Study Abroad Podcast: DHBW Ravensburg

Participants

Markus = Professor Markus Rathgeb, Head of Department of the Media Design (DHBW Ravensburg)

Ingela = Ingela Lundin, International Relations Officer (DHBW Ravensburg)

Marcus = Marcus Dowse, Study Abroad Office (University of Reading)

Transcript

Marcus: Hello and welcome to the Study Abroad podcast – a podcast for Reading students thinking about studying abroad. Today we're talking to a long standing partner from our Typography and Graphic Communication department just to learn a little bit about what is possible there. Colleagues, can you introduce yourselves, tell us a little bit about you, and the institution. Thank you.

Markus: Hello, my name is Markus. I'm Head of Department of the Media Design course in Ravensburg at the DHBW, which is also called the University of Corporative Education. And my link to Reading goes back to the 1990s.

Marcus: I am going to ask about that later, etc. And Ingela .

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Ingela : Yes, my name is Ingela and I work in the International office. So for all students interested in coming to us, I will be the first contact person assisting you with organizing your stay with us.

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Marcus Dowse: Brilliant. Thank you. Markus, you are genuinely only the second other Marcus I've ever met. So I'll try and avoid the embarrassment of this…. But can you tell us, you said that your connection with the University of Reading goes back to the 1990s. Can you tell us a little bit more about that please?

Markus: Yes, I went to Reading after I studied in Wiesbaden, which is near Frankfurt, to continue with Typography and it was an absolutely fantastic time to dive into the world of typography and history of communication and it was just a broad palette of what you can do with typography and how you can understand and use it. So, this I had a I had an impact on me and I returned from time to time and stayed there for years and months and taught there a number of times. So happy to come back.

Marcus; So, you know, Reading well then?

Markus: Uh, yes, yes. Well, as a visitor.

Marcus: But you know the department, you know the academics here *etc*, and you work closely with them, which could be really important in a subject such as typography, I would anticipate?

Markus: Absolutely. Yeah. And it a real, I would say, I mean, I've seen quite a number of universities abroad and Reading is a really unique and special place. I mean I couldn't tell any other place with such a such a distinct focus.

Marcus: Here is an excellent department and you know some really good students doing fantastic things there. But, this not about Reading. Can you tell us a little bit about Ravensburg please?

Markus: Yeah, Ravensburg. We are a rather young department. I helped to set up the course about 23 years ago. We started with thirty students. Now these days we have about 250 students and the special thing about the media design course in in Ravensburg is that we are part of a dual system and this is rather unique in Germany for a design course. Our students, they have a contract with a design firm or institution and they apply with their contract at the University to study here for three years So it's really a synergy between theory and practice. And I think they well from the experience of the last 20 or so years they really making the most of it to combine these two parts.

Marcus; And these students are able to study abroad in between the periods when they're working? And therefore that's why you're able to take students from places like Reading, Is that correct?

Markus: Yes. I mean the downside of our program or model is that our students they don't have a term break. You're lucky if you come as an international students because you have your time term breaks at home and you can do the most of it in Ravensburg. But our students, they would end their work placement on Friday and start studying on Monday at the university. So it's quite intense, but uh, well, it seems to be fun.

Marcus: Yeah.

Markus: Because they, I mean, they really get a whole load of experience out of these three years, as you can imagine. And from the program is also quite broad compared to Reading. I mean, in Reading you have this wonderful focus on typography and in Ravensburg we have basically three focuses where we are traveling basically from graphic design to interactive design to motion design, during the years. And I would say our focus is more in combining these areas, and offering the students a kind of media palette which they can use a together with them, methodical tools in, in their professional career later.

Ingela: As Marcus was saying, all our degree seeking students are employed by a company throughout their entire studies. However, if you come to us as an exchange student, you will only do the theory part. So we are not able to find internships for you, but you will still benefit from our system because all your co-mates are employed by a different media design companies throughout entire Germany. So you get connection to all those companies throughout Germany

Marcus: Absolutely. So you still make those connections and we do appreciate that finding work placements and internships has become harder in the last couple of years for UK students. But they're still going to be able to make those connections with people in industry by studying with you.   
But actually, but given what the numbers that you said actually are much wider, number of connections potentially?

Markus: Yeah, absolutely.

Ingela: Yes, all of our degrees seeking students are colleagues in companies, so they have the direct access to the partner companies in that way.

