Competing Motivations in Germany's Higher Education Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

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Abstract
In 2015-2016 Germany was confronted with over 1 million new refugees, which challenged public and private institutions alike, and increasingly divided public sentiments. This paper investigates the social/cultural, political, and economic dynamics as they were in Germany in 20015-2016 and in particular how its higher education sector responded. The discussion covers a comprehensive review of media debates, public and private institutional research, new German- and English-language scholarship, and case studies the authors collected of 15 universities. The paper ends with recommendations as German universities prepare for 30,000-50,000 refugees eligible for study in the coming years.

Keywords: Germany; higher education; universities; refugees; refugee crisis; integration; institutional reform

Introduction
The ongoing Syrian Civil War has been a tragedy of historic proportions. Over 250,000 Syrians died during its first five years, 6 million became internally displaced, and over 4 million were rendered stateless throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), or sought safe havens in Europe, the United States, and other regions. Much of the rest of the Arab world remains in turmoil, with tribal warfare and terror groups in countries where dictatorships were overthrown during the Arab Spring and simmering or boiling conflicts persist (Juran and Broer 2017; Ternès et al. 2017). This upheaval has intensified the migration of refugees and asylum seekers in many directions, including toward Europe (Juran and Broer 2017).

In Europe, the refugee influx began to be perceived as a crisis by mid-2015 when, in a matter of months, more than 1 million citizens primarily from the MENA region entered the European Union via sea routes through Greece, land routes through Turkey, and entry points in Italy and Hungary. The vast majority of refugees sought asylum in Germany for its generous social system and liberal immigration policies (Streitwieser, Miller-Idriss, and Wit 2017).

In Germany in 2015 as many as 890,000 entered the country, close to half of them Syrians. In 2016 another 280,000 entered. Of new refugees into the country, 76.2% were males between the ages of 18-25 (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2017). At first Germany could only cope with processing and sheltering new arrivals, but over time it also began to direct them into retraining and educational and professional pathways. Between 30,000-50,000 refugees were projected at the time to become eligible to begin or resume their interrupted university studies in Germany within the next 1-2 years when their credentialing and qualification hurdles would be resolved (German Academic Exchange Service [DAAD])

1 The authors wish to acknowledge funding support from George Washington Universit’s UNESCO Chair in International Education for Development; the International Education Research Foundation
2016b). Applying as an organizing principle Robertson and Dale’s (2015) Critical Cultural Political Economy of Education, this paper analyzes how the social, political, and economic realities of education affected Germany’s universities and the ways they responded in the first years of this newest refugee challenge for Germany, how they began to adapt their programming based on their experience with the first refugee cohorts, and what challenges they foresaw for integrating refugees into higher education.

An Ambivalent Land of Migration
Since World War II, Germany had made a complicated transition to becoming a land of migration—first by absorbing ethnic Germans driven out of Eastern Europe, large numbers of people through so called guest worker programs in the nineteen sixties and more recently by offering a haven for economic migrants and asylum seekers (Abraham 2016). The public was slow to accept this status, however (Rietig and Müller 2016). The arrival of nearly 1 million Syrian and other refugees in 2015/2016 visibly divided public sentiment and stretched the capacities of Germany’s government, private institutions, and civic society in potentially far-reaching ways.

Research Catching up with Reaction
The rush to cope with the regulatory demands of processing so many new arrivals allowed relatively little time to reflect on the effectiveness and impact of the process. Early on, accounts of the crisis and limited analysis came primarily from the media, German education and migration ministries, and a handful of policy and philanthropic organizations that were conducting primarily demographic studies. Mostly missing were more careful and deeper academic analyses about specific aspects of the crisis as it was unfolding in the early days of the crisis in 2015. Only more recently have publications in German-language academic journals (Schammann and Younso 2017; Preuschoff 2016) and research reports by German ministries (e.g. Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2016) and university research groups (e.g. Kleist 2017) begun to examine the legal and practical boundaries that refugees faced when trying to access German higher education. International journals only much more recently have started to publish research on the German case (e.g. Streitwieser et al. 2017), and theses and doctoral studies have also begun to emerge (e.g. Ragab, Rahmeier, and Siegel 2017). Given the fact that the education sector is a critical player in refugee resettlement in offering a primary conduit back into society and a powerful antidote to the trauma of forced migration (Crea 2016), documenting this process is important, and understanding what happened early on is critical for historical and policy studies that are still to be written.

In contrast to addressing the immediate needs presented by the mid-2015 crisis, longer-term responses by authorities and institutions are now focusing on integration. In this article we interpret the notion of integration with reference to Ager and Strang’s (2008) ten core domains of integration, including their “marker” for education. Ager and Strang see educational institutions as being “the most important place of contact with members of local host communities, playing an important role in establishing relationships supportive of integration (p. 172).” With public reactions to refugees crystallizing into stark pro or contra positions in 2015/2016 and continuing to evolve today, it is important to understand how various sectors in Germany, including its universities, were, or were not, supportive of integration.

