



Research-Alumni Meeting

Boston, USA –September 20/21, 2012

Connecting North-America and Heidelberg

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I. Participants of the second Research-Alumni Meeting

→ 19 Research-Alumni from North and Central America (further information on the participants available in the [online group](#) Research-Alumni Network)

→ Representatives of Heidelberg University: Prof. Dr. Bernhard Eitel (Rector of Heidelberg University), Marietta Fuhrmann-Koch (Director of Communication), Silke Rodenberg (Head of Heidelberg Alumni International), Irmintraud Jost (Heidelberg University Association), Elisabeth Trnka-Hammel (International Relations Office, Regional Coordinator North-America) and Johannes Scharr (Coordinator Research-Alumni Network)

II. Round of Alumni Introductions

→ During the round of introductions the alumni present their professional backgrounds and research foci. All participants share the experience of having spent time in Heidelberg for their studies or research (between the 1970s and 2012) and some Alumni enrich the session with personal stories from Heidelberg. Among the audience are Research-Alumni of a wide range of ages, subjects and research interests.

→ While introducing themselves, many participants express their wish to connect with Heidelberg University. Many Research-Alumni are interested in intensifying their relations with Heidelberg University by means of student exchanges or research projects.



III. Introduction to 'HAI' and the 'Research-Alumni Network'

→ Silke Rodenberg, head of HAI, gives a presentation on the Mission, Facts & Figures of HAI as well as the different social, professional and international networks initiated or supported by HAI. For further information please check the online group or the website of HAI: www.alumni.uni-heidelberg.de

→ Johannes Scharr, coordinator of the Research-Alumni Network, introduces the Research-Alumni Network. For more information please check the presentation 'Research-Alumni Network' in the [online group](#).

IV. Panel Discussion: Transatlantic Opportunities

- A) Participants of the panel discussion
- B) Topic 1: 'Transatlantic collaboration and funding possibilities'
- C) Topic 2: 'Academic exchange on an undergraduate level'
- D) Topic 3: 'The differences for women in the USA and Germany'

A) Participants of the panel discussion (in alphabetic order)

- Prof. Dr. Bernhard Eitel (Rector of Heidelberg University)
- Dr. Joann Halpern (German Center for Research & Innovation, NY)
- Prof. Dr. Robert Norton (Research-Alumnus, Notre Dame University)
- Prof. Dr. Michael Peachin (Research-Alumnus, New York University)
- Prof. Dr. Petra Rohrbach (Research-Alumna, McGill University)
- Dr. Eva-Maria Streier (DFG Office North America, NY)

B) Topic 1: 'Transatlantic collaboration and funding possibilities'

→ Prof. Dr. Bernhard Eitel, Rector of Heidelberg University, underlines the strong interest to establish and foster collaborations with American colleagues and universities on different levels. The interests vary from personal, institutional to faculty exchange. Further cooperation with American universities and research institutions is highly desirable for Heidelberg University. As part of the internationalization strategy it is intended to increase the opportunities for students and researchers to study or do research abroad. Ideally academic exchanges will be based on integrated bachelor's, master's and PhD programs. Heidelberg is especially interested in establishing joint modules or degrees.

→ Prof. Dr. Eitel encourages all Research-Alumni to intensify their activities concerning the transatlantic exchange. They are 'Heidelberg experts' and be important contact persons at their institution. He emphasizes that every suggestion and idea by the Research-Alumni is appreciated.

→ Dr. Joann Halpern encourages the Research-Alumni to overcome possible obstacles within the collaboration in a creative way. E.g. the DAAD's RISE program enables short-term stays in Germany and provides an incentive for longer stays or



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collaboration. Furthermore Dr. Halpern invites researchers to visit www.germaninnovation.org.

