



AN INITIATIVE OF THE

Federal Ministry
of Education
and Research

Research in
Germany



Land of Ideas



Alexander von Humboldt
Stiftung/Foundation



The Discovery of Research Alumni

Forming lasting bonds between international
researchers and Germany

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The German PDF file can be downloaded here:

www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/forscher-alumni-broschuere.html.

Free copies of the German or English brochure are available from Raabe Verlag (s.kollenberg@raabe.de).

Research Alumni Work in Germany:

More information is available on www.research-alumni.de.



Dear Readers,

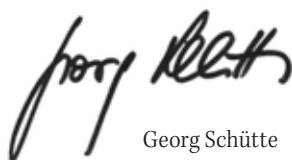


Dr. Georg Schütte
State Secretary at the
Federal Ministry of
Education and Research

Germany's visibility as an international center of research is an important prerequisite if we want to attract leading scientists and scholars from abroad for collaborative projects and longer-term research stays. Under the brand "Research in Germany", and as part of the joint "International Research Marketing" project, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research has supported the corresponding initiatives conducted by German science and research organizations (Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, German Academic Exchange Service, German Research Foundation, Fraunhofer Gesellschaft) in this area. Ultimately, research marketing can only succeed – and help achieve the objectives of the internationalization strategy – if it can rely on broad participation and proactive engagement on the part of Germany's science (and research funding) organizations, research institutions and universities.

We therefore gratefully acknowledge the role of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in promoting international research marketing since 2010. The Humboldt Foundation has contributed its core competency – the establishment of a worldwide, life-long Humboldt alumni network – and shares its experiences with other partners. Over the past several years, the Humboldt Foundation has made it a priority to support and strengthen research alumni work at German universities. Research alumni are international postdocs or experienced researchers who have conducted research stays in Germany, become familiar with Germany as a center of research, and then continued with their research careers in other countries. Research alumni are the ideal 'multipliers' – ambassadors for Germany as an international center of research, who can communicate authentically the value of conducting science and research in Germany. The fact that 26 institutions have received concrete support for their research alumni work so far, and many others have been included in a valuable dialog on the subject, is a sign that the work of the Humboldt Foundation has been successful. This publication provides an overview of the main results and insights from five years of research alumni work, supplemented by the Humboldt Foundation's own experience in alumni relations.

I hope you will find the content interesting and useful – and wish you continued success in your research alumni work!



Georg Schütte





Dear Reader,

“The research alumni initiatives by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation offer exactly the kind of impetus we needed to drive this topic forward within our university.” We frequently hear feedback like this from research administrators at universities and research institutions in Germany. For the past five years, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation has received support from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research as part of the joint International Research Marketing project to draw attention to research alumni work in the larger context of Germany as an international center of research. In the meantime, there has been broad recognition across institutions that engaging this specific alumni segment can contribute significantly to successfully implementing internationalization strategies. At the same time, however, a well-crafted approach is needed.

At its core, our initiative promoted the following idea: There is no lack of good ideas across universities and research institutions on how to pursue more intensive and strategic-minded engagement in each institution’s own research alumni – but these ideas need greater support. Our competitions on research alumni strategies from recent years provided an excellent occasion for promoting the implementation of 26 concepts in total and fostered ‘best practices’ for successful research alumni work. Different events established the framework for meetings between “Research Alumni Advisors” and their institution’s research alumni as well as for dialog between the research alumni advisors from different institutions.

The program on research alumni strategies represents yet another way in which the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation continues to build on its decade-long initiative to foster a culture of welcome in Germany. It understands that research alumni work can only be effective if the groundwork has been laid out in advance. In this context, it is worth recalling the initiatives the “Award for Germany’s Friendliest Immigration Office” and “Welcome Centres for Cosmopolitan Universities” through which the Humboldt Foundation and its partners, the Stifterverband für die deutsche Wissenschaft and the Deutsche Telekom Foundation, highlighted the importance of strong support structures for guest researchers before and during their research stay in Germany.

We thank the Federal Ministry for Education and Research for making the Humboldt Foundation research alumni initiatives possible within the framework of the International Research Marketing initiative.

Helmut Schwarz



Prof. Dr. Helmut Schwarz
President of the Alexander
von Humboldt Foundation

The Discovery of Research Alumni

Nearly unthinkable just twenty years ago, universities and research institutions in Germany today are actively courting their alumni and building the necessary infrastructure for professional alumni relations work. They have also turned their attention to new target groups, including research alumni – scientists and scholars from across the globe who have already completed a research stay in Germany.
| by Angelika Fritsche







American universities are the undisputed leaders when it comes to structured and highly professional alumni relations. As early as the first half of the 19th century, US universities began laying the groundwork for a system that would become fundamental to the development and upkeep of US higher education. Indeed, many of the elite universities such as Harvard, Yale or Stanford would not even exist today without their highly developed alumni organizations, which are often comprised of several hundred employees. From the beginning, alumni relations professionals at US colleges and universities have made it their business to gain everybody who ever studied at their institution for their alumni community and win their loyalty over the long term with an array of services, events and opportunities. US universities have set the worldwide standard for alumni relations work, and their systems have often been adapted (if not copied) by institutions of higher education around the globe, including those in Germany. Today, however, German universities are themselves breaking new ground in this area. According to research conducted by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, they are the first and so far the only institutions of higher education worldwide to have discovered “research alumni” as a separate target group and to develop ways to win their loyalty.

Research alumni are international scientists and scholars who have conducted research stays at a German university or non-university research institution and are now continuing to work as scientists and scholars abroad. This group also includes German scientists and scholars who have worked abroad for years. Many of these research alumni, as it turns out, feel a bond, both personally and professionally, to their host institution after completing their stay. This makes them potentially valuable strategic partners for these institutions. Research alumni can act as “ambassadors” who support the internationalization of their former host university – through communications work abroad, by helping to recruit young scientists and scholars, or by serving as advisors to German institutions striving to initiate and develop international research partnerships.

The discovery and “recruitment” of this new group of alumni is particularly valuable for German research institutions, because these research alumni have had first-hand experience with Germany as a center of science and research. Their exposure to German research excellence qualifies them ideally to communicate their experiences and impressions to international audiences. Compared to other alumni groups, such as former exchange students, who have merely completed a study stay at a

German university, research alumni are more knowledgeable and more authentic when it comes to German research and promoting Germany as a leading center of science and research.

Working with research alumni adds a new dimension to previous alumni relations work at German universities. While many university alumni networks offer a broad range of opportunities of general interest to alumni, research alumni relations are much more target group specific. The research alumni benefit because the activities are tailored to their specific needs and interests. The universities benefit because, by engaging research alumni in this way, they sharpen their international profile and improve their positioning in the global war for talent (see examples on pp. 30-35).

The Humboldt Foundation has long since recognized the research alumni target group as a source of untapped potential for German universities and research institutions, and made it a priority to develop this resource. As one of Germany’s leading science organizations with a special focus on alumni relations work, the Humboldt Foundation has, over the course of more than 60 years, continually developed its own network of international scientists and scholars – the Humboldt Network – as a way to promote and strengthen Germany as an international center of science and research. When the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) launched the joint project “International Research Marketing” over five years ago, it provided the opportunity for the Humboldt Foundation to also turn the attention of other German organizations to research alumni work. BMBF called upon four large science and research organizations (Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, German Academic Exchange Service, German Research Foundation, Fraunhofer Gesellschaft) to contribute their core competencies to a bottom-up process that would develop an international research marketing strategy focused on all of Germany. As part of this initiative, the Humboldt Foundation announced the first round of its ideas competition “Research alumni of universities in Germany” in April 2011 (see also “Budding but Delicate”, pp. 18-23).





One of the forerunners of research alumni work in Germany is the **Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin)**, which, as early as 2012, was one of the stand-out participants in the Humboldt Foundation ideas competition. "Research alumni are an additional target group within our community of international alumni," explains Franca Brand, who heads the FU Berlin's Alumni Office. "As part of our alumni relations work we make sure to address their individual professional needs and tap the potential that they represent." By winning the loyalty of researchers affiliated with FU Berlin – especially young scientists and scholars – the Alumni Office works to strengthen existing partnerships, to experiment with new forms of collaboration, and to help support the career development of young academics both at FU Berlin and abroad. Its current research alumni program, for example, supports research stays for young international academics who are sent by research alumni abroad and then hosted at FU Berlin. Young academics from FU Berlin are also given the opportunity to conduct research abroad at the home institutions of research alumni. "A major goal of our alumni work is to establish active networks both nationally and internationally over the long term – mainly to strengthen academic and professional ties, and as a way to integrate the expertise of our alumni into FU Berlin's own activities," explains Brand. "The university wants to be proactive about using its alumni as ambassadors for its academic agenda and other interests. Along with the research partnerships mentioned already, this might also mean promoting Berlin as a place of study among foreign students, mentoring for our doctoral candidates in Berlin, or even endowing a Germany Scholarship."

The University of Mannheim, which was among the winners of the Humboldt Foundation's 2014 Research Alumni Strategies competition, also pursues a dedicated "research alumni agenda" as a natural extension of its alumni work. The University of Mannheim's Welcome Center, together with the International Office, the Graduate School of Economic and Social Sciences (GESS) and the Office of the President founded the research alumni network "MaRA – Mannheim Research Alumni", which was recognized for its approach to integrate research alumni work into the university's internationalization strategy and to engage alumni in every phase of the alumni "life cycle". With the founding of its ABSOLVENTUM alumni network 20 years ago, the University of Mannheim laid the foundation for the first alumni organization at a German university. Two years prior to the launch of ABSOLVENTUM in 1995, the Office of the President and university administration had conducted a survey among Mannheim graduates. "The large majority of alumni surveyed were in favor of initiating a cross-departmental network as a way of maintaining the bond to their alma mater and their fellow alumni after graduation," says ABSOLVENTUM Managing Director Christian Haas. Two decades later, the network consists of over 6,800 paying members organized in 46 regional groups in 20 countries



worldwide. Currently the ABSOLVENTUM office employs eleven people and finances itself as well as all network activities entirely from member fees and donations. "Our members expect professionalism from us, and this would not be possible without the structures and staff we have in place," says Haas. As a result, ABSOLVENTUM is financially independent from the university and free to manage its operations as it sees fit. The ABSOLVENTUM mandate is stipulated in a formal agreement with the University of Mannheim, which tasks ABSOLVENTUM with supporting the university in its effort to maintain contact and build relationships with its graduates. At other German universities, alumni offices often function as units within the Office of the President with just a few employees, who must juggle a wide range of tasks in addition to alumni relations, including fundraising and career services.

A 134-year head start for US universities

Still, five years of research alumni work at German universities and 20 years of successful alumni relations in Mannheim is a very short lifespan compared to what American universities have achieved over the years. US universities can boast a 134-year head start on their German counterparts. It was September 5, 1821 when the first "Society of Alumni" was founded at Williams College in Massachusetts. Remarkably, the alumni association was initiated by a group of dedicated former students just 28 years after the founding of the college itself, and it still exists today. The goals of the "Society of Alumni" founders were clear and simple: promoting literature and camaraderie among fellow alumni as a way to strengthen the reputation and support the interests of the alma mater. This continues to guide the association's efforts today, and they can look back on nearly two centuries of support for their college. The Williams College website refers specifically to the Society of Alumni and its integral role in the development and success of Williams College over the years: "The organizers' commitment to Williams in the difficult months and years that followed saved the College and thus allowed it to evolve and flourish to this day. The unbroken support and dedication of succeeding generations of alumni are principal elements in Williams' position as one of the pre-eminent undergraduate institutions in the world."

What began in the 19th century as volunteer work on the part of a handful of committed alumni has developed today into a highly professional organization at Williams College. A permanent staff of thirteen employees ensures that contact is maintained to over 28,000 alumni worldwide and helps alumni take advantage of services such as continuing education programs, a career network and an e-learning portal. At the same time,





many Williams alumni not only contribute financially, but also volunteer their time and effort on behalf of their alma mater. A typical American approach, this is certainly one reason why alumni associations have succeeded in the US for so long. As an example, some 3,000 Williams alumni volunteer to help recruit future students, raise funds for the alumni network, serve as mentors to help students make the transition to professional life, or organize alumni groups abroad. And the Williams approach is by no means unique. Other flagships of American higher education, including Ivy League universities such as Harvard, Yale and Princeton, also have highly developed systems for alumni relations. The Austrian alumni expert Ingrid Gomboz believes that this has a lot to do with the American way of life: “In the US you see individuals shouldering social responsibility for the common good; dedicating time and resources on behalf of one’s alma mater is part of this. Because higher education, basic education, healthcare and other areas of public life are not administered centrally by the state, the individual is encouraged to take on responsibility for these areas – and is also recognized by society for the contribution that he or she makes.”

Another aspect, which is by no means insignificant for the alumni who get involved, is that alumni also sit on the university’s board of trustees or board of regents, which function as governing bodies along with the office of the president. In this way, alumni can play a significant role in steering the future course of their alma mater. And, as Gomboz points out, alumni also have a significant indirect influence on university life: “Alumni give guest lectures, write letters of complaint to political functionaries, recruit future students, contribute articles and editorials to university newspapers and serve as advocates for their university in any number of different situations.” And of course they support their alma mater with generous monetary donations.

At US universities: First the friendraising, then the fundraising

Raising money is central to alumni relations work at American universities. In Germany, where entirely different traditions and structures are in place, fundraising on this scale would neither be possible nor desirable. This is especially true in the case of research alumni work, where German universities benefit mainly from the contact to research alumni, along with their consulting and communications support. The fact that Harvard is the richest university in the world is due in no small part to its success in winning the loyalty of some 323,000 alumni worldwide – graduates who, as a rule, have achieved professional success, influence and, in many cases, considerable wealth. According to figures published by the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), the Harvard University endowment in 2014 was approximately 35.8 billion dollars (roughly 31.6 billion euros), followed by the University of Texas with 25.4 billion dollars (approx. 484,000 alumni) and Yale University with 23.9 billion dollars (approx. 169,000 alumni).