This paper details the situation in Germany and how various sectors and key players reacted in 2015/2016. The German higher education system provides an ideal setting to study the refugee response and the success or failure of its universities to integrate this potentially
significant new workforce. How the process played out early on, and will continue to evolve, will have significant short- and long-term ramifications in a country were decades of declining birth rate and an aging population pose a wide array of challenges, which the refugee influx has further sharpened. The paper concludes with policy recommendations.

**Theoretical Framework**

In looking at the German higher education response to the current refugee crisis as a macrosocial challenge posed by globalization, Robertson and Dale’s Critical Cultural Political Economy of Education (CCPEE) framework (2015) is a helpful organizing principle. The CCPEE framework advocates a view of globalization in which education is seen as the central theme in the interconnections of social/cultural, political, and economic forces, rather than being subservient to or marginalized by them. Indeed, the framework argues that reforms and innovations in education provide nations with critically important tools to be responsive to globalization. It is precisely because education is such a powerful mechanism for social reproduction that “it matters how it is organized, and what the outcomes or effects are for individuals and the collective” (p. 166). To understand the higher education sector’s response to the refugee crisis—what former finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble called the “rendezvous with globalization”—it is important to analyse how emerging and existing juxtapositions between cultural, political, and economic forces shaped the response, both broadly in Germany and also through the actions taken by its universities as they prepared to accommodate this new group of incoming students.

In looking at the university sector and how social/cultural, political, and economic forces challenged the refugee integration programming they were beginning to organize at the time, we find particular resonance in Gersick’s Punctuated Equilibrium Paradigm (1991). This paradigm describes organizations as characterized by “relatively long periods of stability (equilibrium), punctuated by compact periods of qualitative, metamorphic change (revolution)” (p. 12). The model provides an appropriate lens to look at the German university landscape in its assumption that, along with continuous adaptation efforts, major changes also suddenly at times occur. Ideally universities are responsive, but it may be in how they react that sheds light on their openness to reform and adaptation. This puncturing of otherwise general equilibrium in the German higher education system is what makes the case of the refugee influx into the country and its university sector so intriguing. Even though German universities had been reforming incrementally during previous decades in response to the Bologna Declaration’s European Higher Education Area (Witte, Van der Wende & Huisman, 2008), the unexpected influx of refugees in 2015/2016 presented them with a new opportunity to more urgently consider targeted reforms.

**The Study**

The goal of this study was to investigate how German universities were helping newly arrived refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Central and Eastern Europe and other countries and regions integrate into the German higher education system by creating academic programming and support services. We did this by looking primarily at how the migration dynamic in Germany played out in social/cultural, political, and economic terms as reported in the media, through gray literature published by higher federal authorities, independently commissioned research projects, and individual academic researchers publishing in English and in German.

We also included an email survey of 15 universities about their current and planned activities through April 2017. Our research was inspired in particular by a smaller, previous
study conducted by Hannes Schammann and Christin Younso (2016), who had looked at the activities of seven universities in Winter semester between October 2015 and April 2016. We selected the 15 case study universities based on 1) geographic location representing diverse parts of the country, particularly the former East and West; 2) likelihood of having a large concentration of refugees, which encompasses both major metropolitan centers and smaller affected cities; and 3) level of engagement with refugees. We asked respondents to share their current and anticipated enrolments of refugees, requirements for enrolment, and refugee services and programs.

Our analysis from the 15 universities was not intended as our sole data source but rather to further shed light on the ‘refugee crisis’ as reported by the wide range of sources noted above. Finally, we also sought email feedback from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), which was facilitating educational integration of refugees in Germany’s 16 federal states. We believe the DAAD’s response, along with the responses from our 15 participating universities, help to demonstrate the passion and dedication shown by the higher education sector at the time to addressing refugee integration challenges. Although the profiled universities represented only a small slice of Germany’s 400-plus institutions of higher education, these data, in combination with the DAAD information and our literature review, provide a robust summary of the diverse range of universities and other key players who initiated services in 2015/2016 to begin helping Germany’s newest arrivals.

Emerging Fault Lines
In 2015/2016, Germany’s response to the refugee crisis was increasingly complicated and influenced by the struggle between two extreme poles: the perception of the nation celebrating a Willkommenskultur (welcoming culture) and a bitter backlash developing against refugees (Zick, Küpper, and Krause 2016). As the German newspaper Die Zeit expressed in a 2015 editorial, “Two bitterly inimical mind sets are now working against each other here in Germany and in Europe: We are opening our arms because people are coming (Merkel) vs. Because we are opening our arms, people are coming” (Ulrich and Hildebrandt 2015). The social debate was being fought between two plainly irreconcilable positions: rejection, which might become violent, on the one hand, and a welcoming culture, which was based on active civil engagement, on the other. These opposing positions were also evident in Angela Merkel’s statement, “Wir schaffen das” (‘We will manage it’) on the one hand (Zick, Küpper, and Krause 2016, 85), and the extra-parliamentary opposition’s characterization of refugee supporters as Ideologisch verblendete Gutmenschen (ideologically blinded do-gooders) on the other hand (Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller 2016, 21).

