



magazine of the max planck phd net

offspring

1 Launching PhDnet's First Interdisciplinary Conference

Global Changes, Environment, Society & Science

2 First PhDnet Survey Published

The Situation of PhD Students
in the Max Planck Society 2005

1 PhNet's 2006 spokesperson:
Franziska Korb



Another look back at the year's events

On a cold snowy November day in 2005, when all the Max Planck PhD student representatives were ready to strike for home after three fruitful days of discussions, planning, and futuristic visions, some of us were facing new challenges as PhNet working group members, working group leaders, or section representatives. As the newly elected spokesperson of the doctoral students' network I did not know by then that the first challenge would be to put the situation of Max Planck PhD students in perspective after their misrepresentation in a highly ranked scientific journal. However, akin to our everyday struggles in establishing a PhD thesis, such new challenges are encouraging as well as conductive. Admittedly, not all of the PhNet's set objectives could be met, but altogether we can be satisfied with what we achieved. In this issue you will get an overview of the network's activity during the last year. We encourage all PhD students to join the annual meeting or one of the working groups. At the last annual meeting in November 2006 it was agreed among the PhD representatives to organize more soft-skills seminars and, after a great premiere of the interdisciplinary conference on Global Changes in Cologne, the second PhD students'

conference. Events like this improve the networking among Max-Planck PhD students and thus make the PhD students' position more transparent in the Max Planck Society. One more striking goal is to publish the Offspring more than once a year to inform you about upcoming events as well as news and information relevant for PhD students. Last but not least, a new steering group was elected at the previous annual meeting in Leipzig, which was a great success, by the way. Rainer Stollhoff from the MPI for Mathematics in the Sciences, Leipzig was elected as new spokesperson. He will be supported by the section representatives Laura Herbst, MPI for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen/Netherlands (Human Sciences Section), Johanna Havemann, MPI for Developmental Biology, Tübingen (Biology and Medicine Section), and Peter Buschkamp, MPI for Extraterrestrial Physics, Garching (Chemistry, Physics and Technology Section). I wish all the PhD students all the best for their dissertation, the steering group and working groups a successful year and take my leave with mixed feelings,

Franziska Korb
Franziska Korb

Network Development

Konrad Tristram
MPI for Astronomy,
Heidelberg

The Steering Group

Last year's steering group of the PhNet consisted of the spokesperson Franziska Korb and the three section representatives David Alich, section representative of the Humanities; Verena Conrad, representative of the Bio-Medical section and Konrad Tristram, representative of the Chemical-Physical-Technical section. Our task consisted of developing a strategy for the administration and supervision of the PhNet network, for instance, the steering group was responsible for the control of the individual workgroups and the publication of the second issue of the Offspring, the official magazine of the PhNet. In order to discuss and to confront these challenges, we organized two meetings this year. In January Franziska Korb, the spokesperson of the PhNet, invited the representatives of the three sections to her institute, the MPI for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig. Later this year, in July, a second meeting took place at the MPI for Astronomy in Heidelberg, the home institute of Konrad Tristram. Both meetings were very successful: the cooperation with the administration of the Max-Planck-Society was discussed and the future strategy of the network was mapped out. Furthermore, a plan to supervise and control the working groups was devised. The different tasks that arose during the meeting were distributed among the section representatives and the spokesperson. During the meeting in Leipzig the steering group had a joint lunch with the Meeting Group at the MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology. There, the

progress of the preparations for the next general meeting in Leipzig was discussed. On the evening of January 20th, there was also a meeting the „Helmholtz Juniors“, the PhD network of the Helmholtz Society. This network has a similar mission to that of the PhNet and the cooperation between the two networks will be of great benefit. At the general meeting of the PhNet in Leipzig in November 2006, new sections representatives were elected to continue work on the issues that we mapped out during 2006.

1 2nd meeting of the steering group (2006) in Heidelberg: Verena Conrad, Franziska Korb, Konrad Tristram, David Alich





Global Changes, Environment, Society & Science

1st Interdisciplinary Max Planck Phdnet Workshop

Johanna Havemann MPI for Developmental Biology, Tübingen
Jörg Bochmann MPI of Quantum Optics, Garching

The goal of the 1st Max Planck Phdnet workshop 'Global Changes' was to establish an interdisciplinary meeting that attracts PhD students from very different research directions.