Just recently, in June of this year, the Harvard Gazette announced the latest mega donation, when New York hedge fund manager and Harvard graduate John Paulson (MBA 1980) gave 400 million dollars – the largest gift to the university in its illustrious 379-year history. In this case, the beneficiary is Harvard’s School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS), which now bears Paulson’s name. According to the Harvard Gazette, the unexpected windfall will allow Harvard to strengthen its position vis-à-vis other elite universities in the competition for the world’s top engineering and computer science students. With his huge donation, multi-billionaire John Paulson outdid Hong Kong financier Gerald Chan, another Harvard graduate, who caused a stir just one year earlier with his 350 million dollar gift to the Harvard School of Public Health. This has now been renamed ‘Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health’ in honor of Chan’s father. Gerald Chan had earned two degrees from the school in the 1970s.

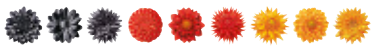
A look at the contributions made to American universities reveals that gifts in the tens and hundreds of millions are by no means a rarity. The source of the generosity is often alumni who attribute their success to their outstanding university education and who want to “give back” to their alma mater. Another example is multi-billionaire Michael Bloomberg, who has supported Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore over the years with donations totaling 1.18 billion dollars. The former mayor of New York City (2001 to 2014) studied engineering at Johns Hopkins in the 1960s and served as chairman of the university’s board of trustees from 1996 to 2002.

Such lavish donations are certainly no accident, but the result of a systematic, individualized approach to alumni relations which begins the moment a student sets foot on campus and continues throughout their university years and beyond. For Professor Dr. Manfred Erhardt, former Berlin Senator of Science and Secretary General of the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft, cause and effect are clear: “American universities recognized long ago that a student’s willingness to identify with their alma mater is the direct result of a positive university experience – one in which the student has received the care, attention and support he or she needs, and has experienced not only an outstanding education but also personal development.” And this kind of attention is, in fact, the rule rather than the exception. US universities, all of which charge hefty tuitions by German standards, provide their students and graduates with support in any and all situations and life phases. Or as Ingrid Gomboz sums it up: “You sign up for life.”

Internalizing the “service” mentality at German universities

This kind of comprehensive, integrated approach, which considers the entire life and career cycle of students, alumni and researchers was, up until now, more or less unheard of at German universities (see article “Constantly Setting Sail”, pp. 24-29). Only recently has it begun to dawn on the responsible university administrators and education policy makers here in Germany that they need to significantly expand their portfolio of support and services, especially in light of the demographic change and the stiffening international competition for young talent. Their counterparts in the US can serve as useful models, even if the American concepts and strategies cannot be adopted unaltered in the German environment. Germans and Americans still differ far too much in their systems, structures, financing models and overall mentality to





see eye-to-eye, but German universities can certainly learn and adopt one key concept from their US counterparts: Alumni work begins at the time of matriculation and requires universities to develop as both education providers and service providers. This is neither magic nor “rocket science”. With a well-conceived strategy, German institutions of higher education and research are in a good position to make this adjustment, as evidenced by the successful research alumni work being established and carried out by more and more German universities with support from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and funding from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

Despite the huge head start in both time and experience that US universities have over their German counterparts, one should not forget that activities designed to get alumni involved on behalf of their alma mater, including efforts to inspire financial contributions, have in fact existed in Germany long before the mid 1990s, when German universities began introducing a more systematic and professionalized approach to alumni relations. One example is the club of “Alte Herren” (old gentlemen) or “Philisters” – university graduates who remain members of their university fraternity after graduation. An age-old tradition, the role of the “Alte Herren” is to support students and their fraternity through financial donations and, using their professional contacts, to help young graduates make the transition to working life – both of which are core activities of today’s alumni organizations.

Another precursor to today’s alumni relations work is the university friends’ association. These associations, initiated largely in the 1950s and active still today, consist of former students, teachers and other friends and affiliates of the university from a range of different professions

and academic disciplines, who volunteer to get involved. Members provide universities with material support and contribute their know-how. They act as financial donors, support teaching and research, and help graduates with the entry into professional life.

One of the largest and oldest alumni associations in Germany is the “Vereinigung Ehemaliger Geisenheimer”, which has operated under the name of VEG – Geisenheim Alumni Association e.V. since 2002. Founded in 1894 at the “Königlich Preußische Lehranstalt für Obst- und Weinbau” (Royal Prussian Academy for Orchards and Vineyards) in Geisenheim, the association today consists of some 2,500 members worldwide. The VEG’s mission was, and remains today, to maintain the bond between the school and its graduates, to facilitate job recruitment and hiring with commensurate pay, and to ensure continued professional training for graduates. For over 100 years, VEG accepted only former students and graduates as members. Today, like many other alumni associations at German universities, it has opened its doors to a broader membership. As with most alumni organizations in Germany affiliated with an institution of higher education, the VEG office reports directly to the Office of the President of its university (Geisenheim University), which also acts as the VEG’s board of directors and oversees its affairs.

Alumni management: A strategic challenge for German universities

An important initiator of the development and professionalization of alumni relations work at German universities was the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK) with its 1997 statement (“Zur Rolle der Absolventenvereinigungen”) regarding the role of alumni associations, which states:





“Alumni relations has become an important aspect for German universities over the past several decades ... These activities not only have a direct impact on network building and fundraising, but alumni work also provides universities with an instrument for organizational development and the further development of their degree programs ... A prerequisite for successful alumni work is a high quality university education ... Despite the level of trust and bond that already exists between graduates and their alma mater, intensifying the contact and maintaining this connection is one of the important and resource-intensive responsibilities of the university on a day-to-day basis.”

With its ABSOLVENTUM alumni network, the University of Mannheim has already demonstrated the benefits of successful alumni work. Today there is hardly a German university that has not discovered its alumni to be a valuable target group. Never before have these alumni been courted so assiduously by their universities, research institutions and science organizations. In this age of technology, digitalization, globalization and accelerating change, institutions have realized the value of “high potentials” – a resource available in limited quantities only. It stands to reason, therefore, that universities want to practice strategic alumni management as a way to maintain and make use of its existing resource of students, teachers, researchers and administrative employees. “For the universities, the investment clearly pays off,” says alumni management expert Ilka Hoepfner. Alumni, after all, are a university’s face to the world. They have the power to enhance the national and international reputation of their university or research institution. They can provide valuable support as mentors or teachers. They can help science and research institutions position themselves worldwide as attractive places of learning and research. They can help optimize teaching and research through their constructive criticism and support the process of putting knowledge into practice. They strengthen the university’s network in the business world, in politics, science and research, thus expanding and enhancing the university’s sphere of influence. They also contribute their own networks, facilitating contact to potential donors, sponsors and collaborative partners.

Successful alumni management depends on strategic planning, a professionalized approach to management, sufficient funding, as well as the availability of member data. But it is exactly in these areas that many German universities lag behind, as Alexandra Rohlmann

points out in her study “Alumni-Management im deutschen Hochschulsektor” (alumni management in German higher education). According to the study, alumni outreach and support is organized either centrally by the university’s administrative staff, or de-centrally through individual schools/academic departments or independent associations. Roughly half of alumni associations were founded by the alumni themselves, are financed through membership dues and are organized and managed on a volunteer basis. According to Rohlmann’s figures, the smaller, decentralized alumni networks today are increasing their membership numbers twice as fast as the university-wide alumni organizations. These centralized alumni organizations, which are often established by the universities themselves and staffed by university employees who work part-time in alumni management, also tend to have modest budgets compared to other organizational units within the university. This is problematic, according to Swiss alumni expert Peter O. Brunner. “You can’t get good work for free,” says Brunner. “This kind of work must be done by professionals who can work and interact on the level with accomplished alumni.”

ETH Zurich has established a cooperation model for its alumni relations, which is considered exemplary both in Switzerland and Germany. ETH Zurich relies on a combination of centralized alumni work carried out by professionals and decentralized activities organized by volunteers. Established committees such as the delegates meeting ensure that the responsibilities and activities are coordinated between the centralized and decentralized levels. Alumni relations, in fact, has a long tradition at ETH Zurich. The ETH Alumni Vereinigung (alumni association) was launched in 1869, just 14 years after the founding of the university. Then as now, its core mission is to build and maintain strong relations between alumni, ETH Zurich, the business community and the general public. It also strives to strengthen the leadership position of ETH Zurich by bringing alumni “back” to the university to share their professional knowledge and experience.

Research alumni work: A mix of technical/professional and emotional factors

One of the key factors for successful alumni relations work – along with a sound strategy and management – is the people, i.e. the alumni organization staff. They must possess the skills to inspire alumni to “give back”



to their former university or research institutions, and they need to be able to adjust their communications according to the specific target group. This is, of course, easier said than done. Students or researchers who have been thoroughly disappointed by their alma mater will certainly not change their minds based on a few emails or letters of invitation. They will only be “on board” if they regard their university experience positively. “Good alumni management begins with ‘friend-raising,’” says Brigitte Kuntzsch from alumni-clubs.net, the umbrella association of alumni organizations in German-speaking Europe. In short, a university must first build a relationship and trust with its students and alumni before it can ask them for support (see also “The Value Must be Clear”, pp. 14-17).

If an institution can succeed in building such relationships, then alumni are generally happy to donate their time, energy and resources on its behalf. This was demonstrated clearly by the network study completed in March of this year by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. According to the study, many Humboldtians – the name given to the foundation’s current and former fellows – serve as ambassadors for both the Humboldt network and for Germany as an international center of science and research, mainly by informing outstanding scientists and scholars about the foundation’s funding programs and research opportunities in Germany, and by helping them apply for funding. Many of them are members of one of the Humboldt Foundation’s 122 Alumni Associations worldwide, which help promote a common Humboldt “identity” and maintain contact to the foundation and to Germany. Other research alumni organize – with financial support from the Humboldt Foundation – regional conferences or specialist symposia abroad as a way to promote regional and/or discipline-specific network building. Or they might serve as one of the Humboldt Foundation’s Ambassador Scientists abroad, disseminating information about Germany as a center for international science and research, and providing consulting support to the foundation. When asked about what motivated them to get involved, a lot of alumni among the group of Ambassador Scientists indicated that they wanted to “give something back” to the Humboldt Foundation, and many also spoke about wanting to “support young scientists and researchers”. Another interesting find from the network study was that alumni who had participated in a foundation networking event and were able to make personal contacts to other Humboldt alumni as well as to foundation employees were the ones who developed an especially strong



bond to the network and actively took part in it. This finding also underscores the fact that alumni loyalty depends a great deal on the quality of the alumni relations work being done.

The challenge faced by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in the coming years will be to keep its finger on the pulse of the times – to anticipate early the individual and ever-changing needs of this stand-out target group and to continually integrate them into its own strategy. As time becomes a more and more precious commodity, and as the global competition for top talent continues to heat up, research alumni will become more and more selective when it comes to choosing their networks. Ultimately, they are most likely to give their time, attention and loyalty to the networks that are most valuable in terms of professional contacts, and to which they feel an emotional connection. For German universities partnering with the Humboldt Foundation it will be an interesting challenge moving forward as they continue to discover and tap the potential of the research alumni target group and, with the help of individualized offers, generate interest in German universities and Germany as an international center of science and research. This is an area where research alumni managers can help spearhead advances in alumni relations work for German higher education and research in general. In the end, maintaining focus on a well-defined target group is essential to successful alumni work and loyalty on the part of network members. Those who try to attract and retain everyone, rather than a specific group, may very well find themselves alone.



The Value Must be Clear

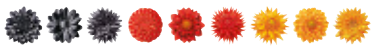
Alumni who choose to join a network of fellow university graduates or fellow researchers must feel that their needs and interests are taken seriously and that the network adds real value. Successful alumni groups have many aspects in common, but there are important differences too. While university graduates, for example, are swayed more by emotional factors, research alumni are focused more on content, i.e. the practical, work-related opportunities that an alumni group offers. | by Angelika Fritsche and Veronika Renkes

John Paulson, Gerald Chan and Michael Bloomberg (see “The Discovery of Research Alumni”, p. 6) have a lot in common. They have been extremely successful in their careers, are extremely wealthy, have graduated from a top US university and feel a life-long bond to their alma mater. This loyalty is evidenced not only by the huge financial contributions they have made to their alma mater, but also by their willingness to devote their precious time to getting involved in the university committees on which alumni are allowed to serve. They are motivated mainly by their sense of gratitude and the desire to promote innovations in research, thus contributing to the future development of their university. Michael Bloomberg, the former New York City mayor, justified his decades-long personal commitment and financial support for Johns Hopkins University as follows: “Johns Hopkins University has been an important part of my life since I first set foot on campus more than five decades ago. Each dollar I have given has been well-spent improving the institution and, just as importantly, making its education available to students who might otherwise not be able to afford it. Giving is only meaningful if the money will make a difference in people’s lives, and I know of no other institution that can make a bigger difference in lives around the world through its groundbreaking research—especially in the field of public health.”

While such exorbitant alumni giving cannot be expected in the German environment, German institutions are surely in a position to adopt the underlying approach of US universities – to create a strong connection between students and their university. Ultimately, it is this bond that motivates alumni to devote their time, resources or know-how on behalf of the alma mater. Many alumni are willing to give something back if they have had a good experience with the institution that is soliciting their support. A student’s initial contact with the university plays a critical role in shaping this experience. The advertising industry has found the right words here: “There is no second chance for first impressions.”

Universities should begin their alumni relations work from day one on the campus

The psychologist Dr. Andreas König found out as part of his doctoral dissertation “Hochschulbindung und Alumni-Engagement als Folge wahrgenommener Hochschulgerechtigkeit” (alumni loyalty and engagement as the result of perceived university integrity) that positive experiences for university students are a door-opener for successful alumni relations later on. He explains this as follows: “Alumni work is about relationship building and begins with the students. It takes time to create



an emotional bond to an organization such as a university, and the years a person spends as a member of the university community is really the only time to establish this connection. In the case of students, the university years are often a very meaningful time in their lives. If they feel they have received a good education and enjoyed many positive experiences, they will be far more open to the university's outreach efforts, especially compared to alumni who feel little or no bond to the institution. So the actual time spent at the institution can be considered a kind of door-opener to all forms of alumni work later on. If a bond cannot be formed during this time, even the most targeted alumni outreach efforts will likely fall on deaf ears."