Past and Current Refugee Flows into Germany: Ordinary Exceptionality?
While the refugee influx of the mid-1990s and the crisis of 2015 saw heavier records of asylum applications than in years past, the historical record shows that the Syrian crisis was in fact not an unprecedented migration event, and that previous periods had witnessed even larger refugee streams (Ternès et al. 2017). For example, before the official end of World War II, as many as 19 million ethnic German refugees expelled from Eastern Europe arrived in Germany (Plato and Meinicke 1991). Shortly thereafter, with accelerating economic recovery in the late 1940s through the 1950s and 1960s and attendant labor shortages, Germany also brought in a large number of guest workers through bilateral recruitment agreements established with several European and North African countries. By November 1973, when the formal recruitment program ended, 14 million guest workers had come to Germany, although 11 million would also eventually return home at the ends of their contracts (Koopmans 1999, 628).
Gradually, the Federal Republic became a major target for migration flows among industrialized countries (Plato and Meinicke 1991). In the mid-1990s during the Balkan War, for example, more than 1.5 million people applied for asylum status in Germany. Despite the inflow, there was no law in Germany that dealt with the issue of immigration until 2005. The first national Law on Immigration and Migrant Integration (Zuwanderungsgesetz) came into effect that same year, which was actually quite late when compared with other migration countries (Dekker et al. 2015).

**The Higher Education Context**

Responses to Massification: Standardization vs. Addressing Individual Needs

What marked the 2015/2016 crisis as different from previous mass migration events into Germany was the initial welcome refugees received. Vivid images in the media hearkened back to another recent moment in modern German history, when West Germans welcomed East Germans after the Berlin Wall opened in 1989. But this did not last long. While the generous reception refugees received in 2015 and early 2016 was characterized by a supportive media heralding the Willkommenskultur, when their numbers continued to swell, the media’s language turned to “compassion fatigue” (Hafez 2016), and not long thereafter a “refugee tsunami” (Zick, Küpper, and Krause 2016, 84). With a rate in 2015 of granting 49.8% constitutional asylum, refugee status or another type of protective status — and 90% if economic migrants from the Balkan states were discounted—the debate around the integration of refugees took on particular urgency (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2016, 7).

Along with being a magnet for refugees, Germany in 2015/2016 was also the fifth most popular destination for international students and indisputably a key player in the competitive international education marketplace (UNESCO 2016). In 2016, 357,835 international students (12.76% of the student body) were enrolled at German universities (German Federal Statistical Office 2017, 6), attracted by its high quality and well-resourced, tuition-free system. The combination of international students coupled with the persistent growth in domestic students led to a 44.5% increase of the total student body since 2007/2008 (German Federal Statistical Office 2017). Universities reacted to this increase by limiting students’ choice within study programs, which is consistent with reforms introduced throughout the European Higher Education Area via the broader Bologna Process. This policy resulted in greater numbers of students crowding into seminars and lectures and greater student-professor ratios (from 1/59 in 2004 to 1/66 in 2014), as well as fewer contact hours, more online lectures, and fewer student services, among other cost and personnel reduction measures (Bös 2016).

While the 30,000-50,000 refugees estimated to seek access to higher education within the next one to two years would amount to an increase of only 1-2% among the total university student body of 2,803,916 at the time (German Federal Statistical Office 2017, 6), refugee students would also need new and additional support structures and services to succeed. That difference marked a stark contrast to the coping strategies universities had applied over the previous years to deal with the more incremental growth in student enrolments. Services needed by refugee were extensive, from verification of higher education entrance requirements to language preparatory classes, from buddy and mentoring programs to additional guidance and individual consultations. All of these also required additional staff and financial and material resources (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2016, 2).
These needs continue to place significantly new demands on the capacities of universities to adequately serve their students.

Access to Higher Education
Despite a reputation for bureaucracy, German university entrance requirements for refugees are in fact no more onerous than quality control mechanisms imposed by most other higher education systems in Europe or North America. German employers and institutions rigorously review diplomas, transcripts, and certificates of authenticity of any applicants for education or employment. While early cohorts of refugees were still able to flee with their documents in hand or had uploaded them onto online storage clouds, some later cohorts who fled more quickly under rapidly deteriorating conditions arrived without documentation. To meet these challenges, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KmK) eased their burden in December 2015 by implementing through statute the following three entrance stages for refugees unable to provide proof of credentials from their home countries (Resolution of the Conference of Culture Ministers, 2015).