Markus: And it's also I mean the members of staff, they also benefit from it because we have here at the department where there are only six permanent members of staff, but we are a cooperating with about 60 external members of staff from the industry. So there they have real specialists in their fields and I think it's a great benefit for the students also for the incoming international students to make contact to these experts, you know, because they're teaching special subjects then and they're bring all the experience from the industry and combine it with the academic approach.

Marcus: You mentioned that there's a difference between the two institutions is that Ravensburg should say has three different themes, whereas Reading may have one focus around typography. Do you think this is a chance for Reading students who may study with you to sort of experiment in some of the other areas where they may not have as much experience? Or do they need some sort of specialism and backgrounds in graphic design or motion [design]? The things that you mentioned, you know, how do you think that would work in practice?

Markus: Yeah, we have we have this study abroad program which offers a selected a subjects or causes from all three academic years. So Reading students, they can select whatever they're interested in and combined subjects from different the academic years So what I mean coming my experience from the past is that reading students that bring a uh, a really fantastic experience and knowledge about graphic design and typography, obviously,. But they could, you know, combine it with motion design or interactive design, or… We even had a cooperation with Reading in where we took part in design awards, international design awards. So there's a whole range of subjects that can choose from cross media, yeah.

Marcus : Fantastic. We have sent students for semester. I think we may have sent for a year before, but we've also sent students to you on shorter, you know, two week trips organized with the department. So there is a lot of academic synergy and discussions between academics that so students aren't from what I can tell, the students aren't just going over to Ravensburg blind, as it were, is a place where there is good communications between academics, so that there will be that full support from both institutions whilst they're over with you. Is that correct?

Markus: Absolutely. I mean the whole partnership is based on personal relationships, which really go back to the 1990s and there is also, you know, from time to time, members of staff from Reading visited here and taught here, we had joined projects together and from time to time I'm visiting Reading so there is a really lively partnership I would say to Reading, especially to Reading.

Marcus: Would you be able to tell those that are listening a little bit more about the in the wider institution and the town of Ravensburg, please? Because it's a place that, I suppose, is a little bit like Reading in that most of the world hasn't heard of it, in that sense?

Ingela: Well, actually the actually most of the world have heard of Ravensburg. You might have heard of Ravensburger, table games and jigsaw puzzles?

Marcus: Yep, Yep. That's...

Ingela: Yes, I'm quite more or less looking at the starting building from my office.

Marcus: Oh wow…

Ingela: So yes, so most of you have heard of us before and you can really see some traces of this company throughout the city. We are in the very South of Germany, so from our city, except from seeing different things from the table games, you can see the Swiss Alps, the Austrian Alps and the German Alps. And we are about 20 kilometers north of the Lake Constance, so it's a very good area for leisure time and, Ravensburg is a medieval city with a very many historical buildings.

Markus: and I mean, compared to London, Ravensburg is a family, you know. So there you have you have short distances. Most things you can most things you can do by foot or by bike. It's very easy to get in touch with people. There are a lot of pubs, we have a wonderful market, There are lots of things to do, so it's all really at your at your hand, if you're here, yeah.

Marcus: The feedback that I can remember from students who studied there before, it's more of an intimate experience. It is more relaxed. It is not a major city rushing round with everything, but it's more of a chance to integrate into the local community and actually feel more at home, as it were….

Ingela: Yes, Ravensburg, it's a small city, and the university - we are not a campus university - all our buildings are integrated within the Old Town of Ravensburg. So you are in the middle of it, but it's not very big. Everything is walkable, and it's nice. And I think it's very easy to get, to get the feeling of feeling at home here.

Markus: And media design is really at the heart of Ravensburg, if you like, because we're in a medieval building. It used to be a theatre until the 1870s, or whatever, and it's a wonderful building in the heart of town. We have a second building. It's our studio building where students have their workplaces or workspaces, and there is also a printing unit, printing workshop and motion design workshop, a 3D printers and so on. And they can work day and night there if they like, yeah.

Marcus : So it sounds like a place of character.

Markus: Yes, that's probably a good description, yeah.

Ingela: Yeah, it is very good place to live. I'm not from this area. I'm actually from Sweden and got stuck here because it's a nice place to live. So I can really say it's a very good place to live and you're in the central of Europe, so it's also easy to travel around and see some neighbouring countries. But you don't have to travel. You can also stay in the area to explore the beautiful lake Constance and the Apls.