As with alumni such as John Paulson, Gerald Chan or Michael Bloomberg, the high-quality academic experience is often considered the foundation for subsequent professional success and a reason to want to give back to the alma mater. But their social experience during the university years also plays an important role. "The level of social integration, i.e. the emotional bond created to their fellow students – through parties, athletics or cultural activities, for example – has a positive impact on what alumni later describe as a sense of obligation, or emotional commitment, to the university or to their own department or area of specialization," reports König.

For alumni, the benefits of membership must be clear

When it comes to alumni relations, German universities today still lag very far behind their US counterparts. This is the case both in the initial contact phase and in the later phase, when the university communicates and tries to establish a lasting relationship to its alumni. If alumni are going to join a network, feel a certain loyalty to it, and even get actively involved in it, they need to be continually informed about the network's activities and projects in such a way that meets their high quality standards and sparks their enthusiasm. Other members of the alumni network also play a central role. A sense of belonging is critical. Alumni are much more likely to identify with a network if they feel they share a set of similar experiences and values with their fellow members.

And, of course, alumni need to recognize the value of membership – the added value that the alumni network brings to them personally, in the form of public recognition, for example, or a valuable service in return. US alumni organizations can certainly serve as a good model here. Along with events, countless perks and educational opportunities, they offer their members, above all, a valuable network of fellow alumni. Members can tap into this network at any time to advance their own careers, to





conduct business or initiate new collaborative partnerships. In the US, every student can take advantage of these kinds of services – including access to an alumni directory – from day one at their college or university. However, this kind of service is both manpower-intensive and cost-intensive. The Harvard Alumni Association, for example, employs roughly 200 full-time staff dedicated to maintaining contact to alumni and providing a comprehensive array of services that members can take advantage of for the rest of their lives.

»» The key for alumni is
that ‘win-win’ feeling. «

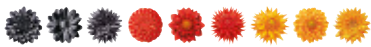
Alumni need to experience the clear benefit of maintaining contact to their former university or research institution. For Dr. Birgit Gaiser, member of the TU Berlin alumni association, it begins with the emotional bond. “TU Berlin’s Alumni Program gave me the sense that TU Berlin is genuinely interested in its graduates,” she says. “I later did my PhD at a different university, but my alma mater is clearly TU Berlin. This sense of loyalty on my part can certainly be attributed to TU Berlin’s highly professional alumni outreach.” In her current job at the Helmholtz Association in Berlin, Gaiser considers her membership in the TU Berlin alumni network a clear win-win: “For me the networking aspect of alumni work is very interesting,” she explains. “I help manage a mentoring program for scientists and scholars, and am always looking for suitable mentors. TU alumni and staff are very interesting for me in this regard.”

For Humboldt alumni, the quality and professional focus of the alumni network are top priorities

While the quality of the relationship is largely responsible for determining a graduate’s sense of loyalty to his or her alma mater, it is the quality of the service provided that maintains and strengthens the bond. In general, it is these two pillars that form the foundation for successful alumni relations. But how does an institution engender a sense of loyalty in research alumni who already work internationally, who already have experience at various universities and research institutions, and who often have multiple “offers” from multiple alumni networks? Dr. Johannes Müller, who is responsible for research alumni relations at the University of Cologne (see interview on p. 35), explains that research alumni place far less emphasis on factors such as emotional bond and nostalgia. Before they join an alumni network, they must first recognize a clear benefit for their everyday work. Müller and his staff in Cologne, for example, learned that typical annual alumni reunion events organized for university graduates are far less interesting for research alumni. To be attractive for research alumni, an alumni event must offer an “upmarket”, research-oriented agenda tailored to their specific professional needs and interests.

Particularly revealing in this regard are the results of a network study completed in March 2015 by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (see “Budding but Delicate”, pp. 18-23), which involved participation by some 6,950 members of the Humboldt Network. The study revealed clearly that Humboldtians use the Humboldt network, which consists of over 26,000 members from all disciplines in more than 140 countries, most of all for “maintaining contacts”. The second most important functions were “exchange of (scientific) knowledge” and “finding cooperation partners”, while “establishing contacts outside research (e.g. in the area of policymaking)” was considered less important. Interestingly, Humboldt alumni evaluate other alumni associations (e.g. from universities or other funding organizations), national academies (e.g. National Academy of Sciences, Royal Society) and academic social networks (e.g. Research Gate, Academia) in much the same way. And what stands out most of all: Humboldt alumni regard the professional networks (e.g. professional societies/associations, cooperation networks and conference networks) as most important in nearly all aspects named.



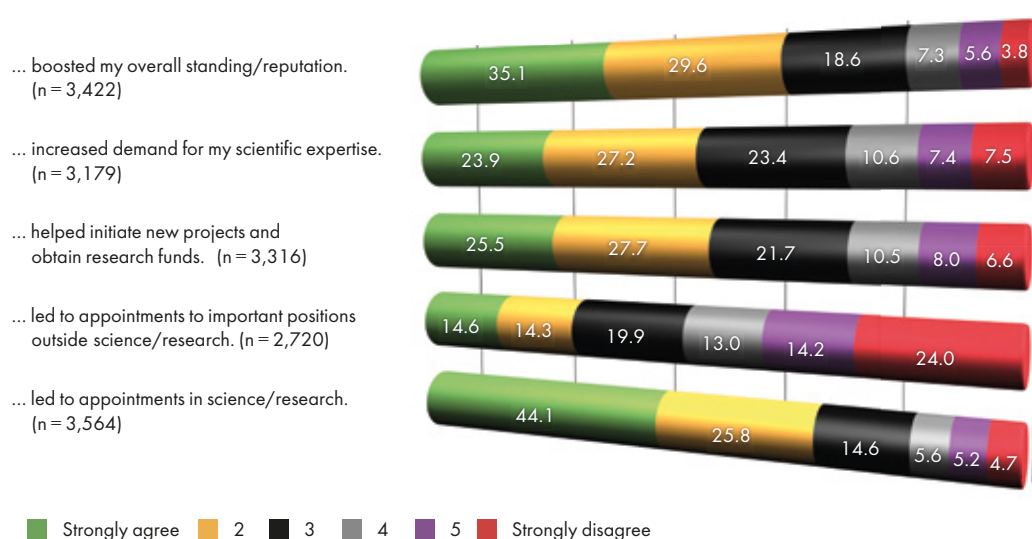


In short, the quality and professional focus of a network are the critical factors in determining whether research alumni join a network and how loyal they feel to the network. In addition, multiple alumni memberships are the norm.

Nevertheless, despite the overriding emphasis on content, emotional factors still play a role in determining the degree to which these top-class scientists and scholars feel a connection to a given network. For many Humboldt alumni, for example, the Humboldt network provides them with a community – a family of sorts – that shares common values and experiences, that shares common interests, that inspires both personally and intellectually, and that also functions as a kind of “ice-breaker” when making new personal and professional contacts (see also interview on pp. 44-46). A sense of belonging is strengthened by the exclusive access to the Humboldt network, which is perceived by the members as a privilege. The network study also underscores what has emerged as a ground rule for success in any kind of alumni relations work: The sense of connection and loyalty to the network is determined largely by the quality of the relationship. According to the survey of Humboldt alumni, the high quality relationship is the result of very good support received during the first stay in Germany, the longstanding personal contact to Humboldt Foundation staff, and the wide range of events that provide alumni with valuable personal and professional contacts. In this regard, research alumni behave similarly to all other alumni.

Humboldtian status as door opener

Survey as part of the Humboldt Network’s unpublished explorative study “Explorative Studie des Humboldt-Netzwerks der Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung”, Bonn 2015): **Looking back, how did your status as a Humboldt alumnus or alumna help you in your career?** (All figures in percent)



Budding but Delicate

Half of the research-intensive universities in Germany report plans to establish research alumni activities; in fact, no more than roughly ten percent have actually taken real steps toward implementation. Such is the state of progress after five years of promoting research alumni work. A recent survey* on the implementation of research alumni outreach reveals that much remains to be done.
| by Barbara Sheldon

“How do you approach research alumni work?” This was the central question of an April 2015 survey* of almost 90 research-intensive universities across Germany. It was commissioned by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation to determine the lasting effects of its initiatives to raise awareness of research alumni strategies within the German university landscape. 26 institutions in all have received support since 2011 as part of four different rounds of competitions based around the implementation of research alumni strategies (including 22 universities, three non-university institutions, one university as part of a commendation — see graphic on page 21 for additional information). The initiatives were made possible with support from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research as part of the collaborative project “International Research Marketing”. 60 of Germany’s almost 90 research-intensive universities participated in the survey (68 %).

The survey, conducted by the Society for Empirical Studies in Kassel, polled those universities that have received support from the Humboldt Foundation and those that have not. It was determined that research alumni as a group have come to play an important role in the strategic positioning of a university within the larger international context. Several institutions have also developed internal structures to strengthen the ties to that institution’s own research alumni and to establish cooperations with them. Yet on the whole, research alumni work has certainly not found its place as a regular order of business among higher education institutions — and many universities have barely started or only scratched the surface of the significant challenges involved.



* Unpublished study on research alumni work at German universities conducted by the Gesellschaft für Empirische Studien bR, Kassel 2015





Research Alumni Strate- gies





Central findings of the survey

Research alumni work is still in its infancy: Post-stay contact with foreign researchers once they have left Germany remains very much the exception for German universities. Only three percent of universities surveyed indicated that research alumni outreach was notably developed, and ten percent had at least taken some initial steps toward the goal. The remaining 87 percent report either no corresponding post-stay contact (40 %), uncoordinated activities at a decentralized level only (27 %) or that central responsibility for this task has only been assigned very recently (20 %).

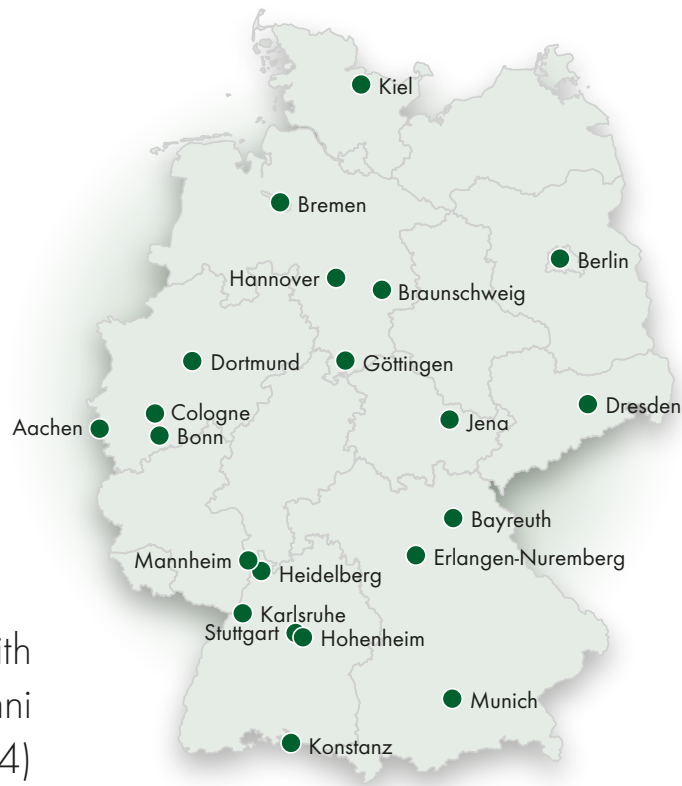
Research alumni work is being categorized as increasingly important: In the past five years alumni outreach to former guest researchers from abroad has grown in importance for the majority of universities (58 %). This is particularly true for those universities receiving support from the Humboldt Foundation, of whom almost all report trends to this effect (94 %).

Intensive initial contact, little alumni outreach: While almost all of the surveyed universities attach great importance to support for international guest researchers (83 %), the activities undertaken before and after the research visit are rarely anchored in university policies at a strategic level. Targeted marketing to recruit international visiting researchers or active research alumni work is only significantly evident as an internationalization strategy at a minority of the universities (roughly a third). Large universities with faculties of 500+ scientists and artists with foreign citizenship often are the sole exceptions and tend often to be already active in these areas.

Research alumni work is rarely structurally anchored: Despite the rising importance, the structural anchoring of research alumni work at the level of the central university administration remains relatively rare and was observed at only approximately a third of the surveyed universities. The great majority of the universities in question were prize-winners from the ideas and strategies competitions sponsored by the Humboldt Foundation (79 %).

Anchoring in Alumni Affairs Offices: Most universities have assigned research alumni work to their alumni affairs offices (58 %). International Offices/Foreign Students' Advisory Offices and Welcome Centers that are generally responsible for support of the guest researchers during their actual stay at the university are only rarely the prime players in post-visit relationship management, although they frequently cooperate with the alumni affairs offices in the execution of tasks. As far as central structures go, the added contribution from schools, departments and research institutes tend to be minor. There has been little integration of non-university institutions at the local, national, European and international level into research alumni work to date. It was acknowledged by only one in three universities.

Limited personnel resources: At the central level, planning and execution of duties related to research alumni work is typically assigned to what amounts to a half-time position (0.6 of a full time position). The relevant personnel were primarily classified within the German seniority structure as higher grade (*im höheren Dienst*, 68 % of the positions involved) or upper grade



Participating institutions with outstanding research alumni strategies (2011–2014)

(*im gehobenen Dienst*, 28 %) civil servants. Relatively few low and middle grade civil servants (*im einfachen und mittleren Dienst*) were involved in research alumni work (4 %). At half of the universities student aides and academic research assistants were typically assigned to support with simple and routine tasks, with a contingent of 20 hours monthly available for this work.

Alumni databases: Almost all universities where alumni outreach is handled centrally have already established a database to record contact data for foreign visiting researchers. This is primarily handled as part of the central alumni database for the entire university. In a few cases, however, the data from the university Welcome Centers are used for this post-visit relationship management work or the International Office has a special database with information about international researchers.