→ Dr. Eva Maria Streier recommends reaching out to the DFG for funding opportunities, e.g. the DFG Research Grants, MacArthur Fellowships, International Research Training Groups and more. For further information please consult the website of [GEPRIS \(German Project Information System\)](http://www.dfg.de/foerderung/index.html) or the website of DFG <http://www.dfg.de/foerderung/index.html>

→ Elisabeth Trnka-Hammel pointed to the DAAD sponsored “[Bilateral Programme for Cooperative Research Grants/PPP](#)”. (Projektbezogenen Personenaustausch USA). The programme aims to intensify research cooperation within the scope of a specific, joint research project.

→ Furthermore, attention was drawn to European Union funds, e.g. the ERC starting grant. The largest funding program for basic research offers funding opportunities for researchers anywhere in the world. The precondition is to have a partner in the EU. Other ERC are grants are e.g. Consolidator Grants. More information: <http://erc.europa.eu/funding-schemes>

→ In the upcoming years the EU will significantly increase funds for ‘blue-skies research’: <http://erc.europa.eu/funding-and-grants>.

→ Prof. Eitel highlighted that Heidelberg University is always open for any kind of exchange and that the university administration is willing to support researchers with its [Advisory Service and Project Management](#) and the [Heidelberg Research Service](#). The Heidelberg University Department for Research and Project Management offers the following services regarding research funding to postdocs and other researchers:

- Information and research services for the funding of research projects
- Application information from various funding programs and awards
- Advising on legal questions and application-writing for research funding
- Advisory Service and Project Administration

On the websites of Heidelberg University you also find [Research Databases and Information Services](#) and [Information on Research Funding \(INFOR\)](#) as well as general information on [research in Heidelberg](#).

C) Topic 2: ‘Academic exchange on an undergraduate level’

→ As mentioned in the Round of Introductions it is interesting for many participants to initiate student exchanges on graduate and undergraduate levels.

→ It was remarked that Germany should be highly attractive to US-Students since the costs of studying in Germany are much lower than for studying in the US. Furthermore the establishment of Bachelor and Master Degrees simplified the recognition of academic degrees. Some participants highlight that shorter PhD.-programs are attractive to American students and provide good career opportunities



after graduation. But there are still several obstacles to overcome, e.g. the question why American students do or not do participate in academic exchange programmes.

→ (*Language*) Many American students do not consider Germany as a study destination because they don't speak or learn German. The word has to be spread that a growing number of courses and subjects at Heidelberg University are taught in English, especially on the Master's level. Furthermore, the common language in research is English and thus knowledge of the German language is often not a necessary precondition for studying in Heidelberg.

For exchange students the university provides language courses to help improve their German language skills. The costs for these courses are covered by Heidelberg University. Moreover it was suggested by some participants that Heidelberg University should advertise the courses which are offered in English and the participants agreed to disseminate this information at their respective universities and 'spread the word' among American students.

→ (*Credits and fees*) It was pointed out that transferring credits is often problematic. Ms. Trnka from the International Relations Office Heidelberg remarked that within the framework of exchange programs, credit transfer is guaranteed for American students.

→ (*Lack of branding*) Another barrier for a more intense exchange between Heidelberg and American universities is the fact that studying abroad is less important in North America than it is in Europe. It was also discussed that German universities lack the branding which entices North-American students to go to Germany and that 'something must be given to students to put on their CV'. It was also mentioned that some students are discouraged from going to Germany because in their mindset 'Germany is just not cool'. As this approach seems to be a key component in the students' decision making process, the crucial question in attracting American students is 'What makes it cool to go to Heidelberg?'" To answer this question Research-Alumni suggest that a prestigious scholarship for American students could act as a branding and marketing tool.

Additionally some participants pointed out the differences between the US and Germany. From their perspective it seems to be necessary to promote that students 'get something different' in Germany compared to what they get in the US. Eliminating all differences between the US and Heidelberg could therefore also harm the attractiveness of an exchange program.

Prof. Dr. Eitel suggests that short term stays in Heidelberg should be promoted since they are easier to plan and to carry out. He points out his efforts in recruiting foreign professors with high reputation, which will eventually attract foreign students.

Information about funding opportunities for a stay in Germany and regular events on studies and research in Heidelberg are very helpful. The American Council on



Germany (<http://www.acqusa.org>) bears the costs for academics who organize such events.

