

WiMa-Kongress 2015 – Interview with MSc Finance alumni



Every year, Ulm University's alumni association "Studium und Praxis e.V." organizes the job fair "WiMa Kongress" where students can make contact with industry partners and alumni. The Institute of Finance invited two MSc Finance alumni to the "WiMa Kongress 2015" to hold a talk about their jobs in investment banking. Natalia Kalashnikova works for Goldman Sachs and Christopher Davis for Bank of America Merrill Lynch. They both live in London.

For those who could not attend this event, we would also like to give you an impression about working in investment banking and how the MSc Finance programme contributes to such careers. That's why we have interviewed Chris.

How did your study at Ulm University help you find your first position after graduation?

Upon the commencement of my studies at Ulm University, I had no idea whatsoever as to the exact career I was looking to pursue, or, indeed, what careers exist in the financial sector. I knew that I was fond of mathematics, with an interest in the financial markets, and that was all. Yet as my time in Ulm progressed, I acquired an ever clearer image of the area of finance to which my skills are best suited, thanks to the broad range of courses available on the Finance programme. With a career path in mind, I was then able to take advantage of the programme's flexibility to specialise my knowledge, giving me the capacity to pass graduate interviews and ultimately receive the job offer that I desired.

What would you look for if you were in the position to hire new graduates from Ulm University?

The Quant domain is very much centred around programming and code development, where the relationship with technology infrastructure is becoming increasingly prevalent. Furthermore Quant teams are generally very busy, facing demands on their time from every angle. Hence, whilst a strong academic record may be important, both evidence of programming competency and the ability of a student to demonstrate a proficiency for 'getting things done' are arguably more so. This could be through the student's choice of seminars, and courses that involve assessed projects/exercise sheets, for example.

What can you advise students pursuing a career in Finance?

Finance is a broad term that covers an incredible range of different careers. Some careers in finance are suitable for some people yet utterly incongruous with others, and vice-versa. I would advise students to research areas of finance that they are interested in thoroughly, to gain a true understanding of what such a career would involve both long-term and on a daily basis, ideally by reaching out to alumni already working in these fields. Whilst this may not be easy, the benefits are significant – there is little worse than obtaining one's 'dream job', only to discover it is not as you once imagined it to be.

If you had it to do all over again, what would you do differently?

Whilst I may have tried my hardest, I do not think that I took full advantage of the readily available German beer. Also I did not make the most of being able to easily visit neighbouring parts of Europe by train.

Unlike many of my classmates, I did not do any internship at all during my studies in Ulm. I think that regardless of the implications for future employment, the experience of working in Germany would have been an excellent experience, and I would endeavour to fulfil this were I to do it all over again.

Could you describe one of your typical workdays and what skills you have learned at Ulm University are required in your position on a day-to-day basis?

Regarding the technical knowledge that I acquired at the University of Ulm – a large part of my working day is engaged in code development, either in C++, which I initially learnt primarily through taking the Numerical Finance course in Ulm, or in Python. The code content itself may well involve aspects of the Financial Mathematics, and Methods of Monte Carlo simulation courses that I also took. Sometimes I am required to performing testing and write documentation for the Bank's pricing models. Here, general knowledge of derivative products such as learnt in the Risk Management Roundup seminar is useful.

Regarding the skills that I learnt – I am grateful for the presentation experience that the seminars in Ulm gave me, enabling me to present my ideas to my team effectively.

When you look back, what was the greatest experience in Ulm?

I think my greatest experience in Ulm is the people that I met there, who were from such an immensely diverse array of countries and cultures, which I had not anticipated at all. Upon my departure from Ulm, I had made friends with somebody from every continent of the world (excluding Antarctica), and countries or cities that I would previously have barely been able to place on the map. Several of these I'm sure will be life-long friends, and I am glad to have had such an opportunity in Ulm that would perhaps not have been possible if studying in my own country.