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Research Report Summer 2005

As a result of an Indiana University South Bend summer grant, I had the opportunity to travel to Berlin to pursue my research on the German student organization, the Burschenschaften. This organization played an important role in the development of popular nationalism in Germany and historians have long been interested in the political views of its members. In general historians have seen a turn to the right and to antisemitism in the 1880s, but my findings suggested the reemergence of progressive and democratic worldview in the last two decades before World War I. Because of the importance of university graduates within the middle class, this research has important implications for an understanding of the range of political perspectives within the middle classes more generally.

Over the summer I was able to work my way through almost all of the issues of the Burschenschaft newspaper, the Burschenschaftlich Blätter, between 1890 and 1914. Each issue has 500-600 densely printed pages per year and was a wonderful source for understanding events at the university level. I also located twenty-five histories of Burschenschaft chapters. These chapter histories will be central not only for my article on the Burschenschaft, but also for my larger project on German student life. I spent most of my time at the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, but also took short trips to local university archives in Jena, Halle, Göttingen, and Würzburg. There I studied the records produced by university officials, which helped me learn more about the circumstances at individual universities.

During the fall and the winter break I was able to make considerable progress on an article based on my findings. I have now finished a 45-page draft manuscript that I plan to edit and revise over the spring semester with the aim of sending it to Central European History in the late spring or early summer. I have already spoken with the editors of the journal, and they have expressed interest in publishing the findings of my research. In addition, the material that I have been able to collect will be of central import in the final version of my larger book project.