



Top 10 — GAC Essay Competition 2025

Essay Question

Germany, the United States, and the wider alliance are at a crossroads. We are entering a new era of international relationships, affecting dimensions such as global trade, defense, and security. This moment calls for a Transatlantic Transformation – a rethinking of how we collaborate, communicate, and confront global challenges together.

What are your ideas for redefining the transatlantic partnership in light of this transformation? How would you reinvigorate it for the future?

Title of the Essay

Beyond Borders: Opening Professional Exchange to All

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Essay

“We all smile in the same language”

That line stayed with me throughout my time in the United States, where I recently completed my Master’s as a German student, made possible in part by a Fulbright scholarship. Outside of classes, I often went for coffee with fellow students, took part in university clubs, or spent weekends on the bus with my sports team heading to games. And for me it was especially during those long rides with teammates, joking about our favourite childhood movie, swapping memories of our first video games, and laughing over how 2010s pop music soundtracked our teenage years, that something clicked. When they asked my “How is it in Germany?”, “What was it like growing up there?” and I asked them the questions back, the replies felt astonishingly familiar. We had all started out playing on a Game Boy or Nintendo, later moved on to Minecraft, knew the old SpongeBob episodes by heart before eventually getting into iCarly, and later also the big American series like How I Met Your Mother or some of us even Gossip Girl. We all shared the same fond memories of early weekend tournaments and long drives with our parents for the sport we played.



Those moments, when my American peers and I saw how much our stories lined up, made me realize that cultural exchange is less about big differences and more about finding that many of the experiences that shape us are the same, no matter where we grew up. That realization sits quietly in my heart, even in a time when the way news, social media, and political debates are framed can give the impression that we are worlds apart rather than sharing common ground.

This resonance between people from different contexts is no accident of nostalgia, and research supports it. A meta-analysis of 713 independent samples from 515 studies found that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudice, with stronger effects when the contact involves equal status and cooperation toward shared goals. The positive effects often extend beyond the immediate group to other outgroups as well ([Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006](#)). Another meta-analysis looking at real-world interventions across 69 settings and involving more than 24,000 people found moderate improvements in attitudes toward minority groups, with the effects lasting over time, especially among school and college-age participants ([Hsieh et al., 2021](#)). These findings help explain what I felt on those bus rides: when we swap life stories and get to know each other beyond stereotypes, we understand each other more deeply and gain insight into why people think and act the way they do. In an era of uncertain geopolitical times, these person-to-person connections are essential for building the trust that underpins any strong transatlantic partnership.

Building on these subjective personal and objective research insights, I would like to propose the “Transatlantic Talent Flow Program”, essentially a “Reverse Fulbright” for professionals. Its aim would be systematic, mutual mobility for skilled professionals, such as technicians, teachers, healthcare workers, engineers, and tradespeople, between Germany and the United States, extending cultural understanding into workplaces across generations and sectors. When looking into existing opportunities, I found that most professional exchanges are limited to very specific groups – for example, politicians, researchers in narrow fields, or programs that only operate in one direction, either to Germany or to the United States. There is currently no open, standardized program that welcomes all kinds of professionals and offers shared structures, support, and mutual access. Such exchanges do happen informally through short-term corporate assignments or professional networks, and I have seen this firsthand. At my current company, which has offices in both countries, short-term assignments are encouraged. Likewise, a friend in law enforcement in Germany once hosted two U.S. officers through the International Police Association exchange, and they found that beyond sharing procedures, they had a very similar approach to working with their communities. The Transatlantic Talent Flow Program would formalize these pockets of exchange under one umbrella, with consistent standards and support, ensuring professional development and cultural insight go hand in hand.

To move from idea to practice, I would recommend starting with a pilot involving multinational companies active in both countries. These firms can co design short term assignments or skills exchange sprints, minimizing logistical friction. The next step in the long-term would be



expansion through chambers of commerce and professional associations to reach educators, nurses, tradespeople, and others. For funding, consider three mechanisms. First, public-private partnerships with cost sharing, modeled on the German dual training schemes, where companies and governments jointly fund stipends, travel, and training. Second, targeted tax credits or vouchers, drawing from EU incentives for internships, to offset employer costs, especially for smaller firms. Third, pooled employer funds matched with federal or EU grants, similar to workforce development in apprenticeships. A 12-month pilot could bring together 50 professionals, 25 from each country, selected through industry nominations and brief interviews. Tracking completion rates, verified skills, continued collaboration six months later, and feedback on the cultural aspects would show if it delivers both professional and cross-cultural value.

Just as those bus rides taught me how much common ground we shared, professional exchanges can spark the same understanding in the workplace. I do not want that “aha moment” I had during those rides to be limited to students, academic programs, or the relatively few people in large companies who already have the privilege of mobility. It should be possible across industries and for different age groups, from apprentices to experienced professionals. A German nurse working three weeks in a U.S. hospital, an American electrician joining a German project site, or a young founder spending a month inside a partner company abroad would all carry those lessons home. None of this requires building something entirely new, and it simply means connecting and scaling the exchanges that already exist. With the right support, these exchanges can become an ordinary part of working life, not a rare privilege.

Note: This essay was written by a human who occasionally asked the OpenAI GPT-4o model for feedback on wording, grammar, and style based on the requirements of this Essay Competition. All ideas, stories, and the puzzled looks from Americans wondering how I can flawlessly sing every American Top 10 pop song from the 2010s at karaoke are entirely my own.

References / Bibliography

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