1. Hochschulzugangsberechtigung, HZB (university entrance qualification)
The HZB is a valid university entrance qualification that can be verified against the Anabin database (Recognition and assessment of foreign qualifications) and then processed by universities with the help of a credential service provider. The Anabin database can compare school leaving certificates, training certificates, individual achievement reports, and other documents to a vast collection of original documents from 180 countries and 25,000 higher education institutions. For example, a Syrian student who earned a 70% or above on his or her high school leaving examination in Syria would be granted direct access to higher education in Germany if the Anabin database proves the veracity of those credentials.

2. Verification of scholastic aptitude with TestAS
TestAS is a standardized scholastic aptitude test to measure the students’ intellectual abilities. While the test can be taken in either German or English and is free of charge for the first sitting, in our research we learned that some universities, such as the University of Cologne and the Goethe University Frankfurt, also provided the test in Arabic (Preuschoff 2016). Although TestAS is neither a language competency exam nor a test of subject-specific knowledge, it is an important measure of an applicant’s general intellectual competencies to study at a German university or technical institution. Subject-level testing must still be conducted by an individual department once a university has determined an applicant is sufficiently qualified, however (Streitwieser and Taylor 2016).

3. Verification of required language proficiency (Preuschoff 2016)
While C1 German language proficiency is required to study for a BA or MA taught in German, by 2015/2016 approximately 150 BA and MA programs were on offer throughout Germany in English, according to the DAAD (2016a). However, even for fully English taught programs, certain universities in our study, such as the University of Duisburg-Essen, require at least a B2 German language proficiency. Even so, while the dominant language of instruction at German universities remains German, there has also been a clear trend over the past decade toward more English language programs. As an example of this trend, which at its core is meant to assertively attract international students, both the Technische Universität Darmstadt and the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf in our sample offered five English MA programs, including Physics and European Studies.

Financing Education Studies
As of 2015/2016, public universities in Germany were all free of charge, apart from an administrative fee of €150-€350 customarily charged per term, which also included a regional travel card. A monthly grant-loan combination (Bafög) provided a living allowance, which
depended on a students’ personal assets, earnings, and parental income and could not exceed €735. Half the sum was granted as an interest-free loan for which repayment begins after the fifth year following graduation; the rate was also based on monthly salary income and could be forgiven if a set salary threshold was not met (Federal Ministry of Education and Research [BMBF] 2017). Additional loans with interest rates below 1% were also available to students from the government-owned development bank, KFW. Refugees had the same access to these generous German educational support mechanisms as did all domestic students, and were neither given special favors nor disadvantaged in this regard (Federal Ministry of Education and Research [BMBF] 2017).

**Juxtapositions Challenging Germany**

The mass stream of refugees entering Germany in 2015 created a context influenced by juxtapositions of social/cultural, political, and economic factors. Without intending to artificially separate these dimensions, we discuss each separately for the sake of clarity in the sections that follow. The discussion is build around our broad review of the literature at the time and supported with examples from our 15 case study universities. In doing so, we analyze how the higher education sector in particular has been affected by sharp conflicts between, on the one hand, an active civil society that was committed to providing crucial refugee support, and, on the other hand, the heightened nativist fears of a Germany overrun with refugees that began to gain strength.

While policy and governance activities traditionally have occurred in separate spheres from the everyday working lives of ordinary citizens, the refugee crisis brought out an extraordinarily engaged civil society. This civic engagement played itself out in positive ways through volunteerism and the donation of material goods to help refugees, and in negative ways through public protests and new political movements that agitated against refugees. The refugee crisis catalyzed actions by different pockets of society, and mobilized people of diverse backgrounds and persuasions who previously had not been as publicly willing to voice their sentiments.

**I. Social/Cultural Factors**

*The positive face of civil society*

Images broadcast around the world of cheering crowds welcoming refugees at Munich’s central station in the summer of 2015 “seemed to shake off [Germany’s] image as a cold-hearted nation” (The Washington Post 2016). According to a 2016 study by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), in Germany there was outspoken support from the elites—comprised of media, industry representatives, and trade associations, among others—for immigration prior to 2016, compared with more negative views in other European countries such as Spain, Italy or the UK (Heckmann 2016). While basic supplies and housing were provided by the authorities, many workaday Germans also generously provided a broad range of additional services, from toys and clothing to ad hoc language classes and help navigating Germany’s dense bureaucracy (Kleist 2017). This public outpouring of support—much heralded by the media at the time—helped to quickly mobilize civic engagement and contribute to supporting the bureaucratic system. For example, 120,000 volunteers from the German Protestant Church and 100,000 volunteers from the German Catholic Church, along with other faiths and secular organizations, and a wide range of organically formed smaller, ad hoc support groups quickly sprang into action to offer language classes, reading literacy courses, and assistance with government agencies and doctor's visits. These support services were likened to being tantamount to a “life insurance of the [German] state” (tagesschau.de 2017b). But this kind of volunteerism, while ramped up in response to the moment, was not entirely
unprecedented. According to a study by the Berlin Institute for Empirical Research on Integration and Migration (BIM), the number of volunteers engaging in refugee work had already increased by 70% over the past several years (Karakayali and Kleist 2015, 5). This level of civil society engagement became a critical bridge between overstretched authorities and refugees (Karakayali and Kleist 2015; Zick, Küpper, and Krause 2016). Even so, a study conducted by the Bertelsmann Foundation at the time also found revealed that over the last two years the feeling of Germans that their state’s generosity was being stretched to the limit also grew from 40% in 2015 to 54% two years later (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2017).