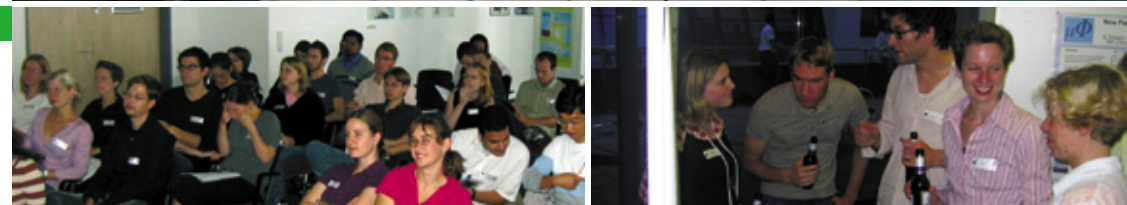
In particular we defined the following objectives:

- strengthen interdisciplinary exchange and broaden the perspective on science
- raise awareness of the common interests within the research community, particularly among PhD students of the MPS
- build career prospects and network
- communicate research to non-experts in the field
- represent the different scientific perspectives and methods within the MPS

The Event workgroup was formed during the 4th general meeting of PhD representatives in Göttingen in November 2005 where we brainstormed and discussed about an interdisciplinary event. However, the organizational work really started at the kick-off meeting in Cologne

in April 2006 where the concept of the workshop, an organization timeline and a detailed proposal and cost estimate were developed (proposal available online at <http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/workshop/download.htm>). Our schedule was dense. Within three months, the team had to establish a detailed workshop program, find external funding opportunities, invite speakers, create an internet platform for student registration and most importantly: promote the event. Communication between the organizers took place via telephone and email.

The team grew during preparation and finally consisted of the following doctoral students: Johanna Havemann (MPI for Developmental Biology in Tübingen), Hannes Böttcher (MPI for Biogeochemistry in Jena), Jörg Bochmann (MPI for Quantum Optics in Garching), Saskia Freye (MPI for the Studies of Societies in Köln), Melissa Anne Pfeffer (MPI for Meteorology in Hamburg), Laura Hartmann, Jens Weber and Julia Maier (all MPI for Colloids and Interfaces in Golm) and Tobias Lenz (MPI for Limnology in Plön) who was in charge of the website and poster design. The head of the organisation team was Johan-



Despite the dense schedule, the meeting provided various possibilities for interaction among MPI PhD students. **2**

na Havemann. The organizers would also like to thank Dominik Bauer (MPI Quantum Optics, Garching) for his help with funding raising.

We estimated 30-60 participants. PhD representatives were asked via e-mail (via the Phdnet secretary) to distribute advertising posters and to forward information about the workshop to their fellows. Unfortunately, this turned out to be the bottleneck: many representatives did not cooperate. Quite a few of the participants learned about the existence of the workshop just before or even after the end of the registration deadline, even though we had sent out several alerts well in advance. We hope that in the future the students will be better informed by their representatives.

After these issues were resolved by June/July, the necessary reservations for the conference venue, materials and catering were made and an abstract booklet was printed. The location for the event was the modern youth hostel Köln-Deutz

in the beautiful city centre of Cologne. It provided adequate conference rooms and infrastructure. We were cautious about choosing environmentally-friendly and socially-fair products and asked the youth hostel to provide us with organic and fair-trade products if possible.

Finally, the workshop took place in Cologne from August 17th-19th. To put it all on firm ground and provide valuable information for the organizers of next year's workshop, the participants' feedback was evaluated and all information was collected in a final report during September and October 2006. Several documents, such as the workshop proposal, the schedule, the abstract booklet, the evaluation report (kindly designed and evaluated by Sabine Schnabel and David Alich from the Questionnaire Group) as well as the final report and pictures of the workshop, are available online at

<http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/workshop/index.htm>.

Learning soft skills

Roland Graf
MPI for Biophysical Chemistry,
Göttingen

The PhDnet seminars

Due to the success of the first series of soft skills seminars offered by the Max Planck Society and the PhDnet in 2005, a new series of seminars was launched in 2006. Kerstin Meyer-Ross, the coordinator of the IMPRS for Computer Science, has been chosen as the seminar trainer. She has already gained a lot of experience as a seminar trainer and offers a wide range of different soft skills seminars. The seminar series 2006/2007 consists of nine events altogether. It started in October 2006 with a seminar on "scientific writing" in Mar-

tinsried and a seminar on "presenting" in Seewiesen. In November another seminar on "presenting" followed in Heidelberg. The series will be continued in January 2007. The future seminars will take place at Max-Planck-Institutes in Göttingen, Berlin, Magdeburg and Mainz. The evaluation of the past seminars has been very positive throughout. One of the few concerns has been the group size in the seminar on "scientific writing" with 24 participants. Therefore, future seminars will either be reduced to 18 participants or the seminar

