

**Report of the
2nd MPG PhD Network Meeting
Dresden November 5th – November 7th 2003**

Introduction	1
1. Organization	2
2. Contracts	3
3. Interdisciplinary Collaboration	4
4. Teaching	5
5. PhD Advisory Committees	6
6. MPG PhD Network Portal	7
7. Contact / Representatives	9
8. Participants	10

Introduction

Cultural and scientific progress ranks among the main characteristics of a developed society and is a reliable token of the welfare level it enjoys. The research institutes of the Max Planck Society (MPG) perform basic research in the interest of the general public in the natural sciences, life sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. The PhD students represent one of the main resources into MPG.

On the initiative of Andrea Raccanelli (former: MPI for Radioastronomy, Bonn) and Sadegh Khochfar (former: MPI for Astronomy, Heidelberg) a meeting with more than fifty PhD representative was held in April 2003 in Heidelberg. This meeting was meant to start a network to build communication and exchange structures among students and between students and the MPG.

A second meeting has been held in Dresden from Nov 5th to Nov 7th 2003. This second meeting had two major goals:

1. Continue the interaction PhD students representatives initiated in the first meeting. For this purpose a more complete structure of the network has been discussed and approved. New student representatives for the three sections have been elected. And the work from the working groups has been updated and renewed.
2. Provide an interface between students of different subjects. Sessions took place, where students of all disciplines, represented in the Max Planck Society, gave talks about their work or area of interest.

The president of the Max Planck Society Prof. Peter Gruss and Susanne Mellinghoff (contact person "Personal/Recht") joined the meeting to present the MPG and its structure as a research organization, showing great support for this network. This introduction was followed by a discussion giving the representatives the opportunity to draw their attention to their concerns.

We would like to thank Florian Mintert and Gernot Klein for their coordination and motivation to make the meeting a success; Katrin Lantsch, for the organization; Jan-Michel Rost, for his attention and the opening; Wulf Schiefenhövel and Christian Kaernbach, for interesting talks in the subjects death and memory and their support to the network; Prof. Dr. Gruss and Fr. Mellinghoff, for their support and participation.

We are sure that by communicating, and exchange experience and information, we can improve not only the quality of the final PhD works, but also the scientific and personal profile of the people involved. We hope that with the support of the MPG, our suggestions and projects will find agreement and be further developed.

1. ORGANIZATION

On the last meeting it was agreed to distribute work between Workgroups: Interdisciplinary collaboration, Contracts, PhD Advisory Committees (PACs), and Webgroup. These groups would collect information and develop a program about the main topics discussed in the Heidelberg meeting.

More specific positions and their duties were:

- PhD representatives: inform students and participate in Workgroups.
- Section representatives: contact PhD representatives of their section and promote the network and activities in their field.
- Spokesperson: contact between the Generalverwaltung (GV) and the PhD Network.

Our main contact with the GV from the MPG was the president Prof. Dr. Peter Gruss, who was supporting the idea of the network from the beginning; Rüdiger Willems (Personal/Recht) ; and Susanne Mellinhoff as a direct contact.

However, one step further in the organization was seen as necessary. Due to the relatively short duration of a PhD and the need to refresh people within the network, a horizontal structure where people would have lot of contact was foreseen as the best adaptive solution. One diagram of the structure can be seen in Fig. 1. The Spokesperson will be the only person in contact with the MPG. The Secretariat is composed by a group of 4 to 8 people and will act as a coordination group, reminding of deadlines to the