Public backlash
Thus, as refugee numbers steadily increased throughout 2015, the initial welcome culture also began to be tempered by more stark reality. With the spike of refugees entering in the autumn of that year—280,000 in September alone —the media coverage became more nuanced, and also began to include reporting on the strain that refugees were starting to place on overburdened administrative agencies. By this time, however, the media’s initial euphoric coverage had caused it to lose credibility among certain segments of the population, who went so far as to revive even the Nazi-era term, "lying press" or Lügenpresse (Haller 2017). On top of that, some segments of the population who had not previously engaged in public protest began to express their distress at the influx of refugees and joined large protests pressuring Chancellor Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union party (CDU) to abandon its open-border position.

The most unsavory face of this pressure came through demonstrations by the Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West, or Pegida, movement (Dostal 2015, 523), a group most active in Eastern Germany and whose ranks seemed to wax and wane in tandem with events involving refugees (Dostal 2015, 524). Attacks on refugee accommodations also quintupled from 199 in 2014 to 1,005 in 2015. Perhaps most worrisome, two-thirds of the attackers had never been criminally active before or involved with crimes linked to right-wing tendencies (Spiegel Online 2016). At regional elections, some Pegida supporters transitioned their protest voice to the voting booth in support of the newly emerged populist-nationalist party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which managed to gain significant seats in state parliamentary elections and in the national elections by September of 2017, making it the third largest party in the German parliament (tagesschau.de 2017a). The requisitioning of gymnasiums and other public facilities as temporary refugee shelters further complicated public attitudes toward refugees. The event that most badly damaged the welcome culture occurred in Cologne during New Year’s Eve 2016 when “mobs of ‘North African and Middle Eastern men’ sexually assaulted hundreds of women in the fireworks chaos” of (Shubert 2016). Even though a subsequent investigation found only three of the 58 men to be recent asylum seekers, the damage to the refugee narrative had already been done.

Universities as civil society players – “third mission”
Universities throughout the country had the autonomy to respond as they chose to and were generally compelled by factors related to their proximity to refugee streams, available funding, and pressure from students and concerned citizens. As a sector they became engaged through strengthening existing services or creating new ones, much in tandem with the civil society movement outside their walls. As of 2016, one hundred and seventy universities were receiving DAAD “Integra” funding to develop their own programming to advance the integration of more than 6,800 refugee students into higher education (German Academic Exchange Service [DAAD] 2017). Much of this programming was driven by an active show of solidarity by faculty, staff and students interested in helping refugees, acting as a beacon of
hope to combat increasing demonstrations against refugees. They did so by going beyond the traditional functions of research and teaching, and allowing refugees to audit courses, take language classes (sometimes even student-led for refugees indifferent of their scholastic aptitude), receive counselling, and participate in sports and social events. This level of service is generally referred to as a university’s “third mission,” a term used by many university websites and the Federal Ministry for Education and Research’s materials (Zomer and Benneworth 2011). However, although well-meaning and beneficial, some of these university support services— for example permitting the auditing courses—also created two potential scenarios that set up unrealistic expectations for some refugee students: on the one hand, it gave the erroneous impression that they were already officially enrolled, and on the other it gave students who would be unable to meet enrolment requirements false hope that they would eventually be accepted into the university as regularly enrolled students. To their credit, as early as winter semester 2015/16, many universities appeared to realize this and began transitioning support services from embracing all refugees as a homogenous group with equal chances, to instead focusing primarily on helping those who were likely to have the necessary credentials to eventually succeed in enrolling (Schammann and Younso 2016, 26ff, 48).

II. Political Factors
The Merkel administration’s efforts to address the refugee situation have been characterized by a “we will manage it” ethos in public messaging, and behind-the-scenes machinations to devise new regulations to control the tide of incoming refugees. As refugee numbers increased throughout 2015 and local governments began to work in crisis mode to provide services and accommodations before winter, Merkel faced growing criticism that she had invited the refugees in without sufficient forethought about what to do once they arrived (Ulrich and Hildebrandt 2015).