Newsletter as most common outreach channel: There is a broad variety of options for most universities to maintain contact with former visiting researchers from abroad. In some cases, the activities are specially oriented toward this specific target audience, and in other cases the research alumni are also integrated into the university’s existing alumni program or alumni network. Newsletters containing information about developments at the university, current job listings, etc. were the most common variant (94 %). One in two universities also offers a special internet portal for research alumni (50 %) or uses social media (44 %) such as Facebook or Twitter to convey information or otherwise communicate. Less common are conferences to

Aachen	RWTH Aachen University
Bayreuth	University of Bayreuth
Berlin	Freie Universität Berlin
	Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
	Technische Universität Berlin
	Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine (MDC)
Bonn	University of Bonn
Braunschweig	Technische Universität Braunschweig
Bremen	University of Bremen
	Leibniz Center for Tropical Marine Ecology (ZMT)
Cologne	University of Cologne
	Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies
Dortmund	TU Dortmund University
Dresden	Technische Universität Dresden
Erlangen-Nuremberg	Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU)
Göttingen	University of Göttingen
Hannover	Leibniz Universität Hannover
Heidelberg	Heidelberg University
Hohenheim	University of Hohenheim
Jena	Friedrich Schiller University Jena
Karlsruhe	Karlsruhe Institute of Technology
Kiel	The Cluster of Excellence “The Future Ocean”, Kiel University
Konstanz	University of Konstanz
Mannheim	University of Mannheim
Munich	Technische Universität München
Stuttgart	University of Stuttgart





promote networking among research alumni and the university (22 %), special continuing education events (22 %) and the establishment of regional research alumni organizations in the home countries of the former guest researchers (22 %). Scholarship funds for research alumni work are available at one in two universities with centralized administration of these responsibilities, and one in three honors notable service by research alumni by awarding the status of Research Ambassador or the adoption into the university's Ambassadors' Club.

Strategic integration is central: Given that research alumni work has only been conducted at the centralized level of universities for a few years, it is noteworthy that two-thirds of those universities already report

extensive integration of former visiting researchers from abroad into strategic outreach measures. They are primarily tasked with the identification of contacts for research cooperations (56 %), the recruitment of international doctoral students (38 %) and postdocs (31 %), the dissemination of information about the university's events, programs and research profile (35 %) and the support of young scientists at the German university in terms of research stays abroad (31 %).

Time resources of research alumni as the limiting factor: Only 37 percent of universities with significant experience in this area report a high degree of readiness on the part of research alumni to get involved on behalf of their former host institution. The alumni frequently cite the pressure of other professional and personal commitments which leave little time for engagement with their former host university. Beyond this, short research stays and the fact that today's internationally mobile scientists will visit more institutions than ever over the course of their careers can make it difficult to establish close ties to a specific host university.

Concentration on specific groups of research alumni: Universities with a central anchoring of their research alumni work typically include all former guest



researchers from abroad when undertaking post-visit relationship management. Tying into the goals of their larger internationalization strategies, a few universities have also identified regional or academic key areas for their research alumni work, or established primary areas of activity, such as support in the search for young scientists abroad or the establishment and deepening of contacts with foreign partner universities.

Expansion of research alumni activities planned:

Half of the universities are planning to establish or expand their research alumni work in the near future. This trend is particularly strong among large universities with more than 500 foreign academics and a centralized structural anchoring of the post-stay relationship management.

Major challenges: As the universities see it, the biggest challenges and difficulties in establishing and implementing research alumni engagement lie in anchoring the topic among university administrators, winning separate faculties and research institutions for co-operations, securing financial and personnel resources, maintaining alumni databases and recruiting former visiting researchers from abroad to take part in the universities' post-stay relationship management measures.

Evaluation and Research Alumni Work

An examination of in-house research alumni activities, ideally a formal evaluation, can be helpful for universities discussing the way forward when it comes to growing and allocating resources over the long term. The following steps have proven effective:

1. Define the goals of your research alumni work at various levels.
2. Start with a concrete measure (such as an event) and consider which goals you are pursuing with it.
3. Then classify the concrete measure and its objectives in relationship to overarching goals, such as those of your research alumni strategies.
4. Establish ties to one target level above, such as the one of the international strategy of your institution.
5. Develop suitable questions for each target level.

Once such an evaluation has been conducted, you will have results that relate to different target tiers – including the higher-level ones that are often crucial for decision-makers:

6. Determine when central meetings and committee decisions are held at your institution. Plan your evaluation so that results, even partial ones if necessary, are presented in a timely manner so they may be fed into decision-making processes.
7. Re-use the results of evaluations: In many cases the evaluations also include “helpful nuggets” for public relations work.

Humboldt Foundation as a strong catalyst for developing engagement in research alumni:

Support from the Humboldt Foundation has a significant impact on the expansion of research alumni engagement levels. Almost all of the supported universities have already established centralized structures in this area, and 39 percent have already moved beyond the initial stage. By comparison: 57 percent of the non-supported universities have undertaken no research alumni activities at all to date, and 33 percent have seen only uncoordinated activities at the departmental level, meaning that less than 10 percent have established centralized responsibilities. When establishing or expanding research alumni engagement, the universities rely on support by the Humboldt Foundation.



Constantly Setting Sail

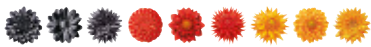
Stops in multiple countries and at different institutions have become common for high-profile international scientists and scholars. The things that are especially important for mobile researchers during such life and career phases are the very things those hoping to connect with research alumni to be able to develop suitable instruments for research alumni relations.

| by Barbara Sheldon and Veronika Schilling

Those who choose science as a career often set sail on a wild ride across stormy seas. Intrepid modern researchers are in search of terra incognita. Often traveling together with their families, they frequently set sail for previously unknown countries and continents of knowledge; starting out as simple sailors, in some cases they end up as captains of mighty vessels. We have tracked the route of internationally mobile scientists, observed where they drop anchor, and mapped out the common elements at the various stations of a researcher's life. Because to attract internationally mobile scientists as research alumni, one must first clarify which coordinates are their guiding lights during the different phases of their academic life.

The following sample profile of a "research alumni life cycle" reflects a distillation of years of experience in alumni relationship management by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. It also incorporates results from the "Exploratory Study of the Humboldt Network" completed in March 2015 (for more on this, please see the interview on pp. 44-46).





Research Alumni Phase 1: The Explorers



Career development:

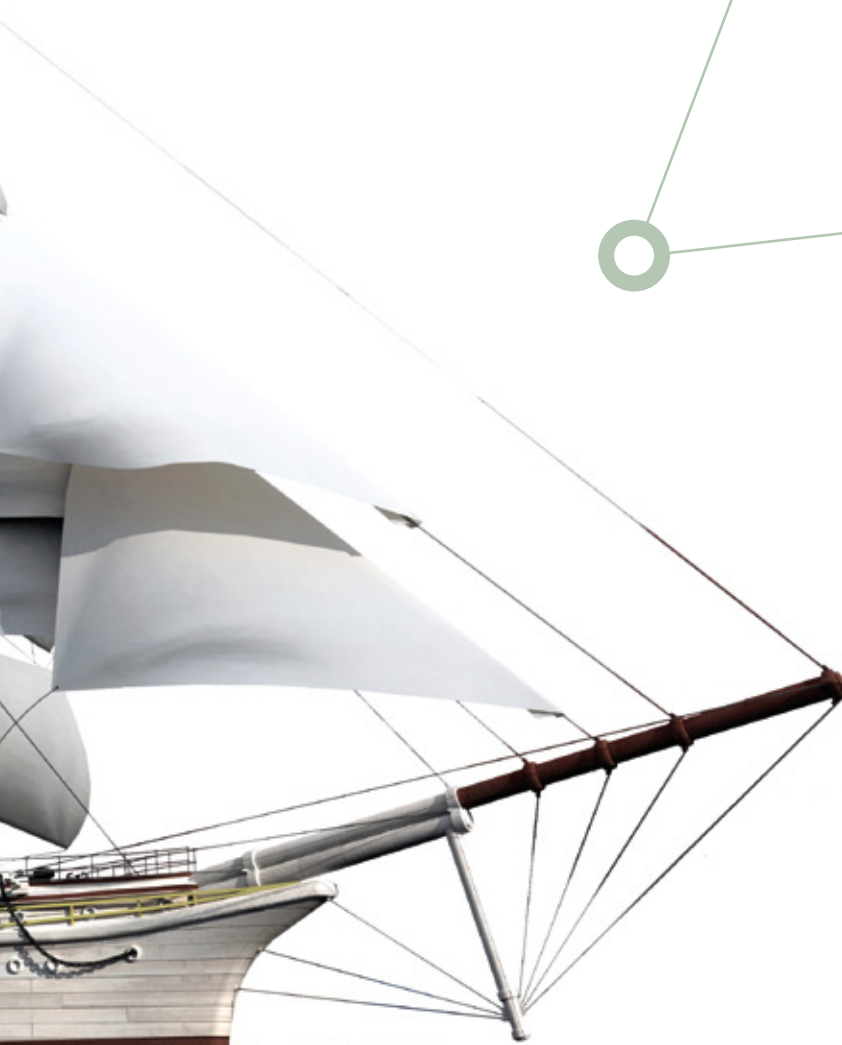
- Doctoral studies concluded with distinction, first research successes
- First research experience in home country
- Primary or sometimes even secondary post doc research visit abroad, in this case in Germany
- Focus on own scientific research and establishment of own academic profile

Experiences:

- Immersion into a working group or institution in Germany, learning German, encountering the challenges associated with international mobility, in some cases for the first time
- Contacts at the institute, acquaintances, friendships, experiences that in many cases make a lifelong impression, formation of connection to Germany

Suitable relationship management by institution in Germany:

- Support for researchers and their families in all administrative, social and personal issues related to arrival and stay (for example by the Welcome Center)
- Establishment of professional and emotional links to host institution through professional and extracurricular engagement
- Recording of contact data and process for securing ongoing access to updated data
- Clarification of collaboration between Welcome Center and unit for alumni relations with regard to maintaining contact to international researchers (e.g. concerning continued use of contact data)



Research Alumni Phase 2: The Go-Getters



Career development:

- Return to home country or stay in another country after research stay in Germany
- Employment in a junior tenure-track position, planning for the next career steps
- Further expansion and establishment of own academic profile
- Return into local networks
- Further (sometimes briefer) visits abroad
- Research projects with a larger number of partners
- Maintenance of contacts with the institution and individual researchers in Germany

Experiences:

- Changed perspectives through stay in Germany
- Next stage in the scientific career
- First experiences with directing other researchers and with encouraging young scientists that are considering their own research stay in Germany
- First experiences with harnessing a network in another country to advance one's own scientific career, use of contacts in Germany for individual aspects of own scientific work

Suitable relationship management by institution in Germany:

- Handover of contact maintenance from Welcome Center to unit for alumni relations
- Notification of research alumni about interesting developments, activities and resources at the institution in Germany, e. g. through regular newsletters or social media
- Establishment of contacts with other alumni from the institution in current country of residence of the research alumni
- Access to (alumni) events by the German host institution in the current country of residence of the research alumni
- Preparation for role as 'multipliers' for Germany as an international center of research



Research Alumni Phase 3: The Networkers

Career development:

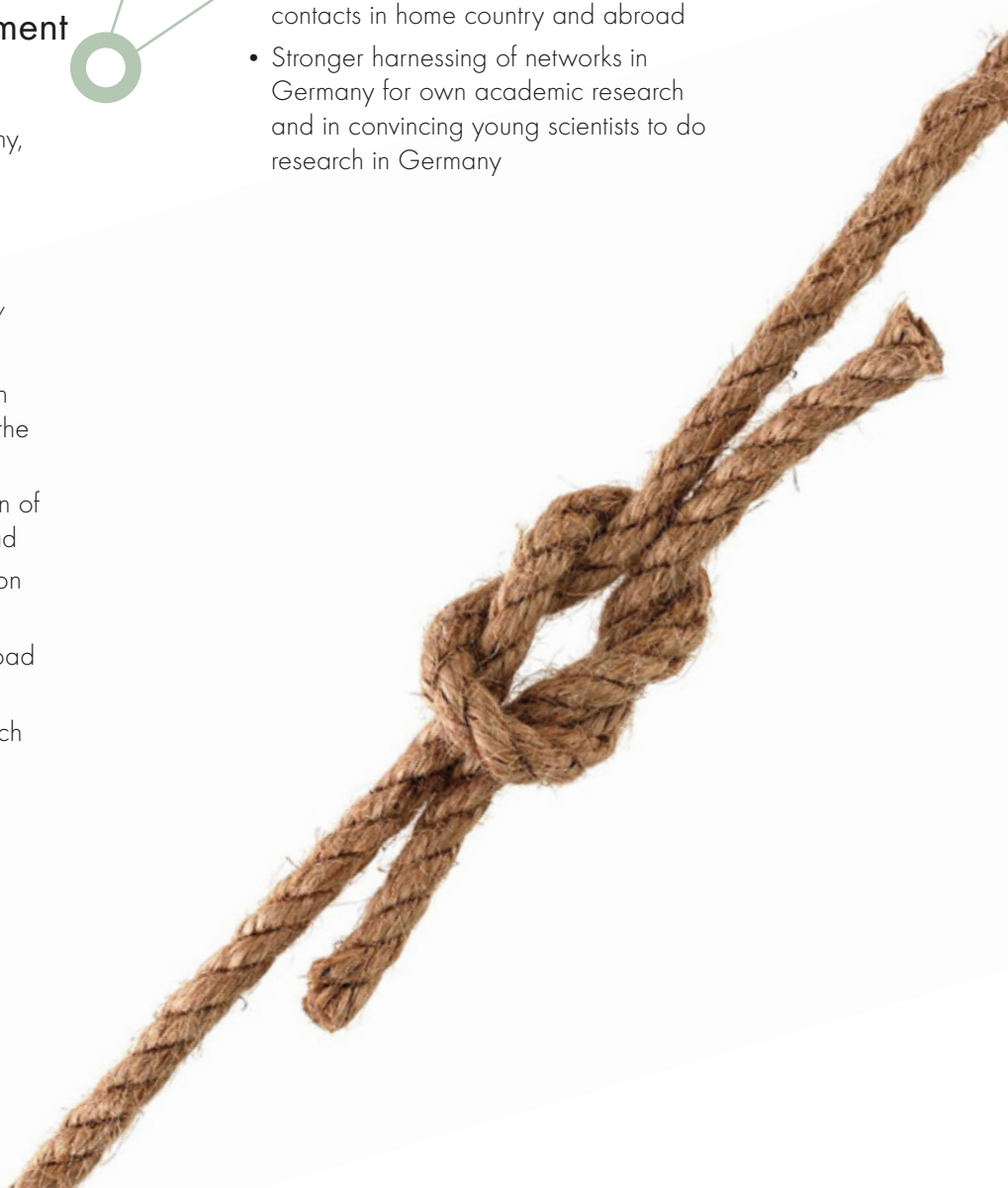
- Permanent position abroad as experienced researcher
- Establishment and recognition in area of expertise
- Preparation for jump to a senior position
- Renewed research stay abroad, in Germany or elsewhere