→ (*Short stays*) Short stays are an attractive way to bring American students to Germany for a first visit, e.g. with the [DAAD RISE program](#). After having been to Germany with a RISE scholarship, a significant number of the participants consider to do a Master or PhD in Heidelberg. Short programs like RISE or summer schools or (laboratory) internships are an effective tool to bring American students to Heidelberg and to implement exchange in both directions.

→ (*Further ideas to increase attractiveness*) To increase attractiveness, Heidelberg should continue to work on research at the best level possible, because that is what attracts the best students. Heidelberg should stress the advantages of an institution with a long research history which can offer excellent opportunities for students and researchers from 'younger' universities and educational institutions in North America.

D) Topic 3 'The differences for women in the USA and Germany'

→ It was mentioned that North American universities offer many opportunities and special programs to promote women. In Germany, however, the number of female professors is still quite small.

→ Prof. Dr. Eitel remarked that the percentage of female professors (17%) is by 5 percent higher in Heidelberg than the average rate in Germany. He added that Heidelberg is trying to create a system of equal opportunities in order to achieve equal numbers of male and female professors in the long term. Thus, the University holds special programs to promote young female scientists.

→ One of the University's most important goals in the area of equality is to increase the number of young women completing their habilitation, the numbers of junior professor positions and of research group leaders. There is still a need for improvement in this respect in Germany, even if the promotion and support of women regarding the compatibility of career and family at Heidelberg University developed very well in the last few years. On the following pages, you will find a list of programs for young female scholars at Heidelberg University:

http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/einrichtungen/gradakad/frauenfoerderung/index_en.html

V. Ideas and Results

→ The Research-Alumni Network can be used as a platform for exchange, contact keeping with Heidelberg and networking among the Research-Alumni themselves.

→ The participants of the discussion and the audience agreed that Research-Alumni should give advice to their students and young researchers who are interested in studying in Germany and advertise the options, also mentioning their personal positive experiences in Heidelberg. Research-Alumni can promote a stay at Heidelberg University or in Germany in general by reporting from their own



experiences and drawing attention to opportunities for study and research in Heidelberg.

→ Some Research-Alumni want to act as ambassadors for Heidelberg as a destination of research. In this role they do not necessarily need to conduct detailed, individual consultations but can inform their audience or contacts about research opportunities on a general level, pointing the way to institutions and experts in Heidelberg. Research-Alumni Ambassadors can promote Heidelberg University by reporting from their own experiences and to drawing attention to opportunities for study and research in Heidelberg among students, academic colleagues and other networks.

→ Some Research-Alumni are highly interested in initiating collaborations and want to contact professors in Heidelberg as well as the institutional staff of the International Relations Office and of HAI.

→ Short stays and returns to Heidelberg can be used to update and learn more about the latest developments in Heidelberg. One out of several possibilities is [HAIreconnect](#). HAI offers within the scope of HAIreconnect the opportunity to return to Heidelberg for a short research stay up to 14 days. (Please note: Application Deadline: February 2013).

VII. Contact

If you have further questions, comments or suggestions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us:

I. Heidelberg Alumni International (HAI)

Head of Heidelberg Alumni International: silke.rodemberg@zuv.uni-heidelberg.de

General Information on HAI: <http://www.alumni.uni-heidelberg.de>

Coordinator of the Research-Alumni Network johannes.scharr@zuv.uni-heidelberg.de

Research-Alumni Network: <http://www.alumni.uni-heidelberg.de/en/research.html>

II. Heidelberg University Association – Heidelberg's U.S. presence

General Information on Heidelberg University Association: <http://heidelberguniversity.us/>

Executive Director Irmintraud Jost: IJost@HeidelbergUniversity.us

III. International Relations Office (Heidelberg University)

General Information: <http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/courses/contact/aaa/index.html>

Elisabeth Trnka (Regional Coordinator North-America): trnka@zuv.uni-heidelberg.de



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