In early 2016, as the AfD party gained support and five state elections loomed between March and September (Zick, Kupper, and Krause 2016, 167), Merkel not only needed to tighten up asylum laws but also to devise a solution to the refugee crisis without having to concede to political failure. After the Balkan countries closed their borders, ending the main refugee route to Northern Europe, the chancellor’s strategy changed to officially still welcoming the perceived “deserving or real’ refugees” (Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2016) but also making it nearly impossible for them to reach Europe in the first place. While still seen by Syrian refugees as the “compassionate mother,” (The Guardian 2015), Merkel was also working out a deal with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan,\(^3\) effective by March of 2016, that restrained refugees from continuing their flight into Europe (Rankin 2016). In this way, Merkel was able to maintain the illusion of welcoming refugees while simultaneously making deals to restrain them from reaching European shores (Hessischer Rundfunk 2016).

Both the European Union and Germany have attempted to limit further numbers of refugees from entering the EU. At the same time, state-led integration initiatives have provided support to help integrate refugees who are already in the country into society and the workforce. The education sector has been a critical player in this effort. The following sections examine the higher education sector’s programming to meet that goal.

*Language and entrance to the university*
Integration classes (*Integrationskurse*) aim to provide immigrants with knowledge of German
history, culture and social norms (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2016, 25). They also seek to bring all immigrants up to B1 language competency level, which the EU defines as the ability to engage with a language on an everyday basis on familiar topics regularly encountered in school, work, and leisure, and understand and formulate simply connected texts (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). However, integration classes end at the B1 level, which is not sufficient for study at university level. Therefore C1 level German language proficiency is required for university study, and all students must cross that hurdle before they can regularly matriculate as enrolled students within the German university system.

During the 2015-16 refugee crisis, universities stepped in to help bridge that language gap, picking up refugees once they mastered the B1 language exam and helping them to progress to C1 proficiency. Between 2015-2019 the DAAD provided universities with 100 million Euros in competitive grants to develop support programming over next several years. In 2016 alone the DAAD made 27 million Euros available to German universities through its Integrating Refugees in Degree Programmes, Integr.a to apply for grants funding to support the development of programming for refugees (German Academic Exchange Service [DAAD] 2016b).

With DAAD support and additional state and private foundation funding, most German universities by 2016 were providing language preparatory courses. The distribution of refugees across the academic sector and the means of supporting them, however, varied greatly. For example, according to our study of 15 universities, the number of refugee students taking language courses ranged between 675 at the University of Hamburg, roughly 200 at the Technical University of Darmstadt, and just 20 at the University of Stuttgart, similar in size to TU Darmstadt.

These language and preparatory classes for refugees, however, are not equivalent to those taken by regularly matriculated students, and rather served merely as a stepping-stone to full enrollment once credentialing was verified and a department recognized a candidate’s subject specific competency. While the vast majority of universities required a minimum of B1 language proficiency, there were exceptions in both directions. For example, the Goethe University of Frankfurt required only an A2 level language proficiency—defined as the ability to “understand sentences and frequently use expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance” (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) —while the Heinrich Heine University (HHU) of Düsseldorf required a B2 level. The HHU provided Deutsch-Intensivkurse for 20 students to prepare them within one year to fully access German higher education. While most universities offered the language preparatory classes on campus, some universities, including the Technical University of Dortmund, used an off-campus service partner. The University of Duisburg-Essen collaborated with a private external language school but started to provide its own language preparatory classes in 2017.

Along with language courses, most of the universities in our study also provided special integration programs customized to the specific needs and requirements of refugees. However, the size of the general student body at these institutions was not a reliable indicator of the number of places available to refugees or the depth of programming that was being created for them. For example, in the 2015-16 winter semester, the Heinrich Heine University of Düsseldorf enrolled 33,000 students in total but only 20 refugees, while the University of Hamburg enrolled 42,000 students but had 539 refugees. Yet each of these large universities...
offered substantial programming. In that regard, size did not appear to be an accurate indicator of the depth of programming.

In most cases the services for refugees offered by universities included some degree of the following. The opportunity for refugees who are not yet fully enrolled to participate in teaching events and lectures, but not for academic credit; regular informational events and campus and library tours to inform refugees about facilities and academic information; crash courses on subjects such as mathematics or additional online language courses to help prepare refugees to take entry examinations; buddy-programs in which a domestic student helps a refugee with events, activities, and lectures and even language issues (many universities give students credit points for voluntarily working with refugee students); regular gatherings where students, particularly women, can discuss traumatic experiences in confidence; and intercultural workshops with external coaches to discuss social issues of mutual understanding, acculturation, and society. In one particularly exciting program, refugee students have been working on an app to make museums accessible for non-German speakers.

Data and forecast
While the DAAD in 2016 predicted that between 30,000 and 50,000 refugee students would become eligible to enroll in Germany’s universities within the next two years, most of our case study universities were unable to estimate at the time how many students they expected. That assessment was borne out of a wider chronic problem: while universities register the students’ country of origin, Germany’s strict data privacy laws (Datenschutz) prohibit them from gathering additional data.

