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Blair Balden

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Recommended Citation

Steinen, Margaret von, "Blair Balden" (2011). *International Faculty Researchers*. 9.
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/international_faculty/9

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Dr. Blair Balden
WMU Associate Professor
of Aviation
Faculty International Researcher



A visiting professorship at the University of Passau in Passau, Germany for Dr. Blair Balden, a WMU associate professor of aviation, provided an excellent opportunity to share ideas and information about teaching aviation law with professors from Germany and Austria.

Balden was selected in early 2011 to participate in the faculty exchange program WMU and the University of Passau established in 1988. He spent the month of June, mostly in Passau, at one of the newest German universities in the lovely region of Bavaria. He was hosted by Professor Karsten Fitz of the American Studies Department.

“I was interested in getting over there to meet some of the law faculty at Passau and to learn how they are integrating into the European Union and merging aviation licensing through the European Aviation Safety Agency,” said Balden, a 19-year veteran in his field, 15 of them teaching at WMU. “I lived in Germany for about five years back in the 1980s, working on planes for the U.S. Air Force, but I had never visited Passau.”

While at the university, Balden gave a presentation to Passau students and faculty that included a brief overview of WMU and the three degree programs offered through the College of Aviation. “I covered specifics about WMU’s aviation law course and described the government licensing process for aviation maintenance technicians in the U.S.,” Balden said. “I fielded several questions following my presentation and spoke with colleagues at the reception from the University of Passau to plan meetings for further discussion.”

These included meetings with Professor Birgit Neumann, who teaches in Passau’s cultural and media studies program, for a discussion about the differences between academic career paths for faculty in Germany and in the U.S. and with two professors from



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Passau's law school, Drs. Dennis Solomon and Wolfgang Hau, during which Balden had the chance to consider the fundamental differences between the legal systems of the United States and Germany and the applicability of EU law on various subjects. "That was quite an enlightening discussion for me," Balden said.



Balden also met with Professor Joachim Posegga, chair of IT security at the Institute for IT Security and Security Law at the University of Passau. Posegga is involved in a research project funded by the German federal government aimed at studying security issues in aviation communications. "I had an interesting discussion with Professor Posegga, who shares with me an interest in amateur radio," Balden said. "The University of Passau has a well-equipped amateur radio station, which I was allowed to operate. I made several radio contacts with amateur operators around Europe from the station that day."

Taking time to travel a bit was also on Balden's agenda. Among his trips was one to the town of Oestrich-Winkel, a small town on the Rhine River where the campus of the European Business School is located. Balden met with Professor Patrick Spieth of the EBS aviation management program.

"Professor Spieth gave me a thorough description of the program and the team-teaching concept that is used extensively at EBS," he said. "I was especially impressed to learn that practically every course in the program includes exposure to aviation professionals currently working in the industry. This is possible because of the school's close proximity to the huge aviation presence in Frankfurt."



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He also met with Axel Schumacher, associate dean for international relations at EBS, to learn about the logistics of the school's student exchange program. "My visit to EBS left me with the impression that it would be worthwhile to develop a relationship for student exchanges with this institution," Balden said. "I believe exchange students from Western could gain much by living and studying in Germany."

In neighboring Austria, he met with officials from Austrian Airlines Technical Training Center. "I had a very informative discussion about Austrian's technical training programs and about the licensing process for students who complete training there," he said "I also provided them with information about WMU's aviation programs."

Balden's wife, Lita, traveled with him to Germany. Their son, who was born in Germany while his dad was working for the U.S. Air Force, and his wife, also visited for a week.

"This visiting professorship was a positive experience for me," Balden said. "Not only did I enjoy the time I spent there, I also gained a greater understanding of German higher education. All in all, it was a good way to spend a month in the summer."