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magazine of the max planck phd net

offspring



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Dear reader,

you have the third issue of the Offspring in your hands, the official magazine of the Max Planck PhDnet. This magazine was started in 2005 to communicate the network's activities and to provide relevant information to PhD students at all institutes. Therefore, the first issues mainly contained reports about previous meetings and announcements of future events.

However, at the PhD representatives' meeting in Leipzig, November 2006, a new work group was formed as the editorial office of the Offspring. The members of this work group decided upon the reformation of the magazine to increase its attractiveness and relevance. The Offspring should be a platform for PhD students that reflects their interests and can therefore be distinguished from other Max Planck publications. Besides information about the work of the PhDnet, the Offspring will now include things like relevant news from the General Administration, reports about individual institutes, careers and profiles, progress reports and interviews as well as letters to the editor, features and commentary.

So, here you see the first issue of this new Offspring and we hope you enjoy reading it! The main topic of this issue is "Success", for instance you may read interviews with MPI-scientists at different levels of their career, giving their personal perception of scientific success, telling how they celebrate success and how they cope with failure; you will learn how two foreign PhD students succeeded in getting along in Germany in their first months – and of course about the successful work of the PhDnet during the last year.

But to keep this magazine interesting for you, we also need your feedback! Let us know what you liked about this issue and what you are missing. We also would like to invite you to actively contribute to the Offspring by providing us with ideas, information, relevant articles, pictures – everything that you regard as valuable information for PhD students of the Max-Planck Society.

Your editorial office



A look back ...

Rainer Stollhoff
ex-spokesperson of the PhDnet

Success - Not only the main topic of this issue of the Offspring, but also the starting point for the president of the Max-Planck-Society in the March 2007 issue of Max Planck Research. Although the success I can report as spokesperson of the PhDnet is a more modest one, nonetheless the past year has been a successful year, as will be detailed in reports of PhDnets activities on the following pages. In my opinion, the most important achievement was to establish the PhDnet wiki (see page 23) as a communication and information platform with more than 80 registered participants as editors and over 70,000 page views up to now. For the last year, the wiki was the platform on which the steering group managed to navigate the PhDnet and our ambitious agenda around the difficulties inherent in a network spread throughout Germany. In the wiki, we gathered and accumulated information about the situation of PhD-students in the MPS. Information we used to move the MPS to start urgently needed changes in the legal status of PhD-students, to help local PhD representatives structuring their work and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge to the next steering group. This information is accessible to

all PhD-students and the wiki is open for participation. Make use of it!

Decisions - As PhD-students we are often affected by decisions taken by others: our directors, the local university bodies, the MPS as a whole, and also politics in general. Among others these are decisions affecting our status as PhD-students, our personal situation by the way and amount of funding, our goals by changes in the Promotionsordnung and our future as scientists in Germany, Europe and around the globe. About these decisions, we are rarely informed and our voice is so far rarely heard. At the Berlin meeting we renewed and strengthened our resolution to get involved into these decisions: locally through PhD representation at every institute, internally through PhDnet representation at meetings of MPS bodies and publicly by the formulation of an open letter, addressing our concerns to the proper political authorities.

As my time as spokesperson is now over, I wish the new spokesperson Melissa Duhaime and her new steering crew all the best and a decisively successful year.

... and forward

Melissa Duhaime
current spokesperson of the PhDnet

Is success a human property? Do non-human creatures experience the feeling of success? Perhaps, to them, success is equivalent to survival. I tried researching what success means in the animal world and I stumbled upon a study describing "nesting success" of woodland ducks struggling to endure a rapidly disappearing habitat. However, in the report it became quite obvious that nesting is simply a means of survival; an innate behavior. For a woodland duck, to succeed is to survive and produce offspring. Given our generally safe lives, for most humans success goes beyond such measures. When survival is ensured, we are capable of the beautiful luxury of success.

I have always thought that success implies a certain degree of intent; success is attained upon the accomplishment of an intended objective. This objective lies in the heart of each individual brave enough to embark upon personal challenges. In this way, success includes, but has the potential to go far beyond, mere survival.

At the general meeting in Berlin, previous spokesperson Rainer Stollhoff

sent me off with simple advice amidst the pandemonium of growing responsibilities: "The most important job is to keep the network alive." Survival.