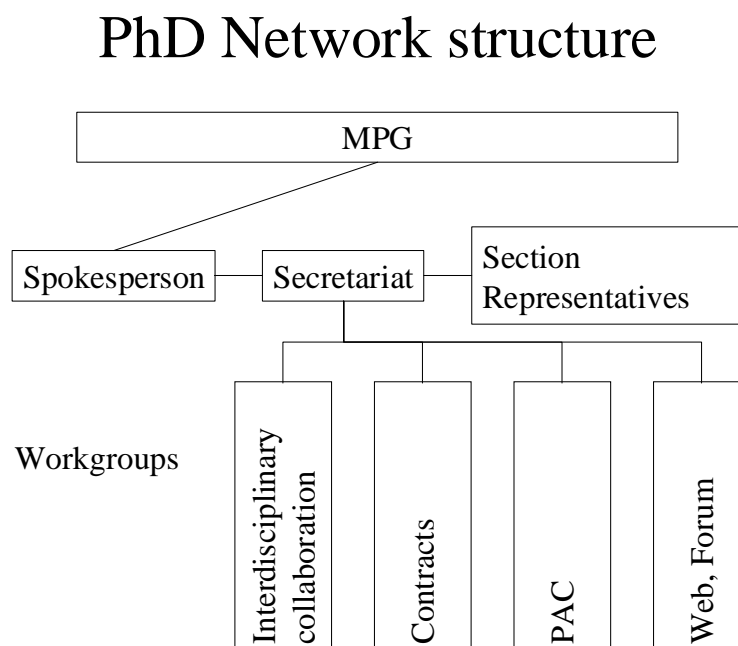


Figure 1. PhD Network structure

workgroups and Section Representatives. The Section Representatives should be responsible for a closer exchange of information between the students of their section and as a link to the sections in the MPG. The Workgroups will maintain their independence and report to the Secretariat regularly.

For the survival of the organization it was remark from last meeting that everyone in one position is responsible to find a successor, explain him the duties and the progress of the network and communicate it to the Secretariat.

In Table 1, the duties of each section and the people selected by the network are presented:

	Duties	People
Spokesperson	Channel of communication with the MPG	Kathrin Kirsch
Secretariat	Central information-administration site of the network. Newletters. Reminding deadlines. Control progress of workgroups.	Sabine Schnabel Hauke Voss Kerstin Skupch Alberto Martínez Joaristi
Section Representative	Contact all PhD representatives from their section.	Kathrin Kirsch Dennis Dittrich Nadine Häring Alexander Litvinenko Thomas Ott Tom Fritz
Workgroups		

Table 1: Duties from the sections of the PhD Network sections

2. CONTRACTS

As said in the 1st report, the MPG mainly offers two kinds of contracts: BAT IIa/2 and Stipends. The following explanation is a summary about the main differences, but for detailed information, it is recommended to read the 1st report.

The BAT IIa/2 pays a net amount, which depends on age and marital status of the student. MPG students receive between 1000 and 1080 €/month on average, plus a Christmas bonus of about 600 € per year. The social security payments under this contract include: retirement plan (about 11000 € for the three years period); health insurance (about 9000 € for the three years period); disability insurance (about 3600 € for the three years period); and access to unemployment which amounts to 60 % of the last monthly salary and is particularly important to ensure financial support during the time between the end of the PhD and the beginning of a new position. With the BAT IIa/2 contract, PhD students are formally employed by the MPG.

The stipend pays 975 €/month, with no Christmas bonus. Therefore students that are paid with a stipend receive between 1000 and 2500 €/year less and do not obtain any of the available social security benefits.

The criteria to offer a contract or stipend are given by the Bund-Länder-Kommission (BLK). The BLK proposes to the heads of the Federal and Länder governments the approval of the annual grants for the research institutions, research funding organizations and research projects jointly financed by all the Parties to the Agreement.

Within the MPG, the criterion is based exclusively on nationality: all German students should have a contract BAT IIa/2 whereas foreign students should be granted stipends. This inequality disadvantages foreign students compared to German students, and affects also German students because institutes might prefer to hire foreigners as they can save around 12.500 € per student and year.

The network, with the support of Prof. Dr. Gruss, is going to write a letter to the BLK asking to review this unfair situation. Some possible solutions will be addressed, like awarding the grants and contracts in terms of different criteria; improving the grant conditions so the people can obtain the same benefits; awarding all PhD students with the same contract or grant, etc. However, it is also thought that maintaining different contractual conditions for different PhDs will always lead to tensions, which is a non-desired situation. For this reason, an effort by all parts involved is required.

3. INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

The aim of this workgroup is to improve the quality of the MPG students' individual scientific work by collaboration on topics that are of common interest to PhD students of all three sections of the MPG and to encourage interdisciplinary exchange in science.

