

# Stuart R. Givens Memorial Fellowship

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*Bowling Green State University Transcript*

## Personal Statement and Fellowship Experience Proposal



Homs, Syria: Photo Credit to Businessinsider.com

When the French refer to Normandy, they use a certain phrase: *complètement détruit*—“completely destroyed.” The Syrians may soon have a similar phrase to describe their whole country. Over half of the Syrian population, 13.5 million people, needs humanitarian assistance. Approximately 6.6 million Syrians are internally displaced. Half of those displaced are children. Over 20 percent of the Syrian population holds legal refugee status and resides outside of Syria; over 3 million have fled to Europe.<sup>1</sup> According to Google maps, the walk from Aleppo, Syria to the Hungarian border would take approximately 452 hours—about 50 days—if one walked eight hours per day and was able to cover an ambitious 25 miles per day.

Arguably one of the largest humanitarian crises since World War Two, the Syrian Refugee Crisis is a growing calamity. It is easy to overlook this crisis as another disaster happening far away from home, but for me, this tragedy has raised a burden of questions. With Western and Eastern world powers engaged in a global stalemate, the Syrian War has quickly become one of the fiercest global debates. The responses of countries affected by the refugee crisis have been hugely diverse. From razor fences that keep refugees out to the creation of mass international refugee

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<sup>1</sup> Data Courtesy of World Vision Humanitarian Organization

settlements to social welfare programs designed to integrate refugees into society: the question plaguing the rest of the world is, *"How can we accommodate all these people?"*

Within the United States, there has been a vast social and political Islamophobic backlash against the small number of refugees who have been granted asylum on our side of the Atlantic. Meanwhile, Germany, the country most affected by the Syrian Refugee Crisis, has opened its arms to the oncoming masses of people. German policy related to the crisis differs drastically from our policy and upholds an entirely different set of ideals. How can two global powers both claiming to espouse Western ideologies react so differently to the same crisis? Why are so many Americans opposed to granting refuge to those in need? And what is it about the German culture that has enabled them to open their arms to another population? I feel as though I chase these questions in circles, never quite latching onto answers.

While studying Middle Eastern conflicts, specifically the Syrian Refugee Crisis, in my classes, the biggest hurdle I have faced is a lack of insight into the societal perspectives of other countries. It is simple to compare policy outcomes across various nations, but what remain nebulous and elusive are the voices, habits, memes, and assumptions that contribute to any official outcome. There are hundreds of articles published about this refugee crisis every day, but I have yet to learn what someone on the other side of the world thinks about these issues. If the world is to reach an agreement that can resolve the conflict in Syria, surely we as citizens, and more importantly, as voters, do not profit when we isolate ourselves from the opinions of others around the globe.

One might wonder what draws my interest to the Syrian Refugee Crisis. The connection lies within my own history. Part of my childhood was spent in Germany because my father worked for an internationally based company. I feel a deep affinity for a culture that not only taught me a second language, but that also helped shape and define my character.

As Germany is such a prominent actor in the Syrian Refugee Crisis, the whole event has captured my attention. I have not returned to Germany in over ten years, but it is my ambition to serve as a Foreign Service Officer for the U.S. Department of State in a German-speaking country. As a future political actor, my understanding of international perspectives will underpin my success. Unfortunately, while studying in the United States, my access to international perspectives untainted by American culture are limited. It would best serve my personal and educational goals to learn about alternative worldviews while immersed in a foreign culture. With regards to my personal background and the Syrian Refugee Crisis, I could best accomplish such immersion by traveling to Germany.

Ultimately, the Givens Fellowship would allow me to fulfill three overarching objectives. First, I would like to learn about the Syrian Refugee Crisis from the German perspective to better appreciate any disparity between German and

American portrayals. Second, I would seek to discover the opinions of adults and university students regarding the Refugee Crisis. Third, I would analyze how public sentiment on the Refugee Crisis is reflected in the August parliamentary elections. Developing answers to the questions implicit in these objectives would enhance my development as a student and as an engaged global citizen.

The attached proposal provides details regarding my trip. Over the course of a five-week stay during the summer of 2016, I would reside primarily in Berlin. From Berlin I can work with German professors and students via local universities. These international instructors are the contacts and colleagues of BGSU professors Christina Guenther and Stefan Fritsch. Through my interactions I will be able to access the opinions of international students as well gain an understanding of the German perspective on the Syrian Refugee Crisis.

While residing in Berlin, I will also connect with the U.S. Embassy's Political & Economic Office to evaluate the U.S. State Department's analysis of the German political environment. I will supplement my time in Berlin with three short anthropological trips to large cities greatly affected by the refugee crisis: Cologne, Frankfurt, and Hamburg. While traveling to these cities I will observe and seek public opinions about refugee related media and policy.

Prior to departure, under the guidance of my BGSU professors, I will thoroughly investigate the current composition of the German parliament and government systems. This background research will provide me with a firm political foundation so that I may focus on the social perspectives while abroad. Finally, and most importantly, I will strive to share my experiences with others through the creation of a blog containing regular updates on my activities and research. At the conclusion of my trip abroad, I will coordinate with BGSU Education Abroad to create an educational presentation on international perspectives for the BGSU community.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for considering my proposal. I would be honored to receive the Givens Memorial Fellowship and I am grateful for the opportunity to apply for a fellowship expressly designed to help students achieve otherwise unattainable dreams.

**Budget Proposal**  
**Tentative Dates: July 15- August 20**  
**At the current exchange rate of (\$1 = €0.90) these are the approximated costs:**

<b>Expense</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Airfare	Round-trip airfare	\$1500
Housing	5-week rental of a furnished, one-room flat in city center (via Airbnb)	\$1800
Food & Water	Estimate includes all meals (105 meals at a projected \$9 per meal)	\$945
Berlin City Transit Pass	\$30 per week for unlimited use of S-Bahn & U-Bahn trains, buses, trams and ferries.	\$150
4-day, 3-night Trip to Cologne Tentative: July 21-24	Hotel: ≈\$125 per night ICE Train to Cologne: \$105 round trip (Price prediction via Rail-Europe)	\$475
3-day, 2-night Trip to Frankfurt Tentative: August 3-5	Hotel: ≈\$125 per night ICE Train to Frankfurt: \$65 round trip (Price prediction via Rail-Europe)	\$315
3-day, 2-night Trip to Hamburg Tentative: August 15-17	Hotel: ≈\$125 per night ICE Train to Hamburg: \$110 round trip (Price prediction via Rail-Europe)	\$360
Miscellaneous	Includes small fund for emergencies, travel insurance, and international calling	\$455
<b>Total Projected Cost:</b>		<b>\$6000</b>