With the support of a great incumbent Steering Group, active PhD representatives from all institutes and the invaluable advice of last year's group, survival is undoubtedly assured. The challenge of "success" will lie in our ability to accomplish defined goals, many of which are still in the birth and development stage. The collective goals of the Steering Group are expressed in our introduction, which you will find in this issue of Offspring (page 6). My personal goal as spokesperson is to undertake tasks honoring the fundamental "PhDnet-wide" goal of improving the condition of PhD candidates of the Max Planck Society. For, when there is room for complaint, even the best can be better. We have all been granted the opportunity for more than survival; we aren't woodland ducks! And herein lies our opportunity for success through the coming year. Let's continue



Introduction of the new Steering Group

Dear Doctoral Students of the Max Planck Society,

Our 6th PhDnet General Meeting is now behind us, hosted in Berlin by the MPI for Infection Biology. Thanks to the excellent work and thorough preparation of all its participants, the meeting was full of discussions, debates, and newly shaped initiatives. Thank you all for raising the bar and setting the meeting standard so high!

At the General Meeting, four enthusiastic PhD students were elected to the new PhDnet Steering Group. Notably, this group makes up the most international Steering Group since the founding of the PhDnet. Let us briefly introduce ourselves.

The newly elected PhDnet Spokesperson is Melissa Duhaime (American), from the MPI for Marine Microbiology in Bremen. The new Section Representatives are: Humanities—Ian FitzPatrick (British), MPI for Psycholinguistics, Netherlands; Biomedicine—Sören Alsheimer (German), MPI for Developmental Biology, Tuebingen; and Chemistry, Physics and Technological Sciences—Ralitsa Angelova (Bulgarian), MPI for Informatics, Saarbruecken.

Based on stimulating discussions at the General Meeting of the current concerns and problems facing PhD students of the Max Planck Society, the new Steering Committee has established three initial goals.

The first is to continue to facilitate institute-wide communication, and to seek out and bridge gaps in information flow. An incredible “communication infrastructure” has been put in place by the past group. To ensure that information reaches all MPS students, we encourage PhDnet institute reps to continue publicizing the PhDnet mission among newcomers. Stay up to date with PhDnet initiatives via the Wiki pages! Every MPS PhD student can subscribe to and edit the Wiki pages!

Our second goal is to spend creative efforts improving the future of PhD students post-graduation—our PhD time is all too short; what do we do next? This includes issues of career development, such as organizing Career Fairs, promoting forums to foster exchange between PhD students and research scientists successful in

their career, and to continue to improve connections with the MPS Alumni network.

The third goal is to increase cooperation with other PhD associations, such as the Helmholtz Juniors (the PhD network of the Helmholtz Gemeinschaft). This will provide a greater appreciation for the experiences of like-minded students as we campaign to protect the rights and ameliorate the social standing of PhD students in Germany.

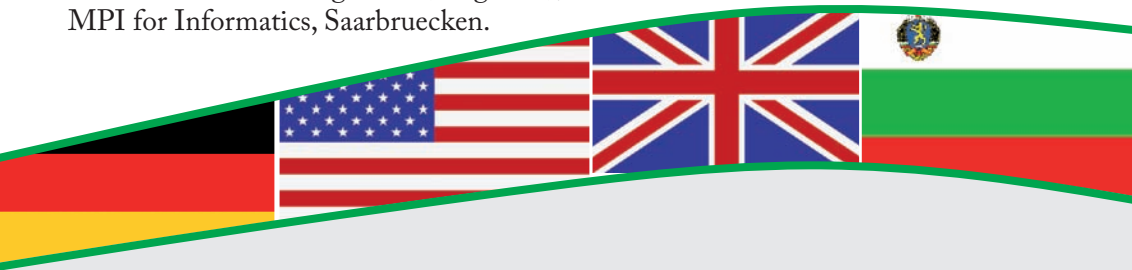
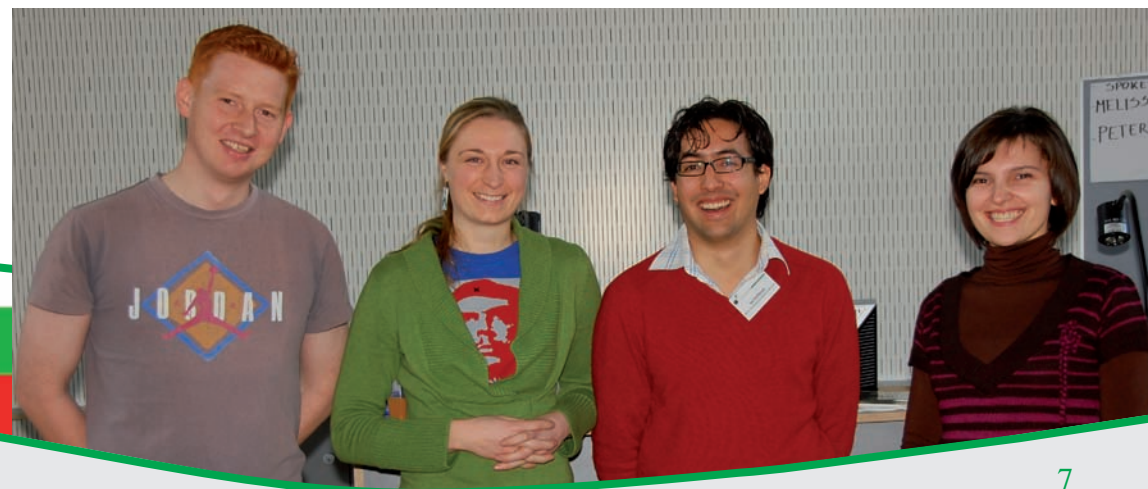
However, as the Steering Group, our primary goal is to make your work easier by helping you solve problems. We provide the direct interface between PhD students and the Max Planck Society Headquarters to cooperatively solve issues you face daily. Please talk to the local PhD representa-