Suitable relationship management by institution in Germany:

- Offer of renewed research stay in Germany, during which events are held to strengthen links to Germany and the host institution, such as receptions for visiting researchers and networking events
- Integration of research alumni as lecturers/speakers
- Support of long-term cooperation between the research alumni's home institution and the German host institution
- Support for research alumni in organization of regional conferences and symposia abroad
- Integration as advisors in internationalization issues
- Integration into targeted talent search abroad
- Integration as advocates: Making young scientists aware of opportunities for research stay in Germany

Experiences:

- Experience in securing funding in home country and abroad
- Interest in further development of own team and in expanding academic contacts in home country and abroad
- Stronger harnessing of networks in Germany for own academic research and in convincing young scientists to do research in Germany



Research Alumni Phase 4: The Shapers

Career development:

- Employment abroad in a leading position at a research institution
- Reputation in broader area of expertise
- Leading of teams with multiple researchers
- Major research projects, including those with participation from multiple countries
- Increased role as science manager

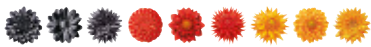
Experiences:

- Thorough understanding of networks and how to activate them effectively
- Interest in further mentoring of own scientific protégés and their placement within the academic system
- Importance of international contacts for own reputation and own position as advisor to the administrators of home institution in matters related to internationalization

Suitable relationship management by institution in Germany:

- Same as last phase, plus:
- “Ambassadors” for German culture and science to representatives from scientific community at home and other major players in society





Research Alumni Phase 5: The Mentors

Career development:

- Strong reputation within broader academic discipline and beyond
- End of most teaching and administration duties
- More time for research
- Taking on role as strategic advisor

Experiences:

- Systematic activation of networks for specific research interests
- Heightened interest in passing on experiences and "giving back"

Suitable relationship management by institution in Germany:

- Same as last phase, plus:
- Integration as representatives, e. g. at university congresses abroad
- Integration as advisors on internationalization issues at a high strategic level





An Impressive Group

In building its research alumni program, the University of Göttingen draws on experience gained from its general alumni activities.

| by Angelika Fritsche



In the first round of the 2013 competition “Research Alumni Strategies”, the University of Göttingen was recognized both for its strategy and its concept for international events.

The prize money was invested in creating sustainable network structures, with the most important activity to date resulting in the university hosting a Research Alumni Conference in San Francisco in September 2014 (see adjacent interview). At that conference, some 60 alumni and Göttingen campus members from the natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities had the chance to discuss digital transformation in research and education, and to exchange views and experience gained in related research projects. “It’s a source of inspiration for our research alumni. They are hugely interested in interdisciplinary exchange opportunities of this kind,” says Professor Norbert Lossau, Vice President for Infrastructure at the University of Göttingen.

In its research alumni activities, the University of Göttingen is certainly not starting from scratch. It can draw from its hugely successful general alumni activities of recent years. These are coordinated in a central alumni office which aligns research alumni activities with the existing program and expands the overall scope. The aim is to intensify relationships with the research alumni, and one of the best ways of doing so is to expand the services offered to that target group.

The activities have been well received, both by the research alumni and by university staff. As fittingly described by the Nobel laureate Thomas Südhof, who was born and trained in Göttingen, when looking at the guest list for the Research Alumni Conference, “... it’s an impressive group of people.”

**Bernd Hackstette**

heads the Alumni Office at the University of Göttingen and is Managing Director of Alumni Göttingen e.V.

Contact:

bernd.hackstette@zvw.uni-goettingen.de
www.uni-goettingen.de/en/1982.html

» Research alumni work is not about addressing a mass audience«

The University of Göttingen was among the winners in the first round of the “Research Alumni Strategies” competition. How has this influenced your research alumni work?

The Research Alumni Conference we held in San Francisco in September 2014 kicked off our research alumni activities at the University of Göttingen. It was attended by more than 60 scientists who had conducted research on the Göttingen campus at some point in the past and now live in the US and Canada. What made the conference special was that, apart from our own research alumni, alumni from the Göttingen Max Planck Institute, the German Primate Center and the German Aerospace Centre in Göttingen were also on hand. The conference also served to intensify networking between our former and current researchers, thus securing the basis for future research cooperation.

How is your office staffed?

Our research alumni outreach is coordinated by our central alumni office on the university campus. But our work can only be effective if institutes, research centers and other administrative areas are actively involved. The Welcome

Center plays an important role: Providing international scientists with optimal support during their stay forms the best possible basis for long-term ties with the research alumni.

Were there any surprises when setting up your research alumni program?

We were both surprised and pleased at the great interest shown by the former Lichtenberg fellows, who in some cases had only spent a single semester in Göttingen. It seems good support and personal contacts are key in forming lasting relationships.


What goals have you set for the coming years?

We aim to expand our Alumni Göttingen program with research alumni conferences around the world. Our research alumni in India and China have already shown great interest in the idea. We would also like to give our global research alumni the chance to make better use of the online services provided by the Lower Saxony State and University Library in Göttingen, and we are currently conducting a pilot project with our Indonesian partner university IPB in Bogor to test this out.

Do you foresee any obstacles to the activities you have planned for the future?

Networking with facilitators and partners at institutes, centers and in administration takes up a lot of time and only works through personal contacts. It's important to nurture those contacts on a regular basis – not least when it comes to long-term networking with former researchers. In research alumni work, you're not addressing a mass audience. That makes it extremely time-intensive.

What advice would you give to institutes wanting to set up a research alumni network?

They should establish contact with international scientists who are currently working at the university and exploit the personal contacts maintained by the departments. Many professors – including emeriti – are still in contact with their former guest researchers and support research alumni work in their respective universities. But they must be contacted directly and be informed about the alumni activities. 



Targeting Unique Potential

The University of Heidelberg builds on existing networks to advance its research alumni work. | by Angelika Fritsche

Utilize and expand existing networks. This is the research alumni strategy adopted at the University of Heidelberg – one that picked up an award at the 2011 Ideas Competition: “Research Alumni of German Universities”. In its work, the university concentrates primarily on cooperation with research alumni in India, Italy and the US.



Nurturing contacts and providing advice and support start the minute research alumni set foot in Heidelberg. If, for example, a scientist wants to continue their career in another country, the University of Heidelberg assists the move with a special advisory and service program.

In the Ideas Competition 2011, the jury was impressed by the exemplary networking that takes place in Heidelberg. The university's central alumni initiative, Heidelberg Alumni International (HAI), ensures that research alumni can enter into cooperation activities with non-university research institutes based in Heidelberg. This gives them access to highly skilled and experienced colleagues, such as the research team at the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ).

Even before the competition, the University of Heidelberg had already begun to focus on research alumni and had approached them as part of its regular alumni relations work. But it was the competition that actually triggered the idea for a dedicated strategy that recognizes the unique potential of this specific target group and provides tailored services for it.

Heidelberg University has since integrated research alumni work into its main alumni department, has appointed research alumni staff and hired a part-time administrative assistant to help them in their work. As research alumni expert Silke Rodenberg (see adjacent interview) explains: “We’d be unable to manage the increasing workload without the possibility to draw on the existing infrastructure, the huge service portfolio and the existing alumni network that has grown as part of the university’s general alumni program.”



Silke Rodenberg

heads the Heidelberg Alumni International (HAI) office at the University of Heidelberg.

Contact:

rodenberg@zuv.uni-heidelberg.de

www.alumni.uni-heidelberg.de/en/index.html

»Appreciation for research alumni work must also improve within universities themselves«

What would you say is currently the most important tool in your research alumni work?

The HAIreconnect fellowship program, which we use to invite former guest researchers from abroad who have worked either at the University of Heidelberg or at one of the city's non-university research institutes to come back for a short research stay. The program provides research alumni with funding to enable them to return to Heidelberg, gives them the opportunity to meet former colleagues, renew professional contacts, exchange views and experience on current research projects, and generally find out what Heidelberg has to offer as a research location. What's more, the alumni return to their places of work as 'research ambassadors' and stay in touch with our alumni office. For us as a university, the fellowship is an important tool for renewing ties with international researchers and in winning them over as Heidelberg research ambassadors. The institutes involved also benefit from HAIreconnect in that they can nominate research alumni for fellowships and thus support projects without having to contribute financially.

Which instruments have proven especially successful in Heidelberg?

Networking meetings abroad have proven extremely useful in the initial activities needed to recruit potential alumni. These help raise awareness for the network, the associated portfolio of services and the opportunities they bring. Of all permanent features, I'd say HAIreconnect has been the most successful. But we also rely on regular communication via newsletters which we publish on our website, providing brief news along with information about our services. It's important to maintain regular contact because research alumni have more than one alma mater and have forged ties with multiple universities in the course of their careers. We provide them with interesting and useful information and services to ensure that they themselves believe it is worth staying in touch.

What criteria did you use to select the various program components?

As in other areas, the tools we use in our research alumni work must be attractive to the target group and be suitable for long-term

implementation by the alumni team. We have also given priority to instruments with a lasting effect.

What would you like to achieve with future research alumni activities?

First and foremost, we want to expand the network. This means greater involvement of institutes and faculties to enable us to recruit guest researchers while they are actually in Heidelberg. We'd also like to repeat the huge success achieved in winning our new partner university in the US, the University of Notre Dame. The foundation for that partnership was laid at a research alumni meeting.

Do you foresee any obstacles to any of the future activities you have planned?

More staffing and more funding will be needed over time if we are to maintain regular communication. And as the network grows, it will take more time to support individual researchers. There are no plans at the moment for universities to create jobs in this new and important area. Thus, to ensure long-term success, perceptions of and appreciation for research alumni work must also improve within universities themselves.

What would you advise institutions that are just starting out in research alumni work?

They should secure the approval and support of upper management, and bring the respective institutes on board from the outset. They should approach visiting researchers at an early juncture – preferably during their stay – and not wait until they have gone back home. They should make good use of available infrastructure, not set their sights too high and aim for long-term success.

Personal Contact is Key

The University of Cologne uses its research alumni activities to promote research and nurture international ties. | by Veronika Renkes



Using the slogan “Die persönliche Bindung entscheidet – Die Forschenden selbst müssen im Mittelpunkt stehen” (Personal Contact is Key: Focus on Researchers Themselves), the University of Cologne was among the winners of the 2012 Ideas Competition “Research Alumni of German Universities”. The university’s research alumni network – Albert’s Global Researcher Network – places particular importance on personal ties with participating researchers.



To ensure these personal ties can grow, Cologne University alumni activities begin with the first visit of future research alumni to Cologne. Network-building is a key first step in all of this. Regular Albert’s Research ‘Workshops’ are held to which all international guest researchers currently working at the university are invited and at which they are informed about the services, benefits and opportunities to be had from the network.

To intensify and secure professional cooperation with the alumni, the University of Cologne has developed a range of promotional measures. Former guest researchers can apply for short-term fellowships to attend seminars and conferences held at the university, but they must apply in conjunction with their former hosts from Cologne. A joint application with their former host institute is a prerequisite for obtaining the Albert’s Researcher Reunion Grant (an invitation with funding to return to Cologne) or to participate in the university’s External Faculty Program.

At Cologne University, research alumni relations work takes place in close cooperation with the vice rectors for research and international affairs, thus underlining its strategic importance in promoting research and nurturing relations with the Cologne alma mater. The research alumni office is located in the university’s Welcome Center where, in addition to the manager, two full-time employees oversee the research alumni network. A part-time position has also been created for network administration and communications work using web-based media.

A prerequisite for research alumni work receiving a permanent place in the University of Cologne’s scope of activity was, however, the award it received in the Ideas Competition “Research Alumni of German Universities” in 2012. “The prestige this brought, not to mention the funding that accompanied the award, has really helped to promote our work and secure the support of the university’s management, institute directors and professors,” says Dr. Johannes Müller (see adjacent interview).

»A mix of regular information and targeted personal contact«

What is currently the most important tool in your research alumni work?

The key instrument in our research alumni activities is our “Reunion Grant” – an eight-week reunion fellowship which former guest researchers can apply for on invitation from a host professor at the university. We primarily support invitations with a long-term perspective. These include research cooperation activities, joint third-party-funded projects and teaching projects. The grant is seen as a kind of start-up funding or ‘enabler’ to foster longer-term cooperation. It’s an extremely important part of our research alumni program because ongoing maintenance of contacts with young researchers from abroad ensures that the benefits for both sides can be repeatedly exploited.

Which instruments have proven particularly successful?

Apart from the Reunion Grant and a smaller-scale “Conference Scholarship”, which we use to invite research alumni to scientific conferences and workshops, we use a mix of regular information and targeted personal contact. This includes web-based information services, social media, a traditional newsletter with research-relevant news and personal invitations to events in researchers’ countries of origin. With offices in New York in the US, New Delhi in India and Beijing in China, the University of Cologne hosts events in these cities on a regular basis – often integrating research alumni as speakers. We have already held alumni conferences in all three countries and in the future, we will use a virtual conference hub to offer select scientific events (seminars and workshops) for registered research alumni, either via live stream or as video recordings. The alumni will also be able to actively participate in those conferences if they choose to.