Markus: And also, I think, from what I know, is that that there is a very intense student life here because the town is not so big, but we have many students. So and they interconnect quite easily. International students, they when they're here they tend to connect quite easily. And what we did, we introduced about a year ago, is that every international students get gets a companion student companion Ravensburg student to introduce the international students to other students, to help to overcome the challenges of the academic program and so on. I think that really was a benefit for the incoming students.

Ingela: And also a benefit I think for incoming students is that we guarantee student accommodation for all of you. So if you do what you're supposed to do on time, I can guarantee you a student room in one of our student accommodations. So you will have a single room and share kitchen and bathroom with, depending on where you are allocated, with two to five other students. Presently, now we have this month of 2023 [December]. The monthly rent is €380 per month.

Marcus: Wow. I'm not quite sure what the conversion rate is on this day, but yeah, that's still a wow.

Ingela: But I think it is quite cheap compared to the London area anyway, but also compared to most other parts of Germany, it's still quite reasonable.

Markus: Yeah.

Marcus: Look, I hope you don't mind me asking about language. We encourage students to learn languages, particularly whilst they're there, but is it possible to get by without being fluent in German? Both academically and socially? Although we will encourage students to use the facilities here, and there, and online etc, but this [languages] can often be something that puts students off studying abroad. The assumption that they need to be fluent not only socially in the language but technically and you know, typography, graphic communication and design is a technical subject. Do they have to have the lingo, as it were?

Markus: Yeah, we it's always a challenge to go abroad. I mean that that that's a fact. But what we have, we have different levels of formats, of teaching and in our study, our study abroad program offers a subjects which are either taught in in English or in a bilingual. And it's indicated in the in the study abroad program. And I mean all the we have a lot of personal feedbacks and they are all in English for international students, obviously. We have also our briefings for the main projects, they come all in English, for our international students. And we have quite a number of actually quite a number of lecturers from the UK as well for the for the study abroad program.

Ingela: We have about 100 little bit over the 100 exchange students coming into us every year studying in different departments and more or less none of them speak German. Maybe one every year. So you're in good companionship if you don't speak German.

Marcus: you mentioned that you have about 100 students. Which countries are they coming from then?

Ingela: Kind of depends on what quarter they come, but we have partnerships throughout the entire world. So between Chile, Mexico, Canada, US, all European countries, Taiwan, China, Korea, Indonesia, yeah, I think India, I think more or less all over the world, yeah.

Marcus: A cosmopolitan bunch in the middle of Baden-Württemberg.

Ingela: Yeah, it is. I mean, so you will study in an international environment with. It's students from all over the world, but we don't teach the exchange students in a part and another corner of the of the university. You are an integrated part of the degree seeking students.

Marcus: And that that's an important I think in actually trying to get the best experience because you get the chance to not only be with other study abroaders but integrate into the local community. And I think there's so much actually as a study abroad student that you benefit from getting the best of both worlds. And I hate that phrase, but it's true.

Ingela: Yeah, but it is. That is the truth, yeah.

Marcus: So. Our students who may study abroad over there will be able to get all the information from the uh, you know the websites in terms of practicalities etc. But just in terms of support, you've mentioned about the companion scheme with other students. What other support networks might there be for someone who's thinking of doing this?

Ingela: Well, first of all, it's me. I'm guiding the students through before they arrive here with information. We also have an online information session about six weeks before they arrive, when they can have all their question answered, hopefully. And also when they're here, we have an international club with students from different departments who are interested in going abroad or maybe they've already been abroad on their own or maybe they cannot go abroad, but they're interested in being in touch with our international guests. So getting in touch with other people and getting integrated is normal, not an issue.

Marcus: Yeah, and academically, Markus?

Markus: Yeah, academically, usually , we have an on boarding scheme. I would say, you know. I get in touch with the new international students before they arrive at Ravensburg and they get all the information, so they need. I explain them or introduce them to the study abroad program then they can choose their courses and we discuss after they arrive here their selection of courses we will have our next meeting on Tuesday the 9th of January so you know, in the first days of the of term and just to get to know each other to introduce the companion students and to discuss their program. And I think also a you know what makes it easy to keep in touch or to stay in touch is that we actually here we don't have real office hours, so they will find anytime someone really, you know, during daylight and that makes it really easy if they're here. And if they have a question or facing a problem, just you know, just approach us and we'll, we'll, we'll find help and we support you.