tive at your institute about all problems, constructive critiques, or new ideas of how to improve your working environment. Sharing also your positive experiences will provide golden standards by which other institutes can learn how to successfully address similar issues. We expressly invite PhD representatives (and students!) from all institutes to approach us with new issues.

Keep connected through the year, and stay in touch!

Sincerely yours,

Sören Alsheimer (*Section representative: Biomed*); Melissa Beth Duhaime (*Spokesperson*); Ian FitzPatrick (*Section representative: Humanities*); Ralitsa Angelova (*Section representative: CPT*)



Success

Verena Conrad story

Science is a wonderful thing if one does not have to earn one's living at it.

(Albert Einstein)

Towards the end of one's PhD, a particular question keeps coming up and if you have not yet thought about it – your supervisor and fellow lab members will gently remind you of an inevitable decision ahead: so, what are you going to do next? “A post-doc”, you answer hesitantly. A postdoc? You suddenly realise that you have not seriously thought about the future...do you want to continue to work in science or even pursue a scientific career? How does one make a decision, what criteria are appropriate? Earlier success might be one, but how is success defined in science? There are not many objective standards, such as salary or promotion as there are in other sectors. The scientific community has its very own benchmarks: publications, successful grant applications, invitations to keynote talks etc.

The number of your publications, ideally at least a couple of first-author papers in the very best journals, will reflect the importance of your contribution to the field and the approval of the general public. However, during your PhD you might have

published only one or two papers...maybe you have only been the third contributor? Maybe you have not published at all? It is difficult to assess one's individual contribution based on the number of publications and citations, especially in the early stages of one's career. Successful grant applications and scholarships are other parameters – often valued as a measurement of scientific excellence. Not only do Zeitgeist and political issues determine the distribution of financial support but more importantly research experience and level of responsibility. Most of these indicators in fact become more relevant in the later stages of one's career.

Okay, here we are with a relatively empty pro and con list – at the most crucial time of one's career. I believe the decision about whether to do postdoctoral work or not, is a much more personal one – often it does not only affect the next year or two but it shapes the rest of your life!

In the current issue of the PhD magazine, we are not going to provide you with yet another guide on how to choose the right postdoc position or reveal the hidden

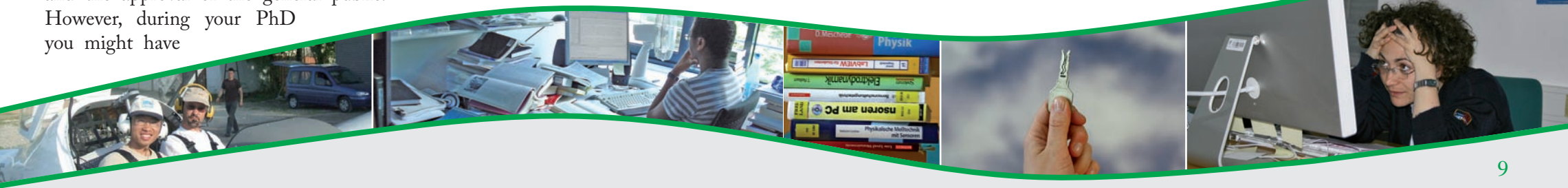
secrets of a successful academic career (no, not again!). Instead we would like to draw your attention to a more subjective, personal issue: you! How do you perceive yourself and your achievements within the context of your scientific community? What have you enjoyed about your PhD? What does it mean for you to be a successful scientist? Is it the talent to describe accurately scientific problems and derive testable hypotheses from abstract theoretical frameworks or is it the ability to analyse datasets in innovative ways that distinguish the really good scientists from the rest? Is it substantial progress in your niche – the ability to excel or the determination to go beyond your mental and physical limits?