Therefore, most universities had little knowledge of their actual numbers of fully matriculated refugee students because this does not get recorded as part of general student demographics. Self-reported data can be noted but is only anecdotal, locally available, and not fed into a national databank. Among our case study universities, self-disclosed data showed the following. At the University of Hamburg, 72 refugees applied for full enrolment but only 19 were accepted; at the Humboldt University in Berlin, which created a special MA track for refugees, only 11 were enrolled by 2016; at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, 15 refugee students passed the preparatory courses and became regularly matriculated students; the Technical University of Munich, 8 students who formerly audited courses became enrolled; and at the Free University of Berlin, the International Office admitted 2 refugees for full enrolment, and 16 of them matriculated. Still, because official data tracking is prohibited, it is unknown how many refugee students were simply not being recorded once they became mainstreamed as regular enrollees.

III. Economic Factors
Early in 2015, Germany’s top 30 DAX-listed corporations were celebrated for their public statements welcoming refugees. In November 2015, these companies pledged, in an expensive print advertising campaign, to hire refugees and provide structured apprenticeship programs, even for those lacking the necessary qualifications. However, as of the middle of 2016, few of these grand promises had led to refugee employment. Although these companies referred to 500,000 vacancies they wanted to fill, as of the summer of 2016, only 54 refugees had received open-ended contracts from any of Germany’s top 30 corporations, and 50 of those contracts were all with the postal service, the Deutsche Post. Companies cited a lack of German-language skills as the reason but then failed to offer an internal pathway for any on-the-job training (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2016).
Essentially, most of the top 30 DAX-listed companies refused to put their money where their mouth was. While the leadership of the Deutsche Bank claimed in November 2015 that the influx of refugees was “the best that could happen to Germany” (Noack 2015), by July 2016 still not a single major bank or insurance company had created any jobs, vocational training spots, or internships for refugees (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2016). While the Federal Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Andrea Nahles, had initially referred to refugees as a “labor force of tomorrow,” she later referred to them as one for “the day after tomorrow” (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2016).

While available spots in Germany’s top companies were few and far between for refugees because of a lack of immediately qualified applicants, Germany’s Mittelstand of smaller, often family-run, companies—historically touted as the backbone of Germany’s economic success—appeared to be more receptive. In a study by the Bertelsmann Foundation, self-reported data from 600 Mittelstand companies employing 250+ employees indicated that 62% provided internships for asylum seekers, 48% provided vocational training spots for young refugees, and 47% provided regular workplaces for migrants (Enste et al. 2016, 22–26). It is notable that in 2016, Germany’s well-established vocational training system appeared to be providing the most realistic pathway to employment for refugees.

According to a November 2016 report from the Federal Employment Agency (2016, 12), there were 546,900 available vocational training spots in 2015-16, offering more options for refugees than universities, which have more rigorous entrance criteria. Refugees, therefore, needed to be made aware that their choices go beyond an academic education, particularly because 2016 was the ninth year running in which there were more open vocational training spots than applicants available to fill them.

Many refugees might have been making the erroneous assumption that only a university education would be respected, as may have been the case in their home lands, and not fully realized that in Germany vocational training has long been a very effective model for professional success and an attractive alternative to a university education. While candidates need some German language competency as well as nine to ten years of schooling to be eligible for a training spot, the requirements are not as rigorous as they are for a university degree. While vocational education in Germany includes classroom training at a vocational college and hands-on training at a workplace, the classroom training is not equivalent to university work. Even so, despite its promise, the vocational education track is also not an automatic solution for all refugees who are unable to enter or remain at the university. In 2016, of the 10,300 refugees who applied for a vocational training spot, a mere 3,600 were selected (Federal Employment Agency 2016, 11–12), and in 2015, up to 70% of refugees ended up aborting their training, according to the Chamber of Crafts and Trades of Bavaria (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2015).

Our queries of 15 universities in Germany indicated that the counselling and services offered to refugees were focused on informing them about different tracks within higher education, and assuming that aspiring students already knew about the other options available to them. Instead of merely rejecting refugees who lack the necessary credentials, universities must help productively redirect refugees into other viable pathways, such as vocational training.

**Policy Recommendations for Universities**

*Collaborative counselling with other sectors*
If universities seek to fulfil their third mission as credible civil society actors, they will need to provide counselling to help successfully divert those who are not eligible for full university entrance to find an occupation that matches their competencies. To that end, we suggest that universities team up with relevant partners in the region such as the Jobcenter, the Chamber of Commerce, and the private sector. The Jobcenter helps refugees map out an alternative pathway within Germany's well-established dual system of vocational education and training.