Dr. Johannes Müller

heads Department 94: International Science, Guest Researchers and University Partnerships at the University of Cologne.

Contact:

j.mueller@verw.uni-koeln.de

<http://international.uni-koeln.de/6766.html?&L=1>

www.researcher-alumni.uni-koeln.de

What criteria did you apply in selecting the instruments you use?

Research alumni work is about promoting research and nurturing international relations. We maintain contact with the research alumni following their stay in Cologne to ensure that the university remains in their minds as a potential research partner and, when the time is right, to make specific offers to revive the contact and facilitate mutually beneficial research cooperation. We want to establish a professional network that focuses on the career interests of the alumni and on the university’s research-related interests. Research alumni connections play a key role in shaping our international ties, because the foreign researchers usually work at renowned research institutes abroad. This is what dictates the criteria we apply when choosing the instruments we use: They must be research-related, focus on the professional interests of the alumni and serve the strategic goals of research and international relations at the University of Cologne.

Were there any surprises when setting up the research alumni program?

At the beginning, we had hoped to address the research alumni as a virtual, globally networked

group beyond the boundaries of their research discipline. Adopting this graduate alumni approach turned out to be a mistake: Research alumni tend not to get nostalgic and have only indirect emotional links to the host university. This was very evident when trying to organize a network conference. An invitation to a multi-discipline conference is not an attractive option for this particular alumni group – they’re not looking for ‘summer school 2.0’. They expect research-focused, discipline-related invitations and events. A general alma mater revival meeting just doesn’t work with research alumni.

What advice would you give to institutions wishing to set up their own research alumni program?

Research alumni work is not the same as general alumni relations. Universities should be aware of this and structure the way they integrate their research alumni to suit. I’d recommend taking a research-related approach to research alumni work. Not just because it serves the respective institution, but because it’s what the research alumni expect.



New Standards through Web 2.0

Personal contact and communication form the basis of all research alumni work, but social networks are an ideal complement. They are affordable, manageable and accessible worldwide. Universities report on their experience.

| by Barbara Sheldon and Veronika Schilling

Facebook, LinkedIn, Research Gate ... the list goes on. Thanks to the new media, researchers around the world are better connected than ever before and can network across continents via the internet. So what do they use online exchange for? Perhaps to share scientific findings and research questions they are investigating and want answers to? Or is it more to raise awareness to work they have published and to market themselves via the worldwide web? Or maybe they are looking for like-minded colleagues with similar interests, regardless of their physical location.

Anyone involved with research alumni asks themselves these questions and there is really no answer. While there is broad consensus among research alumni advisors that personal relations, contacts and experiences are vital in establishing lasting alumni ties, social media can be a useful complement – an additional channel with which to nurture contacts, especially when resources are scarce and there is little time for travel and effort-intensive events. Many of the institutions in Germany have begun using social media and what they are finding is that it is the research alumni themselves who decide which social media group they find attractive and of interest over time.







Social Media Use in Alumni Relations

Three universities report on their experiences so far.

University of Göttingen

"The University of Göttingen has established alumni communities on Facebook, XING and LinkedIn. With LinkedIn being the only one relevant to international research alumni activity, this network was used intensively to establish contact with the research alumni and to advertise the research alumni conference in San Francisco."

Bernd Hackstette, University of Göttingen, Head of the Alumni Office and Managing Director, Alumni Göttingen e.V.

University of Heidelberg

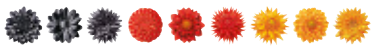
"In Heidelberg, we mainly use the university's own online portal, HALnet, which offers more or less the same features and content as public networks. As the registration process for the Heidelberg Alumni Network is also managed via this medium and we like to see staff, researchers and students use HALnet, we have a very large user community which is both diverse and geographically dispersed. The research alumni have their own HALnet area, but they can also use all the other services on offer and contact people at a more general level. We use HALnet to send research alumni a wide range of information at regular intervals – materials for research alumni activities and details of fellowship programs, vacant positions and so on. It's also used for a wide range of other purposes, such as event organization, participant registration and follow-up, and has proven extremely useful so far. We also place teasers in public networks like LinkedIn, Facebook and Xing, although I must say that only LinkedIn plays a noteworthy role in our research alumni activities. Information placed in public networks is only meant to attract attention, with the more detailed information being communicated via our own HALnet platform."

Silke Rodenberg, University of Heidelberg, Head of the Heidelberg Alumni International Office

University of Cologne

"We use social media in research alumni work largely to provide advance information about our Researcher Network services, such as fellowships and events, and to document these either as they are happening or after the fact. We also use social media to provide information about the university's international activities and research work, and about the city of Cologne. Alongside the website, we use the general social media accounts like Facebook, Twitter and Storify which are run by the International Office. There's also a closed Facebook group specially tailored to research alumni and we have a Wordpress blog which also serves as a newsletter. The general social media accounts have had increased interaction in the past months. Establishing contact, however, say with people interested in the Reunion Grant, usually happens via e-mail. Although the content we place in the Facebook group is regularly read, active participation by group members rarely takes place. In the medium term, we want to try to provide stimulus (for example, with Facebook questions) wherever content allows."

Dr. Johannes Müller, University of Cologne, Department 9 – International Faculty, Head of Section 94 – International Science, Guest Researchers and University Partnerships Albert's International Assistance



Alumni-focused Social Networks

A look at two selected services



Alumniportal Deutschland

The Alumniportal Deutschland is a social network that promotes networking and knowledge transfer between German alumni, businesses, universities and organizations. It targets “Germany alumni” – people from all over the world who have studied, researched or worked in Germany – and provides a platform on which they can stay in touch with Germany and exchange knowledge and experience. People who were educated or trained at a German institute abroad are also invited to become members of Alumniportal Deutschland.

The portal is the result of a joint cooperation project involving the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the German Academic Exchange, the Goethe Institute and GLZ, a German-based development cooperation agency (the project leader). The project is jointly financed by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the German Federal Foreign Office.

Possible usages by Research Alumni Advisors: Universities can use the portal in many ways to assist their alumni work. They can introduce themselves, their courses of study and their alumni services, and search for and re-establish contact with alumni worldwide. Using Web 2.0 features, Alumniportal Deutschland supplements existing university websites.

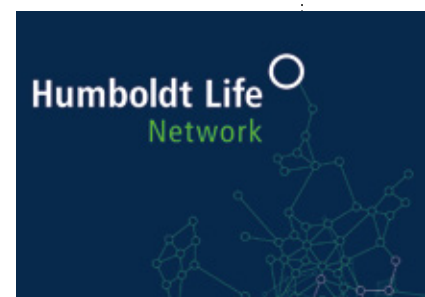
Website: www.alumniportal-deutschland.org

Humboldt Life

Humboldt Life is the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation’s online network specially developed for fellows, prize winners, alumni, their academic hosts, expert representatives and independent peer reviewers. Each member has a Humboldt Life user profile in which they provide information about themselves and their research focus. They can also create their own publications lists. Using photos and blog entries, members capture memorable moments, perhaps a research award ceremony or a scene from their field research, to provide an insight into their research reality. An event diary can be used to keep a note of conferences and seminars, and discussion groups can also be created. Humboldt Life thus provides an exclusive service and, by allowing guest membership, broadens the network and enables invitations to be sent to interesting individuals who have not yet developed Humboldt ties.

Possible usages by Research Alumni Advisors: Research alumni advisors at German universities and research institutes can obtain access to Humboldt Life and use it as a communication tool in their alumni work in order to stay in touch with Humboldtians in their respective organizations and/or to join the Research Alumni Advisors Network discussion group.

Website: www.humboldt-life.de



Nurturing Long-term Relations

Welcome centers lay the foundation for research alumni activities.

| by Barbara Sheldon

Prior to engaging in research alumni activities, there is quite a bit of welcoming work to do. An institution that invests in international guests before they actually arrive, that provides support in all administrative, social and personal issues related to arrival and stay and integrates the researchers while they are in Germany, more or less ensures that they will not leave as mere guests, but as fully fledged alumni. In other words, research alumni activities would be difficult to imagine without the Welcome Centers. This is why the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation has worked for the past decade to foster a culture of welcome at universities in Germany – one that uses a range of initiatives in the various phases of a guest researcher's stay*.

For more information on activities involving the culture of welcome at the Humboldt Foundation, see:

www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/culture-of-welcome.html

Support upon arrival

2



"You are welcome!"
Award for Germany's
Friendliest Immigration Office

1

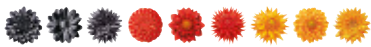
Support in preparing for the research stay

* **Freundlichste Ausländerbehörde (Germany's Friendliest Immigration Office):**

in cooperation with the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft

Welcome Centres: in cooperation with the Stifterverband and the Deutsche Telekom Foundation

Research Alumni: funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research



WELCOME CENTRE

for mobile researchers

"Welcome Centre for internationally mobile researchers" contest

Support during the research stay

3

The ideas competition
"Research alumni of
universities in Germany"

**Ideas
Com-
petition**
Research
Alumni



4

Partnership after the research stay

The Perfect Trio

Every university develops its own research alumni relations program, tailoring it to the alma mater's goals and needs. Activities that have proved useful time and again are featured in the following "Research Alumni Work Checklist".

| by Barbara Sheldon

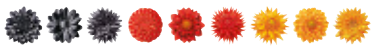


Building structures for research alumni work, using research alumni for strategic responsibilities, offering science-related services for this particular group of alumni: These are the three pillars that occur again and again in university concepts which provided best practices over the past five years (see the article "Budding but Delicate", pp. 18-23). Concepts for research alumni activities have given rise to many good ideas which have been tested in practice (see the examples on pages 30-35). There is evidence that to be effective, research alumni work must take into account the specific goals of the university, the disciplinary and regional focus areas – and local conditions. This means that a given approach cannot simply be transferred from one university to another. Even so, certain activities that tend to keep cropping up in some form or another can serve as reference points for universities wanting to introduce their own research alumni programs.



1. Creating structures for research alumni work

- Establish a unit responsible for research alumni work, for example in the Alumni Office or in the international relations section with a direct line of communication to management
- Secure appreciation for research alumni work within the institution, say by involving management or by linking to key in-house strategies
- Identify the interfaces between the Welcome Center and the research alumni unit, particularly regarding the opportunity to continue to use alumni contact data after an initial visit
- Provide information about the new services offered by the research alumni unit to the institutes within the university



2. Using research alumni for strategic responsibilities in universities



Outside Germany

- “Living examples” to demonstrate the career development benefits of a research visit in Germany – awaken interest among young researchers
- Facilitators in the provision of information about Germany as a research location and about the guest institute, with reference to advisory services in relation to funding programs
- Talent scouts to identify young talented scientists
- Door opener abroad in seeking university partnerships
- Advisors to universities and representatives of universities abroad

In Germany (during a renewed research stay)

- Lecturers at university events
- Point of contacts for and advisors to the university with regard to the country of origin of the research alumni

3. Science-related services for research alumni



Outside Germany

- Newsletters with information relative to research alumni
- ‘Who’s where’ at universities in Germany: information on new appointments and staff additions of particular interest to research alumni, with options for making contact via channels such as social media
- ‘Who’s where’ in the research alumni’s country of residence (excluding Germany): information on other researchers in the same disciplines and beyond, together with options to make contact via channels such as social media
- Information on funding opportunities of relevance for research alumni
- Access to select online resources (such as libraries) of the host institute in Germany
- Events hosted by the German host institute abroad (special events or satellite events at specialist conferences)
- ‘Ambassador’ title as a means of strengthening the position of research alumni outside Germany
- Awards for especially active alumni

In Germany (during a renewed research stay)

- Grants for renewed stays, possibly involving young researchers connected to research alumni where appropriate
- Access to university resources during the stay, e. g. laboratories, libraries, conference facilities, work booths
- Access to select services offered by the Welcome Centers during renewed periods of research
- Access to events and further education and training options at the university
- Involvement in events as speakers



»Once a Humboldtian, always a Humboldtian«



The Humboldt Network offers Humboldtians worldwide a wealth of personal and professional benefits, says a recent study. In an interview, Enno Aufderheide, Secretary General of the Humboldt Foundation, talks about the value of alumni networks and the challenges they bring.
| Interview by Veronika Renkes



Dr. Enno Aufderheide has served as Secretary General of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation since July 2010. A biologist by training, Aufderheide previously held senior positions at leading science and research institutes in Germany, including the Max Planck Society, the German Aerospace Center (DLR), the German Council of Science and Humanities and the Helmholtz Association.



Why does the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation engage in alumni activities?

The special role the Foundation plays in the German research environment has always involved combining individual promotion of highly qualified scientists with their life-long integration into a globally operating network of excellence. This means creating a German research network that forges lasting ties between Germany and research elite around the world: 'Once a Humboldtian, always a Humboldtian'. Pro-active alumni work is vital if we are to achieve this long-term goal.

Due to its role in the German research environment, the Foundation is an institution which is mainly publicly funded. Which ministries support your work and why?

The German Foreign Office, because our work helps it achieve its foreign cultural policy goals. The Federal German Ministry for Education and Research, whose research policy aims match our work. And the Federal German Ministry for Economic Cooperation, whose work largely focuses on cooperation with emerging economies and developing countries – to name the three main funders.

» For our alumni, reputation, belonging to a group of like-minded people and maintaining interesting personal and professional contacts play a key role.«

How does the Humboldt Foundation secure its ties with alumni?

We begin forging links long before anyone actually becomes an alumnus or alumna, starting as early as when the researchers we sponsor first arrive. It's important that all Humboldtians have dedicated contact persons in the Humboldt Foundation headquarters so they are assured assistance whenever they need it. And it is also important that we come into contact with Humboldtians at least three times during their stay in Germany by inviting them to events. The specially organized visit to Schloss Bellevue, the official residence of the German President, leaves a particularly lasting impression. For the past 60 years or so, the German President has held annual receptions for around 800 Humboldtians and their families. Many say that research back home does not enjoy the same status as it does in Germany and they really value the fact that the German President makes time for them.

