



American Institute
for Contemporary
German Studies
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

AICGS' New Transatlantic Exchange Program for Young Minorities: Giving Voice to Future Leaders

Participant Biographies



Kemal Abu Doush

Martin-Luther University Halle/Saale

Kemal Abu Doush is currently a Master's student at the Martin-Luther-University in Halle-Wittenberg where he is pursuing a degree in Business Studies. Mr. Abu Doush has already participated in several international projects, including a human rights workshop in Istanbul in cooperation with Amnesty International in 2013 and a seminar in Gloucester, England, focusing on the political participation of young people in Europe. He was also participant of an exchange project for young leaders in Washington, DC, organized by the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. Department of State in 2014. Mr. Abu Doush's work experience includes working as a study advisor at secondary schools in Berlin and as a sale assistant at Peek&Cloppenburg. He also interned at Johnson Controls IFM Industry at the British Embassy Berlin in the field of Event Management and Business Administration.



Steven Aguayo

Westside Middle School Academy

Steven Aguayo is a first generation U.S. citizen whose parents migrated to the United States from Ecuador. After graduating from a technical high school, he joined the Marines and deployed twice to Iraq. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Anthropology in 2012 a master's degree in teaching in 2014 from Western Connecticut State University. He taught for two years and is now pursuing a MFA in fiction writing. Steven learned both English and Spanish at an early age and has studied German as a foreign language.



Funda Akan

Robert Bosch GmbH

Funda Akan is currently working for Robert Bosch GmbH as a participant of the Junior Managers Program in Marketing & Sales, which is preparing high potential university graduates for a leadership career within Bosch. She holds a M.Sc. in Management & Marketing from the University of Mannheim and a bachelor's degree in General Management from the European Business School (EBS) in Oestrich-Winkel. Her international experiences include working for the Bosch Asia-Pacific Headquarters in Singapore, an internship in a start-up in Istanbul, and a semester abroad in New Zealand. Ms. Akan is alumna of the Vodafone Foundation Germany, which granted her a full scholarship as part of their "Vodafone Chancen" program that supports talented students with a migration background.



Dilan Sina Balhan
Bucerius Law School

Dilan Sina Balhan is currently a legal assistant at a law firm and will begin her legal clerkship at the Higher Regional Court Hamburg. She studied law at Bucerius Law School in Hamburg and at University of Queensland, Brisbane/Australia. She received a LL.B. and completed the First State Examination. Ms. Balhan was a scholarship holder of the Vodafone Foundation Germany. During her studies, she worked as a student assistant at the labor law department of Bucerius Law School and did an internship at the Australian headquarters of Amnesty International. She founded and heads the Bucerius Helps student organization involved in providing help to refugees in Hamburg and worked for a law clinic as a pro-bono legal adviser.



Victor Baten
University of California, Berkeley

Victor Baten is a policy strategist with over 6 years of experience with national Latino advocacy organizations, political campaigns, and on Capitol Hill. Victor is currently pursuing a Master's of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy. Prior to attending graduate school, Victor worked for the Latino constituency group of the American Federation of Labor & Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Victor worked with Congress and the Obama Administration on issues that affect U.S. workers and Latinos. Before joining the AFL-CIO in 2013, Victor coordinated Latino outreach for the 2012 election of Representative Lois Frankel (FL-22), served at the offices of Representative Judy Chu (CA-32) and Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Green the Capitol Initiative. Victor was raised in Boynton Beach, Florida and has a B.S. in Political Science from Florida State University. He is an alumnus of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) and was selected as a Public Policy and International Affairs (PPIA) Fellow at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy.



Maria Beltran
American University

Maria Beltran serves as the National Director of Latino Engagement at Enroll America, the nation's leading health care enrollment coalition whose mission is to maximize the number of uninsured Americans who enroll in health coverage made available by the Affordable Care Act. Maria works to engage Latino communities across the country to make sure they can access quality and affordable health care through innovative initiatives, coalitional partnerships and diverse outreach strategies. Originally from Los Angeles, her experience is primarily in the public sector where she has developed strong skills in communications, program development, community outreach, and relationship building through her time at Young Invincibles, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Aspen Institute, the Institute of International Education, and the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City. Maria holds a B.A. from the University of California, Santa Barbara and is currently a Masters of International Communication candidate at American University in Washington, DC.