Dates of organised Seminars

Date	Venue	subject	part. no.
14/15 December 2006	Göttingen	presenting	12
2 January 2007	Berlin	scientific writing	24
3 January 2007	Berlin	speed reading	24
4/5 January 2007	Magdeburg	presenting	12
8 January 2007	Mainz	project management	24
9 January 2007	Mainz	speed reading	24



A small number of participants guaranteed a high quality of PhDnet's soft skill seminars. **1**

materials will be provided in advance to improve the efficiency of the seminar. The members of the organization team are: Andrea Ernst (preparation of the template e-mails and homepage-texts, local organization in Heidelberg), Sarah Gebhart (conception of the registration procedure, local organization in Mainz), Roland Graf (head of the seminar group, local organization in Göttingen), Joachim Ritter (negotiation with the seminar trainers, local organization in Magdeburg),

Matthias Schlesner (finances, local organization in Martinsried) and Silke Steiger (local organization in Seewiesen). Our thanks go out to the president of the Max Planck Society, Professor Peter Gruss, and to the Deutsche Bank for financing the seminar series. Many thanks also to Dominik Bauer for his efforts in fundraising, to Axel Rasche for the local organization of two seminars in Berlin and to Tobias Lenz for setting up and supervising the registration homepage.

More information and registration at:
www.phdnet.mpg.de/seminars/index.htm.

The booklet's frontpage

1



The New Booklet
of the PhDnet

Information for everybody

Marc Schneider MPI Biophysical Chemistry, Göttingen
Florian Hauer MPI Biophysical Chemistry, Göttingen

The PhDnet secretary group is one of the permanent working groups within the PhDnet. It is the central contact for all internal and external requests. The secretary group collects, processes and distributes information regarding the PhDnet from the spokesperson, the section representatives, from all institutes, working groups and students. It is responsible for all correspondence that is not directly dealt with by the spokesperson or the working groups. To be able to spread information within the PhDnet and to reach PhD students at all institutes, the secretary group keeps the contact details of all representatives and has access to internal mailing lists for PhD students at some institutes. Besides regulating the flow of information within the PhDnet, the secretary group provides assistance to the spokesperson and the sec-

tion representatives as well as to the other working groups. By collecting all internal information, the secretary group also elaborates means of profiling. This year, the secretary group published a small booklet with essential information about the MPS and the PhDnet which will be distributed to all, but especially to new PhD students at the institutes. Members of the secretary group are Marc Schneider (Head, MPI for Biophysical Chemistry, Göttingen), Florian Hauer (MPI for Biophysical Chemistry, Göttingen), Bernhard Ellinger (MPI for Molecular Physiology), Dominik Bauer (MPI for Quantum Optics), Felix Girke (MPI for Social Anthropology), Gregor Feig (MPI for Biogeochemistry).

For contact just write an email to:
phd-sec@gwdg.de.