**Making sure policies work**

Due to Germany’s aforementioned strict data privacy laws, reliable data on how many refugees are fully enrolled in universities is not available although such data could easily be collected. Our study found that because of these Datenschutz privacy protection barriers, universities were not tracking the pathways of asylum seekers once they became regularly enrolled. To investigate the implications, we contacted the DAAD directly to ask why, on a national level, refugees were not being tracked once they became officially enrolled, even though the DAAD and BMBF had pledged to invest €100 million through its Integra program in higher education for refugees over the next several years. The agency responded that it has a comprehensive monitoring system in place and is remediing the lack of data by collaborating with an unnamed research institute to trace the future impact of their policies. In our view it seems imprudent, in light of the urgency of the refugee crisis, to delay transparent data tracking through this arrangement when a quicker resolution would likely help refugees avoid the chronically high dropout rates that have plagued earlier groups of at-risk students (Burkhart and Kercher 2014).

We argue that universities should register the “flight” status of refugee students in a national or state-level database so they can empirically monitor the impact and success of their programming for refugees and thereby justify the considerable effort and significant costs related to refugee integration. Budget flows should be clearly measured, and program impacts need to be systematically analyzed. As of 2017, this information still appeared to be mostly anecdotal or at best internally available in certain universities, such as the Free University of Berlin, only when they agreed to share it with researchers. However, such data is not centrally available for research purposes. This type of transparency is particularly important for assessing refugees’ chances of success in German higher education in light of DAAD figures, which at the time of our study showed that 59% of Latin American and 41% of African students were discontinuing their BA studies in German universities, compared with only 28% of German students (Burkhart and Kercher 2014). This alarmingly high attrition rate suggests that universities may not be sufficiently addressing problems associated with entrance criteria and support services for at-risk students. It seems counterproductive to lose track of refugees and the critical data necessary to adapt and customize policies, programs, and support measures to help them succeed.

**Appropriate services to stem the tide of dropouts**

The enrolments of refugees in higher education expected in the coming years present an opportunity for positive change that will also help domestic and foreign students. As noted previously, universities have reacted to mass enrolments by mainstreaming, standardizing, lowering student-professor ratios, and reducing contact hours. This has not been a positive development for students. If current data protection laws were loosened to allow for more robust collection of the data needed to assess attrition or success rates, universities would be able to immediately implement programs, such as academic writing or guidance for self-structured learning that could reduce refugee student dropout rates.
Conclusion
As Clark and Grandi (2016) have rightfully argued, the time has come to “discard the clichéd image of refugees as passive recipients of aid, sitting idly with outstretched hands.” Elements of the German example show that with proper support, refugees can enrich Germany’s culture and economy (Ragab, Rahmeier, and Siegel 2017), but only if they become successfully integrated. The university sector, just as primary and secondary schooling and vocational training, is a key player in the integration process and could eventually reap the fruits of its success.

Our research has looked at how universities, within a tense national environment of forces agitating for and also against refugees, have worked to accommodate refugees and help them transition to full participation in German society. To make this transition, refugees will first need access to the knowledge, skills, and opportunities that education can provide. Our study of 15 universities, couched within a broader look at the media and research discussion that was taking place in 2015/2016, has shown some of their programming and examined the broader German context of civil society efforts to address the refugee crisis and what the impact of social/cultural, political, and economic forces has been on the higher education sector in particular.

Both our case study data and our review of the broader context shows that German universities were trying to respond positively to the refugee crisis through a variety of innovative programming and individualized support services, and doing so within a national atmosphere that was rife with tensions. As the period of the refugee crisis fades and the broader German effort to integrate new refugees takes shape, German universities stand to continue serving as positive role models of successful refugee integrating if they succeed. Adapting Gersick’s paradigm once more, the refugee influx is indeed a chance for qualitative, metamorphic change in Germany’s universities if they seize the moment successfully in this renewed period of disequilibrium. However, that challenge is mighty and Germany must carefully balance its heavy history with forward-looking policies that have the potential to maximize the great promise its newest arrivals bring.
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Endnotes

1 Contacted institutions, participants are in bold: Freie Universität Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin; Humboldt Universität Berlin; Universität Hamburg; Technische Universität Hamburg; Universität zu Köln; Ludwig Maximilians Universität Munich; Technische Universität Munich; Goethe Universität Frankfurt; Universität Stuttgart; Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf; Technische Universität Dortmund; Universität Duisburg-Essen; Universität Leipzig; Universität Bremen; Technische Universität Dresden; Technische Universität Darmstadt

https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1pWGONGz75lf2PsIw6pcqzQiw4bE&ll=50.8337386931304%2C10.261338899999942&z=7

2 Schammann and Younso (2017) have also published a 2017 article titled “At last light in a dark corner? Hurdles and offers for refugees in the tertiary education sector.”

3 The EU offered monetary concessions in the form of €3 billion under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and another €3 billion through 2018. It also offered the prospect of visa-free access to the European Union for Turkish citizens, as well as a refugee-swapping program to deter refugees from crossing, however both programs were never fully realized. These bargaining chips were offered in return for restraining refugees from continuing their flight to Europe (Rankin 2016).

4 Such as the Stiftung Mercator, which is sponsoring four clearing offices in North Rhine-Westphalia for the next two years, one of which at the Technical University of Dortmund.