

## Vanessa Bittner



On a very **\*\*Fall\*\*** day, Vanessa Bittner and I met up to talk about her life. Vanessa is someone you'll be seeing a lot of here on IG in the next few weeks, because she is OISS' new DEI fellow (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion fellow). More to come about this, but just know that Vanessa is eager to help you navigate your way through the murky waters of being an international person in America! She comes from Germany, and was actually here during her undergrad years (at Konstanz University in Germany) for an internship at Dwight Hall!

Vanessa is a fifth year PhD student studying Sociology, and, more specifically, how controversial public figures become catalysts for political polarization. She argues that these people become “proxy battle grounds” for opposing groups, and act as “symbolic lightning rods”, attracting attention and charging people with emotion.

For international students, conversations about American politics and social justice issues can feel foreign and incomprehensible, especially as we sometimes lack the vocabulary needed to participate in them without saying the “wrong” thing unintentionally. Vanessa wants to help people navigate these new spaces by equipping them with tools, particularly communication-focused, and helping them learn how they can educate themselves in new cultural environments. Her motivation comes from being an international student herself, and having experienced the uneasiness of feeling like she “just didn't get it”.

Vanessa wants to apply what she's studying to the world outside academia. Though she started her PhD thinking she might want to be a professor, she has since begun to imagine herself in other roles, like working in international or science communications. She wants to make complex things accessible for everybody, be that in translating

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scientific research for policy makers, or working as the DEI fellow and facilitating cross-cultural understanding at Yale.

When she's not pondering about sociology, Vanessa loves cooking and baking for her friends. She also enjoys weight lifting, barre classes, yoga, and hanging out with her roommate and her cat @hobbesthenoodle. She says if you're into wholesome cat content, you should check out his IG.

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<https://www.instagram.com/p/CVDzvmkJJAB/> [1]

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[1] <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVDzvmkJJAB/>