Developing and Maintaining a Communication Platform

1

Jochen Maydt
jmaydt@mpi-inf.mpg.de
Forum



The PhDnet Web Group

2

Tobias Lenz
lenz@mpil-ploen.mpg.de
Website



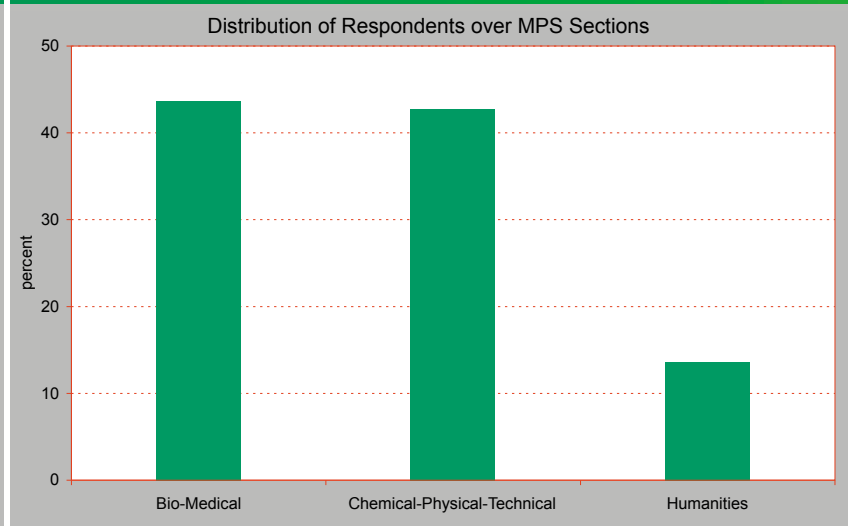
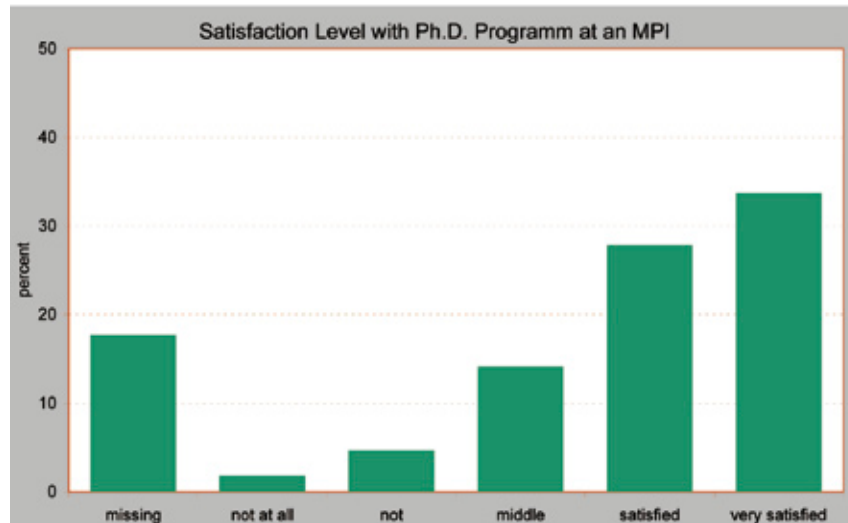
Our working group managed and administrated the computer resources provided by the GWDG (Gesellschaft für wissenschaftliche Datenverarbeitung Göttingen) and the internet representation of the PhDnet. We forwarded requests on the IT infrastructure to the GWDG or consulted them on possible workarounds. As our workgroup is rather small, communication within the group took place mainly via e-mail and phone.

The internet representation of the PhDnet is composed of several websites and the forum. Tobias Lenz was in charge of the websites for the PhDnet, the "Global Changes" workshop and the seminars website. He also participated in the implementation of the PhDnet Meeting website. After the relaunch of the new PhDnet website, Tobias continuously updated the content of the website with news and information. A particularly difficult task was designing the websites to allow users to register for an event!

The PhDnet forum was administrated by Jochen Maydt. He was responsible for the registration of new users. This was an especially time-consuming task as every new student had to be manually authenticated, in order to prevent unauthorised access, e.g., spammers. This task was facilitated by some simple SQL-scripts. He also managed the user permission that controls access to restricted parts of the forum. These parts store valuable information concerning the work of the past PhD network and contain important contacts at the Max-Planck-Society. Finally, he also made sure that new posts obeyed the forum rules and did not contain content or links to inappropriate sites.

Many results of our efforts are visible and can easily be checked out by visiting <http://www.phdnet.mpg.de> and the other related websites. Or enter the forum at <http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/phpBB2/>.

The majority of MPI PhD students are very satisfied with the scientific working conditions at their institutes. **1**



The distribution of interviewed PhD students over the three MPS sections **2**

The Questionnaire Group

David Alich
MPI for Demographic Research, Rostock

Surveying the Situation of MPI PhD Students



The Questionnaire Group of the PhDnet conducted an online survey among the Ph.D. students of all Max-Planck Institutes (MPIs) in the fall 2005. More than 1000 Ph.D. students participated in the survey. The survey provided a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics, the sources of funding and the satisfaction rate among Ph.D. students in 2005.

Three major issues were examined in the survey. Firstly, the expected duration of the Ph.D. program; secondly, the funding situation of Ph.D. students and thirdly, their satisfaction with the Ph.D. program. The results significantly varied across the Bio-Medical Section, the Chemical-Physical-Technical Section and the Humanity Section and also between foreign and German students.

Nonetheless, about half of the participating students expected to complete their Ph.D. within 3 to 4 years. The majority of respondents were either funded by a con-

tract at an MPI (61.4%) or by a scholarship (23.3%). Furthermore, the doctoral students reported high satisfaction with their overall work situation at the MPIs. Students were very satisfied with their supervisors, the equipment in the laboratories, the technical support, and the library.

A detailed report of the survey was published in summer 2006 and distributed to all Ph.D. students within the Max Planck Society (MPS). Furthermore, the report was handed out to the president of the MPS (Prof. Gruss), the institutes' directors and the administrations of the local institutes.

In the future, the PhDnet plans to conduct further online questionnaires among the Ph.D. students working in the Max Planck Institutes. The next survey is scheduled for the end of 2006. It is our objective to provide continuing information on the situation of doctoral students to the Ph.D. student representatives at the MPIs. The results will also be reported to the administration of the Max-Planck Society.

