a new excitement to work with other students. I was extremely fascinated not only to observe the inner workings of the German public sector but also by the structure of my own university and academic office. In the United States, most universities are for-profit, therefore getting to see a university function as part of the public sector and experiencing the comparison was illuminating to me. Working at the academic office was therefore a cultural and professional experience. Not only did this position complement my studies, but I also was able to further practice my German skills and learn the corresponding vocabulary in both the theory and praxis of this line of work. I was able to observe and participate in the different functions filled by the Academic Office, and which tasks were assigned and carried out by which positions. I also learned which functions belonged to other departments and how they worked together with each other, professors, and students.
2 Organization Description

The overall organization that I was employed at is Universität Hamburg a large research university in northern Germany. Below I will describe the history and organization of the university and the breakdown of its departments. I was employed by the Academic Office of Social Economics under the Department of Study Management. I will also discuss the organization of the Academic Office itself.

2.1 Universität Hamburg

Universität Hamburg was founded in 1919 by the Hamburg State Parliament during the Weimar Republic (History of the University 2021). This was the first parliament chosen by the citizens of Hamburg in an election, which makes Universität Hamburg the first democratically founded university in Germany. While extremely successful in the 1920s, many of Universität Hamburg's great scholars were expelled when the National Socialists came to power as many of them were Jewish. These scholars, and students who joined the white roses, are commemorated today around campus. After the fall of the Third Reich, the university closed but reopened by November 1945. More faculties were then added as the university continued to grow. In 1969 the Hamburg Parliament made reforms to the university to give all its members participation rights and expand academic self-governance. In 1911 the merchant Edmund Siemers donated a lecture building for the support of lectures for the public. At the entrance of the building stands: Der Forschung, Der Lehre, Der Bildung (to research, to teach, to educate). This continues to serve as the mission of the university (History of the University, 2021).

Universität Hamburg is currently one of the largest universities in Germany with 44,000 students, including 5,000 international students from over 130 countries, and is the largest institution for research and education in northern Germany (Profile, 2022). As of 2014, the university has 8 faculties: Law, Economics and Social Sciences, Medicine, Education, the
Humanities Mathematics, Informatics and Natural Sciences, Psychology and Human Movement Science, and Business Administration (Profile, 2022).

Universit"{a}t Hamburg has been awarded a University of Excellence through the national grant competition: Excellence Strategy of the federal and state governments. The university conducts top-level, internationally competitive research. Their four fields of excellence are astrophysics, photon sciences, climate research, and written artifacts research. The research conducted is shared with policymakers, the private sector, and the public itself (Universit"{a}t Hamburg - University of Excellence, 2022).

2.2 Academic Office of Social Economics

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*Figure 1: Organization Chart of the Faculty for Economics and Social Sciences*

(Fakult"{a}tsverwaltung, 2022)
The above-mentioned academic offices offer a service-oriented approach for students and faculty. They perform all tasks in relation to study coordination, advising, and course and examination management. Each of these functions is essential for the implementation of further development of studies and teaching in the faculty.

I was employed by the Academic Office (Studienbüro) of Social Economics, which is one of four units of the Department of Study Management of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences. The breakdown of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences can be seen above in Figure 1 where the different academic offices and their employees are listed. The Academic Offices of Social Sciences and Economics and the International Office also fall under this department. The faculty has around 6,500 students and 350 researchers (Fakultätsverwaltung, 2022).

The Academic Office of Social Economics handles a comprehensive range of services including course planning and guidance, examination and administrative processes, admission procedures, and the preparation of graduation documents. It provides these services in support of teachers, students, as well as prospective students. This is all made possible through the division of labor of 16 colleagues. Three bachelor’s and six master’s programs are supported by the academic office, including my program Interdisciplinary Public and Nonprofit studies. In addition, up to six student assistants are employed to help in the provision of these services (Fakultätsverwaltung, 2022).

3 My Assignments and Responsibilities

I was employed under the title of student assistant for the Academic Office of Social Economics. In the first month, I started at 10 hours a week and then continued to 20 hours a week. Most of the work assigned to me was flexible in that I could define the time in which I worked as long as I completed assignments on time. However, I had time frames in which I
was available to work outside of my class schedule that aligned with those of my colleagues if we needed to have meetings for help and clarification.