Ingela: Yeah. And we are very small, you university and the benefit is that we have short ways. So it's easy to just stop by at either Markus’s office or the International Office and ….

Markus: We're in the same building.

Ingela: Yes, we are.

Marcus: So not going to get lost.

Ingela: So no, you will not be lost for very long in Ravensburg. I promise you that.

Markus: No, no, no.

Marcus: So two final questions, if that's alright. First one I was going to say, and sorry to put you on the spot, but what do you think the best things about your roles within sort of international education are? So in terms of, you know what and why do you do this day in, day out day in, day out?

Markus: Ah well. I experienced myself, what a great benefit it is to go abroad. I mean this is this is just this is a lifelong teaching, a lifelong experience really. I mean, it's not about only about studying, but it's really the life experience you get and this is something, you know, no university can care for. It's you. You know it's, it's you. You go abroad and you collect the experience and that's why I'm so, you know, why I'm so fascinated about the exchange program to Reading and to other universities because it's such a great benefit, yeah.

Ingela: Yeah. I think going on an exchange is one of the best things that you ever will do in your entire life. I'm originally from Sweden and I did a student exchange here in Germany and it was really a life changer. As I said earlier, I got stuck here and I haven't regretted that, but it's really opening your eyes to the rest of the world because you experience a new place totally differently than you do if you just go on vacation. If you go on vacation, you see a lovely places and see the nature and you might meet some friendly people, but you don't really dive into the culture and get to know them. And I think living abroad for three or six months with people from all over the world is a life changing experience.

Markus: Yeah, absolutely.

Marcus: And this is something we hear quite a lot from alumni, from people who've studied abroad and, you know, not only when they just get back, but, you know, five years down the line, you know, it truly was a transformative experience.

Ingela: It really is. Let me just say something about our semester dates because its something different from your university is that we have intake four times a year.

Marcus: OK.

Ingela: So you could in theory choose if you want to come to us in October, January, April or July and stay with us for either one term, three month or more terms. The Media Design department has the most English course offered in January to March and July to September.

Marcus: OK.

Ingela: But you could still do 2 terms, for instance, come in January to March and do courses and things like that, and then continue for the second term, April to June and do some self-directed courses. So you have six months to do 1 semester workload. You can even maybe do have some time to do some extra things that you don't really need, but you just for the fun.

Marcus: So incredible flexibility, which you can realistically only get from smaller institutions that are more hands on….

Ingela: Yes, and something more with our only three month one term with us is only it's a bit less than 90 days. So this means that you can come here without a visa. So that makes it easier as well. So more or less you just apply get accepted, you register for the student accommodation your book, your flight. You tell me when you're coming. We pick you up at the train station, take you to the student hall. So nothing can really go wrong. It's easy. You don't even have to apply for a visa, yeah.

Marcus: Final question, why Ravensburg? I think you've created a beautiful picture, but you know in a sentence or two why do you think a Reading student would benefit from studying abroad with you.

Markus: Well, I think in in, in different aspects, you're close to things. You you're close to elements of a academic program which really combines professional practice with theory. You are close to student life, you are close to life in town. It's a very it's a very personal department, I would say. And that makes the experience, I think, quite intense.

Marcus: Ingela, anything to add?

Ingela; Well I think we said all of this before, but yeah, I think it's a good mixture of us being small, so short ways, but also that we are in the middle of Europe. So you can you are of course here to study, but there's a lot of things to explore in the area.

Marcus: Brilliant. Look, thank you for your time. It really is appreciated. I know we've sent you loads of students in the past and we've received in return and we hope to continue to do that long into the future as well.

Ingela: Yeah, we have. We have one student who's coming now in January, so yeah.

Marcus; Yeah, that's brilliant. So look, thank you for your time. It's appreciated. If anyone has been inspired both to either study abroad at Ravensburg if you're typography and graphic communication degree, but actually just if you've listened to this and just inspired more generally to study abroad, either in Germany, or anywhere in the world, we strongly encourage you to come have a chat with us in the Study Abroad Office - either to us, or to one of our student ambassadors. As you've heard, it's a wonderful thing to do. So, Markus and Ingela , thank you for your time and no doubt will be in contact soon. Take care.

Markus; Yeah. Thank you very much. See you soon.

Ingela: Thank you so much and hope to see you in Ravensburg soon.

Markus: Yeah. See you. Bye bye.