General Meeting in
Leipzig November 2006

Rainer Stollhoff MPI for
Mathematics in the Science, Leipzig

The Meeting Group



1 62 PhD student representatives from more than 50 MPIs participated in PhDnet's general meeting 2006.

At our last PhNet meeting in Goettingen an overwhelming majority of the general assembly voted for Leipzig to host the next meeting. At first all the representatives from Leipzig: Nils Bertschinger, Franziska Korb, Dieter Lukas, Stefanie Regel and Rainer Stollhoff got together to set an agenda for the year ahead. The objective of the meeting group was easily defined: to prepare the next general meeting of the PhNet. We also received valuable information from the former workgroup leader Ajaybabu Pobbati and left Goettingen with some vague ideas about "winning strategies" and potential pitfalls that could occur in the organization of such an event. The work of the Meeting Group really took off in spring 2006 with choo-

sing the ideal location. This presented a no-brainer. The Max-Planck-Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology was the only one that could host such a big meeting. Besides its perfect size, the staff of the institute was extremely cooperative and supportive and had tons of experience in organizing meetings and conferences. The second step involved the planning of the program (contacting speakers etc, the representatives of the MPS). We established a preliminary outline of the programme: half of the time slots was assigned to section representatives and the other workgroups, so we were responsible for filling the remaining time with interesting talks and discussions. From then on, the Meeting Group decided

to meet on a regular basis. But where? Unsure about the cooking skills and entertainment talents of our group members, we decided to get some help from the experts at the MPI EVA: the institute's cafeteria, well known in Leipzig for its superb quality, and the great apes, well known for curly hair and superhuman cuteness. These monthly meetings proved to be very useful in organizing the meeting and getting to know the other group member better.

In hindsight, we encountered many problems but there was one challenge that we totally underestimated: finding a renowned scientist for a public presentation. Unfortunately we could not convince Richard Dawkins, an ambitious endea-

avour, but we managed to invite Winfried Göpfert for a talk on the relationship between science and media. His talk gave interesting insights into this delicate relationship and provided new ideas and ways for addressing scientists from other fields and an even further audience: the generous taxpayer. It was a new and great experience for us and we invite you to participate in this experience at PhNet's next general meeting.

The Alumni Network for Max-Planck PhD students

Andreas Bock MPI for Dynamics of Complex
Technical Systems, Magdeburg

Work in Progress

1 The members of the
alumni working group 2006



The aim of the alumni working group is to establish a platform that connects the alumni with the PhD student network of the Max Planck Society. The members of the alumni working group 2006 were Caroline Schmitz, Kerstin Thein, Hendrik Bartko, Wencke Armsen, Janire Mimentza, and Andreas Bock. In our opinion it is an important issue to stay in contact with your former institute and colleagues to exchange information and establish new contacts, for instance, with industry. In addition, an alumni network should also provide the chance for current PhD students to get in touch with former ones. Every PhD student who has finished the thesis has the opportunity of joining the alumni network. The alumni-net will be implemented in the web-portal of the PhDnet. Relevant data

of a former PhD student such as contact details, institute name, year of defence, present position and email address will be stored as part of his or her profile but even more information such as pictures etc. could be presented on a private homepage. Former PhD students will be provided with an IP-address of the Max-Planck-Society. Present PhD students will have a 'guest' status and can enter the database of the alumni net.

After the establishment of the alumni working group in Göttingen in 2005, we started to exchange and discuss different ideas via e-mail and finally developed a structure for the alumni-net. Luckily, in 2003 seven former PhD-students had already created a user group called 'alumni' that existed in the forum of the PhD-net homepage. This

user group was modified and extended in cooperation with the web group and is, of course, open to new members. In addition a forum "alumni ideas" was created to discuss the work of the alumni-net. This would have not been possible without the professional help of Jochen Maydt. In the end of October 2006, the alumni-net had eight members but we hope this number will increase soon. Interested PhD students of the Max Planck Society who have graduated recently can add "Max-Planck Alumni" in the interest field of the user profile or contact me directly at the following address: bock@mpi-magdeburg.mpg.de. At the general meeting in Leipzig, a new alumni working group was formed and

the group members defined new goals such as improving the communication with the Generalverwaltung (Administrative Headquarters) of the Max-Planck Society in Munich. The Generalverwaltung supports the systematic development of an alumni network at the individual institutes. In the future, the alumni working group will administrate the alumni-net and will send a version of the "Offspring" and the annual report of the general meeting to the members of the alumni-net. Furthermore, alumni will be invited to the general meeting, to seminars and to local activities.



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