3.1 Service Hotline

The main role I fulfilled was operating the student service hotline. I worked the service hotline on set days depending on my and the other student assistants’ class schedules. Due to the pandemic, the Academic Office of Social Economics set up this hotline so students could still reach us even though the physical service point could not be open. The hotline is a point of first contact with the academic office. Students can call regarding their studies in relation to the responsibilities of the academic office to receive answers and advising. Students often contacted us about admissions, class registration, registering for their theses, and examinations. With time and training, I could answer the frequently asked questions, and always had support from my colleagues if I was uncertain. If a question was more complicated or on a case-by-case basis, I was able to give the student or faculty member the correct contact information for the responsible party. The most important thing was to get the students or faculty members the correct information, therefore if something was uncertain, knowing whom to direct them to within the Academic Office to get them the information they needed to succeed. It was also important to know which functions the Academic Office were responsible for, and which ones belonged to other departments, so we could direct questions to the proper source outside of the Academic Office as well. To ensure they knew in the future who their assigned contact person was for specific questions, I made them familiar with the Academic Office’s website, which is updated depending on who is assigned to what group of students or topics. For example, questions regarding examinations are often the responsibility of the course and examination managers. For students, different managers take on different sections of the alphabet by last name, which can be seen on the website. Internally we also had a list of which colleagues were responsible for other topics such as
room planning for faculty members, another tool to help those who called find the right contact person to answer their specific questions.

3.2 MIBAS

Another role I was heavily involved with was that of admissions. I supported the corresponding student coordinator to monitor applications and field questions from incoming and prospective students. The first admissions project I worked on was for the master’s program International Business and Sustainability (MIBAS). Due to its international nature and being taught in English, this program receives the most applicants out of all the other master’s programs handled by the Academic Office of Social Economics. Therefore, I worked with the Student Coordinator as well as another student assistant to manage the workload. I had to thoroughly look through each application to confirm the presence or absence of the required documents. For this program, each student must upload their bachelor’s degree certificate, a transcript of records, proof of knowledge in business administration and research methods, proof of sufficient English language skills, a written justification letter, and a Curriculum Vitae. If they were not from Germany, then they also had to upload recognition of their foreign educational qualification. I had to quality check each of these documents and then record the presence or absence of each piece of the application on the corresponding cover sheet for each student. For example, if a prospective student uploaded proof of their English language skills I had to make sure it was a valid English test or sufficient proof accepted by the program and that the test was taken in the last two years. If the test was valid but the student did not score high enough, I would document that on the cover letter.

After recording the documents and their validity I would then sort each applicant into different database folders. If an applicant uploaded all their documents and they were all valid I would sort them into the completed folder. If a student uploaded all their documents
but was still waiting on the recognition of their foreign education qualification, I would sort them into the corresponding folder. All of this was done online in the university database, whereas in the past it had been done on paper and the documents were sorted into binders. With the introduction of the online database, all members of our team could access the documents on our work laptops, which was essential as almost my whole time of employment we were working from home. This also supported what we called the “four-eye principle” in which each document and application would be looked over by at least two people to be thorough and careful in reviewing them. This acted as quality control to make sure each student and their application were getting proper attention, and to lower the probability of mistakes. At the height of application season, we were looking through over 100 applications a day. In the end, there were over 1000 applications that we reviewed. In tandem with the application document reviewal, I was also responsible for E-mail correspondence with prospective students. We had a reference sheet for commonly asked questions so we could efficiently respond to questions. This was crucial during the height of applications, as well as when acceptance and rejection letters were received. Students often had questions about their qualifications being sufficient for the program, clarification on the process of getting their foreign qualifications recognized, if they need to provide proof of German language skills, and much more.