Workshop at the PhD Network meeting

The interdisciplinary group has organized two seminars, which were held in conjunction with the 2nd meeting of the PhD Network in Dresden. Under the slogan "Let's make use of our combined knowledge" the PhD representatives attended seminars on the topics "Death" and "Memory". The keynote speaker for "death" was Prof. Dr. Schiefenhövel (MPI for Behavioural Physiology): "Death. Evolutionary and Crosscultural Perspectives." Student speakers were *Dirk Sachse* (Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry): "Dead organic matter as a recorder of ancient climate"; *Dieter Lukas* (MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology): "The death of species - extinction and conservation of current biodiversity".

The keynote speaker for "memory" was Dr. Christian Kaernbach (Institute for Psychology, University of Leipzig): "Memory is a mud trap". Student speakers were *Nico Birkner* (MPI for Immunobiology): "Memory in the immune system"; *Daniel Grün* (MPI for Human Development): "Age differences in emotional memory"; *Hauke Voss* (MPI for Radioastronomy): "The oldest memory: the echo of the Big Bang".

These topics were received with high interest and discussed lively.

Conference "Languages of Science"

During the meeting in Dresden, it was also presented a call for papers for an interdisciplinary conference/workshop workshop that will take place at the Humboldt-Universität, in Berlin on the 14th, 15th May 2004, with the main topic "Language of Science" . Professor Brüning - director of the Hermann von Helmholtz-Zentrum (HZK) - has initiated this conference for PhD students from all three sections of the MPG. The HZK is a unique example of a university-based center where researchers from both natural sciences and humanities collaborate. More information can be found under: <http://www2.rz.hu-berlin.de/kulturtechnik/zentrum.php>

Another talk informed about seminars for woman-PhD and postdoctoral students at MPIs on application and negotiation strategies, career planning, leading potentials and presentation techniques as well as on the "leading of projects and working groups". Information on these possibilities has been given to us by the MPG-equal opportunity commissioner, Dr. Marlis Mirbach (see also in the Intranet www.zgb.mpg.d).

Further Work

Due to the success of the seminars hold in the meeting, the Interdisciplinary working group agreed to organize a further workshop on the topic “Life”, which should be part of the next PhD Network meeting in Munich in autumn 2004. To make it possible for all MPG students to attend the workshop, it was thought about holding the workshop either before or after the network meeting.

Some members of the working group stressed that the organisation of workshops or seminars open to all students of the MPG is a chance to establish the PhD Network in the MPG. To make seminars attractive to as many students as possible they do not necessarily have to deal with scientific topics in the classical sense, but could also improve academic skills necessary in all disciplines such as how to give talks or scientific writing.

A further goal is to provide the students with the information about on-going research within the whole of the MPG to support initiatives between related fields and “use of our combined knowledge” to obtain new insights.

4. TEACHING EXPERIENCE

There is no clear statement about PhD students teaching. Legally, PhD students are not supposed to teach, but as it is the University the only and latest responsible for giving a PhD title, some contradictory situations occur:

- Some students may see teaching as a very valuable experience for a later career in academia, but they do not get support from their supervisors. Therefore, they have to do it in their spare time and with no economic benefit from it.
- On the other hand, in some institutes PhD students are forced to teach in the University if they want to accomplish their PhD. These cases have to be study carefully case by case, since it is the University who confer the PhD title.

There are many positive aspects seen in the teaching experience, not only for academia, but also for industry or when presenting a subject to an audience. Discussing the matter with Prof. Dr. Gruss, he accepted to write a communication to all directors from MPIs, recommending the support of students in gaining experience in teaching if they were willing to.

5. PhD ADVISORY COMMITTEES

In several Max Planck Institutes PhD Advisory Committees (PACs) are already successful at guiding and advising PhD students. By following the progress of the PhD projects, enhancing the communication between students and their advisors, and training students at presenting their scientific work, PACs are beneficial to both students and advisors. For this reason, we believe that the concept of PACs should be put into practice for every PhD student within the Max Planck Society.