Encounters with the researchers you sponsor, both in Germany and abroad, are part of your everyday activities. Are there specific topics that your alumni tend to bring up time and time again? Meeting Humboldtians is one of the particularly nice things about my role as Secretary General. They often tell me that their first research stay in Germany was a key step in their career – most of them go on to be extremely successful upon returning home or in moving to other countries. They really want to stay in touch with Germany. Also, many Humboldtians are committed to making young researchers in their immediate environment aware of the opportunities to be had from a research stay in Germany.

Talking about the Humboldt Network, how important is it to your alumni and what role does money play in it all?

When trying to pinpoint what makes the Humboldt Network so special, we've asked ourselves these questions and many others. In the past few years we've gone so far as to conduct a comprehensive study in order to find the answers. A total of 6,951 members of the Humboldt Network took part in the survey, answering questions online or in personal interviews. The results, which we received in March 2015, confirm the huge personal and professional benefits the network affords its members, and show that it cements ties between Humboldtians themselves and between them and Germany. Areas for improvement include raising awareness to the funding opportunities for alumni and their use by members from highly-developed industrialized countries. The Foundation's services are most widely used in countries where there are few alternative funding options. The Foundation is working on a range of measures and instruments to make the network even more attractive. Money, meaning the alumni funding program, naturally plays a role but there is clearly



» Our alumni value the fact that the German President makes time for them.«



««

another dimension that makes the network attractive – things like reputation, belonging to a group of like-minded people and making interesting personal and professional contacts are seen as just as important.

You mentioned the role of the Humboldt Network today. What role have the Alexander von Humboldt alumni programs played over the past sixty years?

The alumni programs have made it possible to establish the Humboldt Network and thus promote extremely talented people of great influence in the scientific community that are tied to Germany. Some Humboldtians, however, are also active in areas other than research. This helps the network spread and have a system-changing impact in very different sectors.

» As a multi-discipline network, the Humboldt Network offers great opportunities at a professional and personal level.«

Can you exemplify this point by referring to individual people?

Let me give you three examples from very different parts of the world. The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation promoted scientists from Eastern Europe during the Cold War and constantly stayed in contact with them via the alumni program. After the demise of the Communist regime, these researchers with experience of working in Germany were in a position to build the new political system. In 2001, for example, some 20 years after his first Foundation-sponsored stay in Germany, Serbian philosopher Zoran Djindjic, a dissident under the Communist dictatorship, became the first Prime Minister of post-Communist Serbia. And more recently, Humboldt alumni have been shaping American energy and environment policy since 2009: As a winner of the Humboldt Research Award, the US energy minister and physicist Ernest Moniz conducted

research at several institutes in Germany – as did his predecessor, subsequent Nobel Prize laureate Steven Chu.

Looking ahead, what would you say are the greatest challenges you face in your alumni relations work over the next ten years?

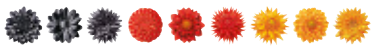
We want the Humboldt Network to remain an important network for the world's top researchers. While most researchers tend to see their professional network as the most important, our study has shown that with its multi-discipline approach, the Humboldt Network offers huge opportunities at the professional and personal level. For Humboldtians, the Humboldt Network is highly important. Today, almost every Humboldtian has multiple alumni identities, meaning ties to more than one institution. We need to consider this in just the same way as changes in the geography of knowledge, i. e. new "research powers", new mobility patterns and new cooperation patterns. We see this as a challenge to develop our programs and services in such a way that the special benefits of the Humboldt Network are further enhanced, thereby ensuring that the network remains attractive to future generations of Humboldtians from countries all over the world.

We are said to be living in an era of crises. The Foundation undoubtedly has alumni who are directly affected by these crises.

What role can alumni play? What role does the Foundation play?

This immediately brings the late Humboldtian Neville Alexander to mind. He was a fellow-activist of Nelson Mandela and was in prison with him on Robben Island. And like Mandela, who later became President of South Africa, Alexander was also persecuted for criticizing the system. Scientists, whether they are alumni or not, are critical thinkers per se. As such, they often play a role in overcoming crises, but they are also vulnerable to the risks involved. I think that we in Germany should provide the impetus to show that scientific innovation and freedom of speech go hand in hand, that they are integral components of an academic culture – and that the research community has a particular responsibility to help persecuted researchers. Initiatives of this kind are already underway in some countries. The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation could play a role in all of this.





Support in All Career Phases

A brief introduction to the Humboldt Foundation's alumni programs
| by Klaus Manderla

Since the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation was established some 60 years ago, the Humboldt Network has become both its centerpiece and its distinguishing feature. The network comprises more than 26,000 Humboldtians from across the disciplines in more than 140 countries along with their hosts in Germany. In keeping with the principle of "Once a Humboldtian, always a Humboldtian", members remain in the network their whole lives long.

In maintaining the Humboldt Network – by nurturing, strengthening and expanding research-based contacts between sponsored researchers and German colleagues, and between Humboldtians around the world – we pursue two central objectives. We strive to assist the internationalization of the German science and research landscape, and to support Germany's foreign cultural and education policy in ways which go beyond research collaborations. Alumni funding programs foster Humboldtians' individual paths and personal development, and they support cooperation activities between those in the network. The measures described below are used to support alumni and also the network for alumni outside Germany.

Funding reintegration in the country of origin via Return Fellowships for certain countries

With the initial research stay at an end, it's time for most Humboldtians to either go back home or move to another country. If they return to certain countries with limited foreign currency reserves, the Foundation offers them a 12-month fellowship to enable their seamless transition into the local research environment.

Funding a renewed stay in Germany

Back in their home country or country of residence, Humboldtians continue their careers and many quickly move into top positions. Ideally, they keep up their ties with Germany. Several years on, the Foundation funds return visits for them to conduct renewed research in Germany. Humboldtians can conduct joint research for

up to three months, either with their former hosts or with other researchers, or they can participate in conferences in Germany by giving presentations.

Promotion through the provision of equipment and materials for countries with limited foreign currency reserves

When returning to some countries where hard currency is in short supply, Humboldtians lack the equipment and materials they had access to during their research stay in Germany and which they need to continue their research back home. The Foundation supports them by providing particular equipment or materials.

Promoting long-term research cooperation activities with researchers in Germany

Humboldtians who have resettled outside Germany and who are responsible for research areas and research teams can enter into comprehensive, longer-term cooperation with colleagues in Germany. Cooperation of this kind involves the Humboldtian and their German host, along with other (junior) scientists at the respective institute in Germany and abroad.

Promoting events and other network initiatives outside Germany

The Humboldt Foundation headquarters activates the Humboldt Network at events held outside Germany to which Humboldtians from a specific country or region are invited. Young scientists are also invited to participate in these events with the aim of sending far-reaching signals to the respective research environment. The Foundation also supports events organized by Humboldtians themselves.

Humboldt Alumni Award to promote innovative networking initiatives from Humboldtians abroad

The network is kept alive by the initiatives of Humboldtians in more than 140 countries. Annual awards are presented for especially innovative ideas which connect Humboldtians in specific countries and regions.

Dr. Klaus Manderla is Head of Division Asia and Alumni Officer at the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

Research Alumni in their Own Words

A research stay in Germany, including the contacts and network that go with it, are important building blocks in a successful scientific career. These experiences, reported widely by alumni of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, can reasonably be assumed to apply for other alumni relationships as well – and are an excellent starting point for research alumni outreach efforts. Eight research alumni from the Humboldt Foundation were asked for their opinion on this at the Annual Meeting in Berlin in June 2015.

| Protocol: Veronika Schilling

» Each research stay in Germany, in my case in Mannheim at the Institute for German Language, is first and foremost a wonderful opportunity to re-kindle old contacts, to make new ones, to familiarize oneself with new projects at the institute and perhaps even to find partners for collaboration on new projects. I'm already looking forward to our next joint project. «

Ruxandra Cosma, Professor for Comparative Linguistics, University of Bucharest, Romania. During her most recent research stay in Mannheim she undertook a comparative exploration of the syntax of modality in different languages.



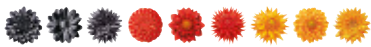
» My research visit changed my life. It was a real turning point. Immediately after the end of my Humboldt Fellowship, I received a position with my host institution and ended up staying in Germany. I've now expanded the research project I was working on at the time. «

Thamy Pogrebinski, Professor for Political Science, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Since 2014 she has been researching at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center on the impact of democratic innovations on the quality of a democracy.



» Being an alumnus of the Humboldt Foundation for me means an ongoing chance to conduct research with the aid of international materials, books, databases, etc. It also conveys a certain prestige among my colleagues. «

Héctor Miguens, Professor for Private Law, Universidad Austral, Argentina. He most recently spent time researching at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law in Hamburg, e.g. in the area of "Comparative Insolvency Law".



» The Humboldt Foundation has a strong global network. I have opportunities to make contacts with colleagues in the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. That kind of thing is highly necessary for my interdisciplinary research. «

Myles Jackson, Professor for the History of Science, New York University, USA. At the University of Stuttgart he most recently researched the relationship between music, the natural sciences and technology from the 18th century through today.



» My research stays in Germany are always beneficial on a professional level: The academic interaction with staff and students, the excellent research infrastructures and the professional attitude of my scientific host (institutes) are quite phenomenal. «

Heather Marco, Zoologist, University of Cape Town, South Africa. She spent time during her most recent stay at the University of Osnabrück researching for her specialist field, neuroendocrinology.



» I feel very privileged to be a Humboldtianerin. For me, it means to be a part of a large world-wide network of distinguished researchers and scholars. A good deal of my most productive scholarly collaboration has been initiated from my Humboldt research contacts. «

Marina Bykova, Professor of Philosophy, North Carolina State University, USA. She most recently spent time at the University of Bonn, researching topics that included the history of continental philosophy in the 19th century.



» My latest research stay gave me the chance to coordinate projects that I'd already initiated with German colleagues and their partner institutions directly on site and, by working together side-by-side on a daily basis, to raise the quality of our collaboration immensely. «

Paulo Soethe, Professor of German studies, Universidade Federal do Paraná, Brazil. He was most recently involved with two projects at the University of Potsdam to renew German/Brazilian academic relationships and received the 2015 DAAD Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm Prize.



» I have known numerous top marine researchers in Germany, which is highly important and helpful for me to continue the research of Kuroshio Power Plant technologies. «

Falin Chen, Professor for Hydromechanics, National Taiwan University, Taiwan. He most recently spent time at the Center for Marine Environmental Sciences (marum) at the University of Bremen, researching renewable energy in oceans.

Signs of Change

Closer collaboration with the Humboldt Foundation's US-based research alumni

| by Cathleen S. Fisher



Visit the website of any college or university in the United States and you will likely find a link to the institution's alumni association as well as an office for alumni relations. Boasting a strong cultural tradition of volunteerism and philanthropic giving, US universities and colleges, both private and public, devote millions of dollars and staff hours each year to cultivating lifelong connections to former students. Using a broad array of tools, universities seek to establish a strong and attractive institutional brand, build affinity with alumni, and provide valued services. Their broader aim is to motivate alumni to engage on the institution's behalf – as advocates, as volunteers, and as donors.

While US universities invest significantly in maintaining and strengthening ties to their former students, they have paid far less attention to the scientists and scholars from abroad, who have been affiliated with their institutions – their “research alumni”.



Dr. Cathleen S. Fisher has served as President of the American Friends of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AFAvH) since 2008 and has worked in the area of transatlantic and German-American relations for over 25 years. She previously served as Deputy Director of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies (AICGS) at Johns Hopkins University and as Senior Associate at the Henry L. Stimson Center, a research institute focused on international relations and security policy. She has also conducted research in political science and security policy at Emory University and Georgetown University.



Why are “research alumni” relatively neglected in a country that has honed alumni relations and outreach to a well developed art?

The reasons are many. First, US higher education institutions view former students as critical resources in their efforts to attract strong applications, boost donations, and generate interest. The neglect of faculty or “research alumni”, however, also reflects the strong competitive position of US research institutions in the postwar period. Attracted by the opportunities of world-class institutions and a large and diverse system of higher education, the United States for decades has been able to “internationalize” its research enterprise through a steady inward flow of foreign scientists, scholars, and engineers to American institutions.

But change is on the horizon. Although the United States continues to attract large numbers of foreign graduate students and researchers, current trends suggest that reliance on a model of “brain capture” in perpetuity is unsustainable and imprudent. With federal research budgets stagnant or falling, many public research institutions under growing fiscal pressure, and tenure track opportunities shrinking, the competition for international research talent is significant and growing.

The time is therefore ripe for new thinking about US approaches to international research collaboration – and about the role of US research alumni, who may be uniquely qualified to help US and foreign institutions navigate the challenges of international research collaboration and to position their institutions competitively in an era of global science.

The US research alumni of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

Since 1953, over 5,300 scientists, scholars and engineers in the United States have benefitted from the support of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, carrying out



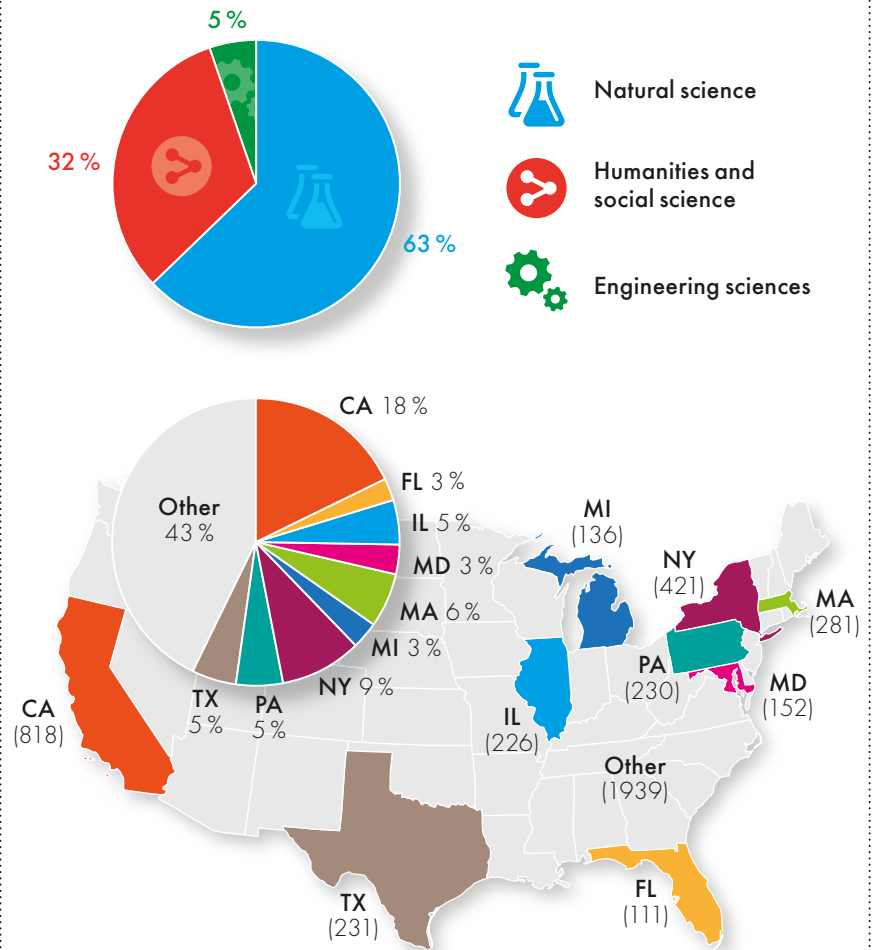
research projects in Germany in all disciplines. Today, nearly 5,000 research alumni of the foundation – US “Humboldtians” – are professionally active at over 1,200 institutions in all 50 states, with the vast majority at higher education institutions, many in senior or leadership positions.