Another important piece of the puzzle for the MIBAS admissions period is the information sessions. When I first started, I was able to listen to the two-hour session that the Student Coordinator and another student assistant led. Hundreds of people from all over the world took part and the presentation was split up into sections to have time for questions related to each topic. The following year I worked alongside my colleagues to update the presentation to match the new admissions requirements. We were also able to make the presentation more interactive and had discussions on the flow and what made most sense to
give the students easy access to important information. While the program in the past had used uni assist, a private company that provides the service of recognizing foreign education qualifications at a cost to the student applicant, this year they switched over to the university providing this service internally through the Campus Center. Therefore, the students had to be notified that the process had changed and the proper information of where to access the portal to upload documents for recognition, and contact information for those responsible at the Campus Center, which provides this service. Another important change was the addition of the requirement of providing proof of research method skills through a certain number of credits. By presenting these changes and clearing up any questions in these information sessions, students could better understand if their qualifications matched the requirements of the degree, and if they did how to apply correctly and in a certain time frame. This created efficiency as we then received fewer E-mails and could thoroughly focus on the admission tasks at hand.

3.3 Admissions

After getting admissions experience with the MIBAS program I was able to transfer that knowledge to help with the admissions process for M. Sc. Interdisciplinary Public and Nonprofit Studies (PUNO), and the M. Sc. Health Economics and Health Care Management (HEHCM). These degrees had different requirements such as providing a subject aptitude test for HEHCM and getting extra points if you had written a bachelor’s thesis that was related to the master’s program for PUNO. Paying attention to the details of each program’s application requirements was extremely important, and the “four eye principle” was always in use. Since significantly less people applied to these programs, not due to their lack of academic excellence, but likely due to the proof of sufficient German language, we were able to have more time and resources to directly contact applicants if they were missing something. This was unfortunately not possible with the MIBAS applications and was only a courtesy in the
other programs as prospective students are responsible for uploading all required documents. It was very interesting to see the other side of the admissions process from the Academic Office’s perspective after I had applied as a student the previous year. In addition to my main tasks, I completed various side projects depending on my weekly availability. I helped in creating scheduling documents, collecting student information, provided translations, and other administrative tasks to support the staff of the academic office.

3.4 Mentoring and Support

In working at the Academic Office of Social Economics I felt extremely supported. In each step of my learning process, I was given the contact information of anyone I could reach out to, and always told I could ask questions and contact my supervisors at any time. With the expression of this support, I felt comfortable reaching out at any time, and in doing so learned a lot about the functions of the Academic Office itself. We mainly used the platform Microsoft Teams where we had a team for the whole office in which we could all say good morning and send updates as needed. This was also helpful to see who was online and available, or if someone was out sick and how to plan accordingly. Then based on other projects other teams were formed. Microsoft Teams provided easy access to each other during the workday for support and gave us a way to connect even while working from home. While I worked with many different people, a course and examination manager also played the role of the official manager of the student assistants. Whenever other colleagues inquired to see if we were available to complete other assignments or if we ourselves were looking for assignments, we coordinated with her. She gave me great support in providing me with tasks and keeping the balance of assignments among the student assistants to not overwhelm anyone. There was always an emphasis that we were students first and therefore flexibility was provided when we had exams or papers to turn in.
I not only received support and mentoring from my superiors, but largely from the other student assistants who had been there longer than I. With the experience they had in the role they were the ones who trained me in the position as they understood it best. One student assistant who had been involved in the previous years in the MIBAS admission process and was a MIBAS student herself, always connected with me through video calls to make sure I felt comfortable in everything I was doing. Another student assistant who had been there four years and subsequently graduated and began full-time work at the university, trained me in working the student hotline and provided me resources on FAQs and contact partner information. Not only do the employees of the Academic Office of Social Economics provide great service to students and faculty, but they also provide great support and resources to each other.

4 Reflections

I can highly recommend this position to anyone in the PUNO program. It complements the Public Administration and Management aspect of the degree. It provides praxis to learning the theory, and a real-life perspective on how the public sector functions. I also think working at a university versus a “typical” public office has its own benefits in seeing how education affects populations, and the clientele being students and faculty. It provides insight into the functions and amount of work that goes into making a university function inside the public sector lens.

Along the way, I noted many observations I found interesting regarding comparing the functions of a university in Germany versus the United States. One observation I had was that all the admission requirements were codified into law. Therefore, if a prospective student were to not meet a requirement and their application were to get rejected, a specific law paragraph is cited from the examination regulations (Prüfungsordnung). This maintained
regulation and transparency to students in knowing exactly what was expected of them in the application process.

When a student was sick, they would have to file their request through the Academic Office for approval. In my experience in the United States, if you were sick or needed an extension it was at the discretion of the professor and not through official channels. In reflecting on this I appreciated the official process aligning with the public sector as it creates fairness to approve an extension based on an official doctor's note, rather than the possibility of discrimination by a professor when there is no official record of the request.

