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More Americans Study in Germany to Avoid College Debt

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FILE - Students walk across campus at the University of Vermont in Burlington, Vermont.

Michael Lipin

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More young Americans are taking a novel approach to getting a higher education without paying the rising costs of U.S. college tuition: enrolling in German universities where tuition is free.

Germany offers [free university tuition](#) to foreign as well as domestic students who meet certain academic qualifications.

By contrast, tuition fees at U.S. public and private universities have risen significantly in recent decades.

U.S. college students accumulate debts averaging \$30,000 dollars to pay for tuition by the time they graduate, according to American historian and social justice activist [Lawrence Wittner](#).

"Today, paying for tuition is beyond the means of most U.S. college students and their families," said Wittner on this week's [HashtagVOA](#) program.

Hunter Bliss, from the southern U.S. state of South Carolina, told HashtagVOA that his family faced a stark choice.

"I either had to leave my country and save my own life [from debt], or stay in the U.S. and put down \$45,000 for a bachelor's degree. That was simply not doable for me," said Bliss.

Germany became an option for Bliss when he realized that he could pursue

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Lawrence Wittner, American historian and social justice activist in Albany, New York, speaking on HashtagVOA, Nov. 3, 2015.

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Hunter Bliss, U.S. student at Technical University of Munich, speaking on HashtagVOA, Nov. 3, 2015.

physics at the Technical University of Munich (TUM), where he enrolled as an undergraduate one year ago.

Tuition at TUM is free, but Bliss says each year he has to pay "semester" fees of about \$200 - an amount that covers administrative costs of the university and its student union.

How many US students in Germany?

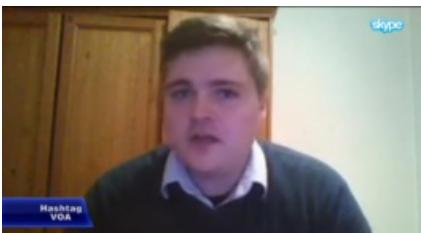
Thousands of other Americans have made the same decision as Bliss in recent years. In an email to VOA, the [Institute of International Education](#), a U.S.-based nonprofit group, says there were 3,069 Americans doing full degrees in Germany in the 2013-14 academic year, a jump of 50 percent from five years earlier. It attributed the data to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), an organization of higher education institutions in Germany.

Bliss says Americans who qualify for undergraduate programs in Germany typically can study in English for the first year. But he says those students are required to take intensive German language courses to prepare them for completing their studies in the local language.

"The language barrier is probably the biggest challenge," said Bliss, who already had some German skills before moving to Germany. "But there is a tradeoff. You either pay a lot of money to study in English in the U.S., or you learn the language in Germany and [study for free]."

Bliss says he is considering a switch to studying design after failing to pass his latest physics exams. But he says he has no regrets about the move to Germany.

"Living more than 7,000 kilometers away from parents, that can be kind of difficult. But the whole journey has been an absolute pleasure. I loved every second of it," Bliss said.



Jay Malone, founder of Eight Hours and Change, speaking on HashtagVOA, Nov. 3, 2015.

Chicago-based international university consultancy [Eight Hours and Change](#) is trying to help other American students to follow Bliss' lead.

Its founder, Jay Malone, also studied in Germany and now lives in Cologne.

He told HashtagVOA that U.S. students and their families often ask him about the additional costs of studying in Germany.

"It's not absolutely free," Malone said. "If you live in a more expensive city like Munich, students should budget around \$800 - \$1,000 per month for living expenses. For some less expensive cities in the east, you might be looking at spending less than \$600 a month."

Malone says Germany wants to boost its international student population from 300,000 to 400,000 in the coming years, hoping that many of them will go on to work in the country, revive its aging workforce and join its pool of taxpayers.

Bliss, when asked whether he will be one of those students who stay in Germany after graduation, gave an emphatic response. "Absolutely, I want to stay. This country is amazing!"



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