Nurturing the connection to the US research alumni of the Humboldt Foundation is one of the principal functions of the Foundation’s professional partner in the United States, the American Friends of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AFAvH), a US nonprofit charitable organization established in 1999 and located in Washington, DC.

How does AFAvH engage such a large and diverse community of research alumni, connecting to the Humboldt Foundation’s larger global mission while adapting to the somewhat singular characteristics of the US market?

In engaging Humboldt Foundation research alumni in the United States, American Friends is guided by best practices of alumni engagement at the Humboldt Foundation and US universities. It has adapted many of these practices, however, to the specific needs and preferences of US Humboldtians, as expressed in an alumni survey conducted in 2012. Like alumni of the Humboldt Foundation around the world, a majority of US Humboldtians maintain both personal and professional ties to Germany, and many want to “give back” to the Humboldt Foundation. Only a small percentage of US Humboldtians are actively engaged with AFAvH or the Humboldt Foundation, however, and US alumni in general have made less use of the opportunities for alumni support provided by the Humboldt Foundation. Citing the pressure of other professional and personal commitments, US Humboldtians underscore that they have little time for volunteer engagement and need specific information about what they can do. US alumni are most strongly interested in promoting the Foundation’s programs to younger scholars, scientists, and

Research Alumni in the US



US Humboldtians by academic discipline (top)
and by US state (bottom); Source AFAvH, 2012

engineers and prefer alumni activities near to their geographic and disciplinary homes.

Finally, in developing its strategy for alumni engagement, American Friends is taking advantage of a unique period in the evolution of the US research enterprise. Across the United States, higher education and research institutions are engaged in vigorous debates about the “fundamentals” – the financing of and value of higher education, the impact of technology (especially MOOC’s), and the role of private versus public funding for research, to name just a few. At the national level, science policy makers and thought leaders are pushing for expanded US engagement in international research collaborations and exchanges so as to retain access to the best talent and ideas around the world and ensure the country’s future competitiveness. Beyond debate and discussion, many US colleges and universities are engaged in institution-wide efforts to become more “global”, mapping their international engagement, expanding recruitment of international students,





encouraging broader participation in study abroad programs, and modifying curricula to impart “cross-cultural competence”. New international partnerships are being forged, many building on faculty collaborations already in place.

The US research alumni of the Humboldt Foundation: Knowledge resources and change agents

Within this context, American Friends encourages US Humboldtians to become active both as knowledge resources and as potential change agents in order to encourage fuller US participation in international research collaborations more generally and with Germany in particular.

To advance this mission, American Friends uses three broad approaches to engage US alumni of the Humboldt Foundation:

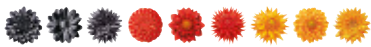
First, American Friends of the Humboldt Foundation emphasizes the professional relevance and utility of US Humboldtians’ international experience and networks. Beyond emotional appeals, AFAvH seeks to validate the value and relevance of Humboldtians’ international experience at this unique juncture in the US research enterprise. More specifically, it seeks to create concrete volunteer opportunities that showcase the insights of US Humboldtians in ways that benefit Humboldtians, US research institutions, US science and scholarship, and German-American research collaboration.

A network of alumni volunteers, the “Humboldtians on Campus” (HoCs), informs students, colleagues, and university administrators about the Foundation’s programs and their impact on knowledge production, career opportunities, and research institutions. American Friends also encourages “HoCs” and other US Humboldtians to share information about the quality, scope, and focus of German universities and other research institutions, as well as guidance on how they have solved the practical challenges – institutional, legal, and logistical – that often inhibit international

collaborations. Finally, US research alumni of the Humboldt Foundation are urged to weigh in on discussions at their respective institutions about strategic international engagement and to help build bridges between “bottom-up”, faculty-to-faculty international collaborations and “top-down” institutional goals and priorities for internationalization.

In addition, American Friends has launched a pilot program on the internationalization of the research enterprise that leverages the experience of the Foundation’s research alumni and the expertise of the Humboldt Foundation. In 2014, AFAvH hosted workshops on the impact of international mobility on scientific output and quality and the approaches of US and German universities to the challenges of global science. Workshops in 2015 will explore the challenges of crafting a more comprehensive and strategic approach to US international engagement in science, technology, and innovation, building on the German-American experience in research collaboration and drawing on insights from Germany’s approach to internationalization. These “real” programs are complemented by an online blog featuring contributions by alumni and other partners examining key issues related to the globalization of science and scholarship, the impact of international experience on science and science careers, and the nexus of science and policy.

Second, AFAvH is developing a diverse menu of volunteer opportunities scaled to accommodate different levels of commitment and time. American Friends offers a variety of means to engage the Humboldt Foundation research alumni in a meaningful way, from making a donation to the AFAvH Annual Fund, to providing a short testimonial or blog contribution for the website, to presentations at professional meetings, to service as a Humboldtian on Campus or member of the organization’s Alumni Council. Whenever possible, American Friends engages alumni where it is easiest for them – online, at small on-campus alumni gatherings, or at alumni receptions at the annual meetings of major scientific societies. Recognizing that resources to support alumni gatherings are often limited, the AFAvH Alumni Council provides a limited number of small grants to US Humboldtians who organize modest intellectual



Thanksgiving 2014 in Berlin:
US Ambassador John B. Emerson
carving a turkey on the occasion of
the reception for US Humboldtians.

and social alumni events. To encourage and facilitate US Humboldtians' use of the traditional alumni opportunities of the Foundation, American Friends has collected testimonials from US Humboldtians who had concluded a return research stay to Germany and developed a handbook containing practical tips and tools to assist alumni with organizing a Humboldt Kolleg. Finally, American Friends also encourages US Humboldtians to consider making a charitable donation to American Friends to support its programs to sustain and grow US engagement in research exchange with Germany.

Third, AFAvH uses technology and strategic partnerships to amplify its message and broaden its impact. Technology is an essential tool of modern alumni engagement. In addition to regular updates of alumni contact information and a new and expanded website, American Friends integrates social media into its promotional, alumni, and programmatic activities, in close coordination with the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. American Friends uses both Facebook and Twitter to communicate news about alumni accomplishments and to distribute information of possible

interest to US Humboldtians, including notifications of the Foundation's fellowship deadlines, announcements regarding American Friends programs and blog contributions, and articles describing important developments in the German research landscape. Partnerships with US and German organizations and institutions with a shared interest in encouraging fuller US participation in international collaborations are also essential.

The AFAvH approach to engagement of Humboldtians is in some ways peculiarly American, building on a strong cultural tradition of volunteerism, philanthropy, and alumni outreach. On the other hand, the United States is by no means unique in its growing interest in the internationalization of science, technology and innovation. Governments, universities, and scientific academies around the world are exploring and developing new modes of international collaboration and exchange in higher education and research. Research alumni can be an invaluable asset to early career researchers, to research institutions, and to governments seeking to adapt to the globalization of science and scholarship.



Alexander von Humboldt
Stiftung/Foundation

Connecting the World's Academic Elite with Germany

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation is unique in that it not only provides individual sponsorship for outstandingly qualified researchers but also integrates them in a world-spanning network of excellence during their entire lifetime. This "Humboldt Family" connects the world's academic elite with Germany.

For more than six decades, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation has fostered research cooperation between highly qualified researchers from abroad with those in Germany. Each year, the Humboldt Foundation enables upwards of 2,000 researchers from around the world to travel to Germany to work on research projects. The Foundation maintains a global, multi-discipline network of some 26,000 Humboldtians in more than 140 countries – among them 51 Nobel Prize winners. The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

- **sponsors research at the highest level:** The most important selection criterion is evidence of individual excellence. The Foundation sponsors the best scientists and scholars as well as prospective leaders irrespective of regional origin or disciplinary focus.
- **sponsors people:** Even today, advances in science are dependent on the excellence and, above all, the pioneering spirit of individual personalities. Thus the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation sponsors people, not projects. It does, however, help them to form teams and research alliances if these are important for achieving their aims.
- **promotes creativity through independence and freedom of scope:** Those sponsored by the Humboldt Foundation are free to choose their own research topics, their academic hosts and the scientific methods they wish to use.
- **sponsors researchers for an entire (academic) lifetime:** The Foundation's diverse portfolio of funding tools enables Humboldtians to foster contact with Germany and collaborate with their specialist colleagues even after they have returned to their own countries.
- **is independent:** Selection is based on the principle of academic self-governance: Committees composed of scientists and scholars of all academic disciplines decide who will be sponsored, independently and solely according to standards of academic excellence.
- **is neutral:** Sponsorship recipients are chosen without regard to religion, ethnic and social origin, nationality or gender. The Foundation is not governed by ideologically or commercially defined guidelines.
- **is flexible and personal:** The Foundation responds flexibly to individual requirements. Personal contact with its foreign guests and their families is a constitutive aspect of the Foundation's work.
- **is innovative:** In its ongoing dialogue with partners at home and abroad the Foundation identifies new challenges facing cooperation in science and cultural policy, developing potential solutions which it implements with the support of various different funders.
- **is professional:** The trust placed in the Foundation by public funders and private donors is a consequence of professional management. Headquarters abide by the requirement to use the funding economically, efficiently, lawfully and effectively without dispensing with the degree of flexibility appropriate to science.

For more information: www.humboldt-foundation.de

The annual Humboldt Foundation reception at Schloss Bellevue:
The event demonstrates Germany's high regard for Humboldtians.



»» Being a member of the Humboldt Family is something very special – a distinction. It is about collaboration across national and cultural boundaries, and worldwide understanding through common values.«

This quote is exemplary of the feedback from many Humboldt alumni who participated in the Humboldt Foundation's "Network Study" completed in 2015 (see the article "Budding but Delicate", pp. 18-23).



A supplement to *duz – DEUTSCHE UNIVERSITÄTSZEITUNG*, September 18, 2015.

The *duz SPECIAL* is published by the RAABE Fachverlag für Wissenschaftsinformation (Klett Group).

Publisher responsible for this edition

Alexander von Humboldt Foundation
Jean-Paul-Strasse 12, 53173 Bonn
Germany
Tel.: +49 (0) 228 833-0
Fax: +49 (0) 228 833-199
info@avh.de
www.humboldt-foundation.de

Project design

Dr. Barbara Sheldon
Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

Project management

Dr. Veronika Schilling
Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

Content and editing

Dr. Barbara Sheldon and Dr. Veronika Schilling
in collaboration with
RAABE Fachverlag für Wissenschaftsinformation, Berlin
Corporate Publishing-Redaktion
Angelika Fritsche and Veronika Renkes
www.redaktion-recherche.de

Design and typesetting

axeptDESIGN, Berlin, www.axeptdesign.de

Translation and proofreading

en:comms, Bonn, schuman@en-comms.com

Photos and illustrations

David Ausserhofer: p. 5, p. 44 (on the left), p. 46, pp. 48–50, p. 55 | axeptDESIGN: Cover, pp. 7–13, pp. 19–22 | Federal Government of Germany/Sandra Steins: p. 3 | Federal Government of Germany/Denzel: p. 4 | DAAD/Volker Lannert: p. 44 (in the middle) | Fotolia: p. 15 (ThreeArt), p. 37 (vege) | iStock: p. 24 (hkdesign), p. 25 (LdF), p. 26 (kyoshino), p. 27 (ILLYCH), p. 28 (gundula.grueterich), p. 29 (MadeByEve) | Christoph Mischke: p. 31 | photodisc p. 44 (on the right) | Oliver Ruether: p. 45 | University of Göttingen: p. 30 | University of Heidelberg: pp. 32–33 | University of Cologne: pp. 34–35 | U.S. Embassy Berlin: p. 53

Printing

KESSLER Druck + Medien GmbH & Co. KG, Bobingen

Publisher

Dr. Josef Raabe Verlags-GmbH
Fachverlag für Wissenschaftsinformation
Kaiser-Friedrich-Str. 90, 10585 Berlin
Tel.: +49 (0)30 21 29 87-0, Fax: +49 (0)30 21 29 87-20
www.raabe.de, www.duz.de

Dr. Wolfgang Heuser (Managing Publisher)
w.heuser@raabe.de

Stefanie Kollenberg (Coordination and Marketing)
s.kollenberg@raabe.de

Press date

August 2015

The publication is part of the "International Research Marketing" project conducted jointly by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Fraunhofer Gesellschaft. The goal of the project is to promote Germany – both at home and abroad – as an international center of research and to strengthen its position on the global science/research market. All measures implemented as part of the project are part of the "Werbung für den Innovations- und Forschungsstandort Deutschland" (promoting Germany as a center of innovation and research) initiative funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research under the brand "Research in Germany".

See also: www.research-in-germany.org

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