During my time as a student assistant for the Academic Office of Social Economics, I experienced the change from turning in assignments and applications on paper to the digitalization of the process due to the covid-19 pandemic. It was amazing to see this transition as many digital processes that were likely to be implemented over a longer period due to the bureaucracy of the public sector, were approved quickly to accommodate students in the pandemic. From my experience, in the United States, most university’s processes are already highly digitalized as they are mostly private for-profit organizations that can thus afford to do so and do not have to follow such strict guidelines. There was also a transition from always turning in assignments to the academic office to turning in assignments directly to the professors. This created relief for the academic office to focus on other tasks at hand and provided professors with direct access to the examinations for grading.

I enjoyed the strict organization of each aspect of the job. With set rules and regulations to follow, expectations were always clear. This experience showed me that I would truly be interested in the possibility of continuing my career in the public sector. I originally thought I would in my studies and career lean towards only nonprofit work. This opportunity opened my eyes to the possibility of supporting and helping others within the public sector realm, and that nonprofit work was not the only way to create a positive influence in the lives of others.
Corresponding with my work at the Academic Office I was amid my group paper for the research module, a required course for the Interdisciplinary Public and Nonprofit Studies master’s program. My group decided to research hiring discrimination in the public sector. We set up an experiment in which civil servants had to review resumes and make hiring decisions with treatment interventions to see if applicants with non-German names were hired less. This was not the case, while discrimination is still present in the sector, studies had shown it was less likely in the public sector in comparison to the private sector. We concluded this is likely due to the strict regulations of the public sector as well as the influence of public service motivation. Alongside experiencing regulation within my job, not directly in relation to discrimination but in general, I saw the dedication of my colleagues reflecting their public service motivation. Each member of the team was kind and helpful to me, and extremely supportive of the students they served. It was obvious to me the joy they took in working in accordance with faculty and other university departments to serve students. They enjoyed the direct contact with students and missed being able to come into the office to do so, but of course, continued their work online. It was inspiring to me to see such dedicated people working at our university and serving the students and the public and drew me into thinking this could be a possible career path for me.
5 References


Arbeitszeugnis

Frau Jenna Byrne, geb. am 28.07.1996 in Spearfish, South Dakota, USA, war vom 16.03.2021 bis zum 31.01.2022 als studentische Mitarbeiterin tätig.


Die Studienbüros der Fakultät nehmen höchst professionell und serviceorientiert sämtliche Aufgaben der Studienkoordination, der Studienberatung sowie des Lehrveranstaltungs- und Prüfungsmanagements wahr, die für die Umsetzung und Weiterentwicklung von Studium und Lehre in den wissenschaftlichen Fachbereichen der Fakultät zu erfüllen sind.

Im Studienbüro Sozialökonomie wird das umfangreiche Dienstleistungsspektrum - von der Studiengang- und Lehrplanung, über die begleitende Studienverlaufsbewertung, die Umsetzung sämtlicher prüfungsrechtlicher und administrativer Prozesse sowie der dezentralen Zulasungsverfahren bis hin zur Erstellung der Abschlussdokumente - arbeitsteilig von 16 Kolleg:innen realisiert und richtet sich an Lehrende, Studierende und Studieninteressierte. Betreut werden ca. 3.500 Studierende in drei Bachelor - und sechs Masterstudiengängen. In die Bereitstellung der Leistungen sind zusätzlich bis zu sechs studentische Mitarbeitende eingebunden.

Zu den regelmäßigen Aufgaben von Frau Byrne gehörten unter anderem:

- Erstberatung von Studierenden und Lehrenden am Service-Point und durch die telefonische Serviceline des Studienbüros
- allgemeine Bürotätigkeiten (z.B. Ablage)

Wir bedauern mit Frau Byrne eine ausgezeichnete und engagierte Mitarbeiterin zu verlieren, danken ihr für die stets sehr gute Zusammenarbeit und wünschen ihr für den weiteren Berufsum Lebensweg weiterhin viel Erfolg und persönlich alles Gute.

Hamburg, 29.04.2022

[Unterschrift]

Britta Ganswindt