Think about the eureka!-moments that you experienced during the last three years. About your curiosity! Your intrinsic motivation! Science is more than a job...it is a personal mission, a passion. It is the pursuit of an activity in which one does not immediately see results...and in which one has to cope with a certain amount of monotony despite the luxury of being paid to learn new things.

Think about your survival kit. How do you deal with feelings of failure and disillusionment? Failure is not personal, it is part of the scientific process – non-significant results are part of the physiognomy of science.

Become aware of the necessity of certain skills that you will need throughout your career: independent thinking, teamwork, discipline and the meeting of deadlines, networking, and last but by no means least, the ability to communicate the essence of your projects. These skills will be important assets regardless of whether or not your latest experiments turned out to be significant!

When you have finished reading this article, take a break and spend five minutes thinking about your personal achievements and how science fits in with who you are and where you want to go. Use our questionnaire! Remember that whatever comes after the Max-Planck-experience: you have achieved a great deal and made a contribution to society...hey, part of success is loving yourself!!!



Questionnaire on Scientific Success

What is success? What does it mean for the scientific community, what for you personally? Do you perceive yourself as successful and what is special about you? The following questionnaire contains ten questions that you already may have asked yourself – if not, you might think about your personal answers while reading what seven scientists from different fields and at different levels of their career responded. (Names are changed by the editorial board to preserve the anonymity)

What is success?

There are two aspects to this. In practice, the second is probably more important (perhaps sadly): 1. Seeing that one's scientific work leads to satisfactory results and to answers for questions that one was always curious about. 2. Being accepted by fellow scientists as a colleague who makes an important contribution to the business of science.

Alan Adverb, male workgroup leader, Humanities Section

As a mother of two small kids, success is when I got to work for a full day on my actual research, during normal daylight hours, kids healthy, household under control, no urgent administrative matters,

no computer troubles. For others just a normal day. Usually, success is measured on the number of papers, posters, talks at conferences – but to me scientific success is to discover something exciting and new, small or big, that gets me going in my field of research and gives me the drive to dig down further.

Corinna Chaos, female PhD student, mother of two kids, CPT section

Not a good question. How do I define it? How do I think the community defines it? For the scientific community:

High paper output in good journals (especially Nature and Science), good grants, big group, invitation to talks, panels, committees etc.

For me personally:

High paper output in really good journals (not Nature and Science), positive feedback from the people I work with, appreciation within the scientific community, all the above if they are not achieved at the expense of someone else (e.g. family) or of one's health.

Gilbert Gravity, male junior research group leader, CPT section

Do you perceive yourself as successful?

I don't know. Yes, in the sense that I like my work and I have lots of drive, and no, that I never seem to make it to get enough time to work on my Ph.D. and be fully there for my family at the same time. It is a daily struggle, which I can't win.

Corinna Chaos

Yes. Got a well paid job that allows me to do what I want to do.

David Decibel, male junior research group leader, CPT section

Do you celebrate your success? If yes, how?

Each gathering with colleagues, such as a conference, is still a kind of celebration for me. We are extremely privileged, within the Max Planck Institutes, and in the rich countries more generally, so we have a lot of reason to celebrate together (regardless of how successful we perceive each other to be). *Alan Adverb*

Not really, because there are so many other aims/horizons to be reached that at the moment when you realize that you

have been successful, this is already history. *Frank Farad, male institute director, CPT section*

How important are external factors (publications, talk invitations etc.) for your perception of success (internal sense of achievement)?

They're obviously not unimportant, because there is a strong pressure on scientists working within the MPS (and anywhere else, I guess) to 'publish or perish'. Furthermore, publications or invitations to talks are of course an external indicator of how good your work is. But just the solution of a problem, or reading through something I've written and thinking 'that's not bad' gives me a small feeling of success.

Bertha Book, female junior research group leader, Humanities Section

The highest sense of achievement arises when I personally believe a work was a step forward AND the scientific community does so (expressing it by invitations to talk and citation etc). But it also happened that I did not take my results so serious until



colleagues really stressed the importance.
Eddy Electron, male junior research group leader, CPT section

Are you comfortable with how you measure success?

Mostly. But then my supervisor declares what I consider successful research as “not interesting” and it takes me a while to stick to my own measures of it being a success.
Corinna Chaos

Not exactly. In general, I try to reach a more holistic view of my achievements integrating not only the usual indicators (papers, grants, etc.) but also other criteria such as being a good supervisor, teacher, father, citizen etc.
Gilbert Gravity

Are you comfortable with how the scientific community measures success?