**Necla Benzer**

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

Necla Benzer is currently working in International Development Cooperation with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (GIZ) GmbH. In the wake of the recent influx of refugees, she co-founded Project Re:Start, an initiative enabling refugees with an entrepreneurial background or spirit to start their own business and create opportunities for themselves and others. Ms. Benzer completed a B.A. in Political Science with a special focus on Middle East Politics at the University of Bamberg and the University of Geneva and has an M.A. in International Relations from the University of Exeter.

**Marisol Campos**

Illinois Student Assistance Commission

Marisol Campos earned her B.A. in Political Science and Communication at the University of Illinois-Chicago. She currently works with the Illinois Student Assistance Commission where she is a College Access and Outreach corps member. Previously, Marisol worked as a deputy registrar, a high school career and college coach, and has extensively interned with her state representative. Within the community, Marisol volunteers with several community-based organizations and non-profits in assisting eligible permanent residents apply for citizenship.

**Halil Ibrahim Dogan**

Technical University Berlin and Humboldt University Berlin

Halil Ibrahim Dogan is a student at the Technical University and Humboldt University of Berlin, majoring in Business/Employment Studies and History, which will lead to a B.A. in Education. Mr. Dogan is a youth worker for an Islamic community. He has been a member of the relief organization Hasene e.V. since 2014 and has volunteered internationally as a distributor of aid packages. Mr. Dogan gained teaching experience by doing internships at high schools and the Conservatorium for Turkish Music in Berlin, where he studied Turkish Music for 5 years and is still working as an instrumentalist.

**Mehmet Dogan**

University of Leipzig

Mehmet Doğan is currently pursuing a Master of Arts degree in European Studies at the University of Leipzig. Mr. Doğan's concentration is on intergovernmental relations, European social and economic policies and the legalese of such policies. Additionally, he studied at École normale supérieure in Paris. Previously, he achieved a degree in Political Science at University of Leipzig and was selected for the exchange program at Sciences Po Paris. Besides his studies, Mr. Doğan, was student representative for Sustainable Mobility and worked as an assistant lecturer in the field of Middle and Eastern Europe and Financialization at the University of Leipzig.

**Rahfin Faruk**

Foundation Strategy Group

Rahfin Faruk completed degrees in economics, political science, public policy and religious studies and a mathematics minor at Southern Methodist University, graduating summa cum laude. Inducted into Phi Beta Kappa as a junior, he was awarded the school's Most Outstanding Senior Award. Rahfin is also a Harry S. Truman Scholar. Rahfin is the founding CEO of a Dallas microfinance startup, and he has worked at Grameen Bank, the U.S. Department of State, and McKinsey & Company. At SMU, he served as the sole student trustee on the Board of Trustees. Before that, he was the editor in chief of the student newspaper and ran the school's student policy center. Rahfin was a fellow at the Center for the Study of the Presidency, and he has published original research on microfinance and migration. He actively publishes in the Dallas Morning News and the Huffington Post. Rahfin currently works as a Consultant at FSG, a nonprofit consultancy. He is also a researcher for a public scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, and Rahfin is presenting papers on 'the emerging migration state' at the American Political Science Association and the International Studies Association this fall.

**Esra Karakaya**

Deutsche Welle

Esra Karakaya is a multimedia journalist currently working in the editorial office for the English newsroom of *Deutsche Welle*, Germany's only state-run international broadcaster. Previously, she worked for the Alternative Information Center in the Palestinian Territories and various community organizations, such as *korientation e.V.* (Asian-German organization). Ms. Karakaya graduated from Humboldt-University of Berlin with degrees in Musicology and Media Sciences. Her academic as well as her professional focus is on social transformation through media and pop culture.

**Abdulsettar Mahdi**

Georg-August University of Göttingen

Abdulsettar Mahdi currently studies dentistry at the medical school of the University of Göttingen, pursuing the state examination. His political interest leads to working with NGOs like Amnesty International and several minority-representing student associations. Mr. Mahdi recently assumed the chair of the Group of Young European Federalists Göttingen, where he's advocating for a federal system in the European Union and is trying to represent the interests of the European youth. As a Fulbright Fellow, he's also still engaging in the Fulbright Alumni Association. Furthermore Mr. Mahdi is a founding member and the head of marketing for the social startup "SUBA – Startup Bootcamps for Africa".