After the first MPG PhD Network meeting in April 2003 we outlined important elements of advisory committees, which are thought to serve as guidelines for creating new PACs. The major task of this workgroup will be to support the implementation of PACs by providing PhD students in all MPIs with advice and information.

The organizational features of PhD supervision differ essentially from institute to institute. PACs have been established only in some MPIs and are sometimes associated with an IMPRS. There is no standard procedure for the implementation of PACs, which is due to differences in size and structure of the institutes. Therefore, it will be of major importance to carefully evaluate the current situation of the PhD students in the MPG. A questionnaire, which will be sent to all PhD representatives, will help us to gather information on PACs and similar models of PhD supervision, PhD seminars, teaching opportunities, and the contact to the advisor from the university. Furthermore a survey among the PhD students will be carried out to get a more detailed picture of their individual experiences.

The webpage of the MPG PhD Network will provide a platform for distributing information about PACs to the PhD students. General elements of PACs will be described as well as details of PAC models, which have already been proved to be successful at advising PhD students at different institutes. Additionally, a list of contact persons will be available on the webpage. By evaluating the present situation of PhD students in the MPG and providing information about PACs on the webpage we will be able to support PhD representatives creating new PACs at their institutes. If necessary, we will also help to overcome difficulties with existing PACs.

PhD Advisory Committees enhance the communication between PhD students and their advisors, train PhD students at planning scientific projects and presenting their work, and follow their overall development. We want to actively support the implementation of PACs at all MPIs because we are convinced that PACs can further improve the quality of PhD education in the MPG.

6. MPG PhD NETWORK PORTAL

The PhD net portal www.phdnet.mpg.de serves as a platform for exchange among doctoral students at Max Planck Institutes. Launched after the 1st meeting of MPG PhD students in Heidelberg (April 4-6 2003) the PhD Network portal is a basic tool for the building up of the network organization and the share of information.

There are several links related to:

- News
- Workgroups
- Forum
- Next meetings

The forum is the most active part of the portal with 126 registered users. There are announcements, public discussions about projects and activities and student representatives' discussions where the access is limited in order to control the discussions between the working groups.

The forum has shown to be very useful when discussing some issues, like for example developing a brochure with information for people that are new at the institute, discussing which topics it should contain and how to make further information accessible.

There is also an exchange database which purpose is to support the exchange between the institutes and stimulate interdisciplinary work. The general idea is that people who would like to go abroad and talk about their work offer one or several talks here. Anyone who would like to organize a seminar, a colloquium, a retreat etc. may then browse or search these offers and contact the speaker to negotiate the details of the exchange. In addition, someone in need of a talk or collaboration may enter a request stating his needs. People willing to offer their help may now and then browse these requests and answer them if they think they may be of assistance.

7. Contact / Representatives

The representatives have been elected to serve as a bridge between the PhD students and the MPG in respect to communicating new information, proposals, data and questions. Beyond representing the PhD students of their own section, they are closely linked to one-another and to the representatives of the workgroups.

The PhD representatives try to participate in MPG section symposia or Nachwuchsgruppen-Meetings. They have already got the support of Prof. Dr. Gruss. Such participation would constitute an excellent opportunity to exchange upon and discuss topics of common interest: it would not only allow the PhD students' representatives to explain needs and proposals of the PhD students but also to receive direct feedback and learn about the suggestions of the PhD students advisors and Directors.

1. Biology and Medicine

Thomas Ott
MPI for Molecular Plant Physiology
Address: Am Mühlberg 1, 14476, Golm
ott@mpimp-golm.mpg.de
Tel.: 0331-5678151

Tom Fritz
MPI for Cognitive Neurosciences
Address: Stephanstr. 1 a 04103, Leipzig
fritz@cns.mpg.de
Tel.: 0341-9940239

2. Chemistry, Physics and Technology

Alexander Litvinenko
MPI for Mathematics in the Sciences
Address: Insel str. 22-26, 04103, Leipzig
lag@list.ru
Tel: 0341-9959816