Maria Alejandra Moscoso

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

Maria Alejandra Moscoso is currently a development and program intern for the Salzburg Global Seminar in Salzburg, Austria. She is a recent Public Policy Fellow with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute where she worked with the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the office of Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. Ms. Moscoso transferred and earned her B.A. in economics with a concentration in Global South Development Studies at Smith College, after attending the Honors College of Miami-Dade. While working in Washington, DC, Maria volunteered as an English teacher, where she worked with adult immigrants through the Washington English Center and acted as a mentor through the Latinas Leading Tomorrow program.



Eric Otieno

University of Kassel

Eric Otieno is currently a graduate student at the University of Kassel, where he is pursuing a degree in Global Political Economy. He holds a Bachelors Degree in Sociology and Political Science from Goethe University of Frankfurt. Mr. Otieno has been professionally involved in policy advice on public procurement and the Fairtrade Towns Initiative with the Development Policy Network (EPN Hessen e.V.). He has also worked on global public health policy and Human Rights at the German Bundestag, as well as at Medico International as an Intern. Additionally, Mr. Otieno is a civic educator, focusing on active citizenship education for inclusive society in the face of the recent discourses around refugees and the entry of a new right-wing-populist party into half of Germany's sixteen state parliaments. In the past year, he has been engaged as a speaker at various events across the country on the correlation between migration, global justice, and human rights. He is a 2016 John Lewis Fellow (Humanity in Action), and a Member of the Africa Good Governance Network.



Giovanni E. Pagan Velez

Columbia University

Giovanni is a third-year student at Columbia University in the City of New York, majoring in Political Science and International Relations. He is the Director of International Affairs at Columbia's International Relations Association and he is also working as a Research Assistant at Columbia's Institute of Latin American Studies. Giovanni also has professional experience as a Legislative Intern at Puerto Rico's House of Representatives and as a Public Policy Intern at Estudios Técnicos Inc.



Maritza Perez

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund

Maritza Perez is a Soros Justice Fellow at the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) in Washington, DC. She advocates for policies to end mass incarceration and the disproportionate representation of Latinos in the criminal legal system. Before joining MALDEF, Ms. Perez attended UC Berkeley School of Law (Boalt Hall), graduating in 2015. As a law student, she participated in efforts related to criminal justice reform, diversity and inclusion, immigrant rights, and education access for disadvantaged students. Prior to law school, Ms. Perez taught for two years in New Orleans with Teach For America. She developed her passion for social justice at the University of Nevada, Reno, where she championed progressive causes before graduating magna cum laude in 2010. As an undergraduate, she interned for the Obama for America campaign in her homestate of Nevada and in the Office of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in Washington, DC. Her longstanding commitment to serving underrepresented people through law and policy earned her a spot in the Huffington Post's "40 Under 40: Latinos in American Politics" list of 2014.



M. Antonio Quintanilla

Greenberg Traurig, LLP

Antonio Quintanilla is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Latin American Studies and Political Economy at Georgetown University. Mr. Quintanilla has previously worked as a corporate immigration paralegal for Greenberg Traurig, LLP and Fragomen Worldwide. He completed a B.A. at Brigham Young University in 2013. Additionally, he has interned at the Library of Congress and has participated in internships in Peru and Utah. His work included teaching self-sufficiency workshops, recruiting volunteers, developing business courses for earthquake victims, and teaching English to local immigrant populations.



Gabriela Santiago-Romero

Wayne County, MI

Gabriela Santiago-Romero is an executive assistant at Wayne County, MI, working for the Wayne County Executive's cabinet. She graduated in May 2015 with her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration focusing on International Business from the University of Detroit Mercy. She has recently completed a one year fellowship program with Challenge Detroit where she consulted for numerous nonprofits in the city of Detroit.



Julia Tekin

Administrative District Westerwaldkreis

Julia Tekin studied law at the Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, specializing in criminal law & criminology, and completed her legal traineeship at the Regional Court Giessen, where she focused on public law. Since January 2015 she has been working as a lawyer at the Administrative District Westerwaldkreis. She is chairwoman of the rights committee and adjudicates on the legality of the administrative decisions, in particular the decisions of the Foreigners' Office. Among other things she advises the various departments of the authority. During her academic studies, Ms. Tekin was a voluntary board member of the Youth Board of the Syriac Orthodox (Aramaic) Church.