Nadine Haering
MPI for Astronomy
Address: Koenigstuhl 17, 69117, Heidelberg
Haering@mpia-hd.mpg.de
Tel: 06221-528384

3. Humanities

Kathrin Kirsch
MPI for Psycholinguistics
Address: Postbus 310, 6500,
AH Nijmegen, The Netherlands
Kathrin.Kirsch@mpi.nl
Tel: +31-24-3521546

Dennis Dittrich
MPI for Research into Economic Systems
Address: Kahlaische Str. 10, 07745, Jena
dittrich@mpiew-jena.mpg.de
Tel.: 03641-686640

8. PARTICIPANTS

Julia Asbach, MPI for Chemical Ecology, Jena
Tobias Aumueller, MPI for Research Unit for Enzymology of Protein Folding, Halle
Nico Birkner, MPI for Immunobiology, Freiburg
Meike Burow, MPI for Chemical Ecology, Jena
Dennis A. V. Dittrich, MPI for Research into Economic Systems, Jena
Axel Don, MPI for Biogeochemistry, Jena
Tom Fritz, MPI for Cognitive Neuroscience, Leipzig
Andreas Gaab, MPI for Chemistry, Mainz
Markus Garczarczyk, MPI for Physics, Muenchen
Daniel Gruehn, MPI for Human Development, Berlin
Nadine Haering, MPI for Astronomy, Heidelberg
Christian Holtze, MPI for Colloids and Interfaces, Golm
Malte Huebner, MPI for Computer Science, Saarbruecken
Silvia Carola Keller, MPI of Art History, Rome, Italy
Sadegh Khochfar,
Kathrin Kirsch, MPI for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen
Gernot Klein, MPI for Physics of Complex Systems, Dresden
Axel Kohler, MPI for Brain Research, Frankfurt/M.
Verena Krenberger, MPI for Foreign and International Criminal Law, Freiburg
Oliver Lange , MPI for Biophysical Chemistry, Goettingen
Janne Lempe, MPI for Developmental Biology, Tuebingen
Alexander Litvinenko, MPI for Mathematics in the Sciences, Leipzig
Timm Lochmann, MPI for Mathematics in the Sciences, Leipzig
Dieter Lukas, MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig
Alberto Martinez Joaristi, MPI for Coal Research, Muelheim
Alexander Milbradt, MPI for Biochemistry, Martinsried
Florian Mintert, MPI for Physics of Complex Systems, Dresden
Laura Muniz, MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig
Thomas Ott, MPI for Molecular Plant Physiology, Golm
Martin Otto, MPI for European Legal History, Frankfurt/M.
Andrea Raccanelli,
Thomas Rohark, MPI for History, Goettingen
Georg Rasche, MPI for European Legal History in Frankfurt/M.
Claudia Rollenhagen, MPI for Infection Biology, Berlin
Claudia Roth-Alpermann, MPI for Neurobiology, Martinsried
Dirk Sachse, MPI for Biogeochemistry, Jena
Linda Sauter, MPI for Solid State Research, Stuttgart
Sabine Schnabel, MPI for Demographic Research, Rostock
Miriam Schneider, MPI for Biophysical Chemistry, Goettingen
Yakov Sergeev, MPI for Developmental Biology, Tuebingen
Kerstin Skupch, MPI for Limnology, Ploen
Sander Smits, MPI for Biophysics, Frankfurt/M.
Ioannis Sotiropoulos, MPI for Psychiatry, Muenchen
Joerg Teuber, MPI for Study of Societies, Koeln
Carsten Tieg, MPI for Microstructure Physics, Halle
Stephan Tontrup, MPI for Collective Goods, Bonn
Jens Twellmeyer, MPI for Biochemistry, Martinsried
Verona Vandieken, MPI for Marine Microbiology, Bremen
Hauke Voss, MPI for Radioastronomy, Bonn
Carl Jakob Walcher, MPI for Astronomy, Heidelberg
Hans-Joerg Warnatz, MPI for Molecular Genetics, Berlin
Franziska Weickert, MPI for Chemical Physics of Solids, Dresden
Maria Elena Zegada, MPI for Foreign and International Criminal Law, Freiburg