I don't think the community as such measures success. As a community, we often have to try to assess a colleague's merits when giving them a job or promoting them. But this is not exactly the same as “success”. When hiring someone for a position, we normally say that we want the best person, not the most successful person. (I'm often not comfortable with the way in which such decisions are made, but I don't know a solution.)
Alan Adverb

The community cannot measure success the same way as the individual. The scientific community and the tax payer don't care about work-life-balance, family issues, etc. The community wants maximum output (in terms of quality and quantity) for a given amount of invested money. In general, I think, the scientific community measures success in the above-mentioned sense quite well. However, I think it is important to realize that publications in Science and Nature are not exactly a proof of scientific excellence but rather of cleverness in selling scientific results.
Gilbert Gravity

What are the secrets of a successful scientist? What distinguishes you from others?

Who said I'm a successful scientist??? As to the first part of the question, what the secret is, I always imagined it to be a combination of a large amount of creativity, a not insubstantial amount of elbows, and a small amount of luck. But you would have to ask the really successful scientists what their secret really is – and then let me know.
Bertha Book

If only I knew the secrets...
Gilbert Gravity

Precision but not perfectionism; ability to abstract and conceptual thinking; creativity; balance of self-confidence and self-criticism.

Eddy Electron

What are your driving forces?

- curiosity - the satisfaction to gain understanding and new knowledge - the desire to open new fields of research - the will to change some part of the world's operation
Frank Farad

Curiosity, love for nature, need to support my family.
Gilbert Gravity

How do you cope with the daily routine of scientific work? How do you cope with failure?

Ok. To the extent that I do, I try not to think too much about it and just get it done and out of the way. What is failure? A rejected proposal or manuscript? That can also mean that your work was not good enough, and you need to improve it. So, try again. Or the time is not right for it and you need to postpone it.

David Decibel

You should better ask how I cope with the pile of administrative work. Formerly the night and the weekends were reserved for my own science, but this has become history. Today, I try to reserve some weekend to do science. Failures are always bitter. With administrative failures I may not sleep for days. Scientific failures, I try to be better.

Frank Farad

Does private success influence your scientific career?

I find it hard to separate “private life” from “career life”. I would not enjoy my life if I did not perceive the two aspects as fundamentally unified. I don't think that what counts in life more generally is “success”, though if one has success, that's no doubt very nice. Fortunately, most people who are not particularly “successful” are nevertheless quite happy in their life!

Alan Adverb

For me the private life is important not to become ‘crazy’, i.e. too involved in science. But in general it could be that private success correlates negatively with scientific success for practical reasons. What about the conflict profession and family here?

Eddy Electron



What the ?&%@# is Bologna ...

Corinna Handschuh

... and what does it mean for you?

The Bologna Process is an important part of the European educational policy and aims at creating a 'European Higher Research Area'. It was officially started in 1999 by the development of the Bologna declaration, which states the objectives of the process. So far it has been signed by 46 states (from in- and outside the EU). The process is accompanied by biannual ministerial conferences, the next of which is to be held in 2009 in Flanders.

The goals of the Bologna Declaration can be summarized as the following:

1. Adoption of a system of comparable degrees across Europe
2. Adoption of a system based on two main cycles of degrees: undergraduate (Bachelor) and graduate (Master)
3. Establishment of a credit system to encourage students' mobility
4. Promotion of mobility - i.e. access to study and training opportunities; recognition of research or teaching periods spent in a European context
5. Promotion of cooperation and quality assurance

The original Bologna declaration only aimed at creating comparability between European universities at the undergraduate (Bachelor) and graduate (Master) level. However, at the ministers' meeting at 2003 in Berlin it was agreed that doctoral programs are to be added to the Bologna Process as a third cycle. The main effect of this will be that Europe-wide credit points will be needed within doctoral programs to complete the degree, while until now in most German universities no credits or coursework were needed for a PhD.

How this requirement is included in the study regulations will most certainly vary between universities. If the credit system is about to be introduced at your university, it might be a good idea for MPI PhD students to address these issues while the study regulations are changed. In case the credit system is already implemented, it might be useful to check how these questions are dealt with:

Can credits only be obtained from courses offered at the university, or can events at the MPI (e.g. regular lab seminars, or intro-

ductory course to special topics) be transferred to credits?

Under which conditions is this the case (e.g. is a register required, do you have to take an exam)?

Can credits be received for published papers, conference talks etc.? What are the conditions (e.g. do you need a written statement from the conference organizers, does the publication have to be peer-reviewed)?

What about courses taken at summer schools (especially outside the Bologna countries, e.g. US), can you get credits for that?

Can you get credits for courses from other disciplines? What about soft skill or language courses (e.g. German classes for non natives)?

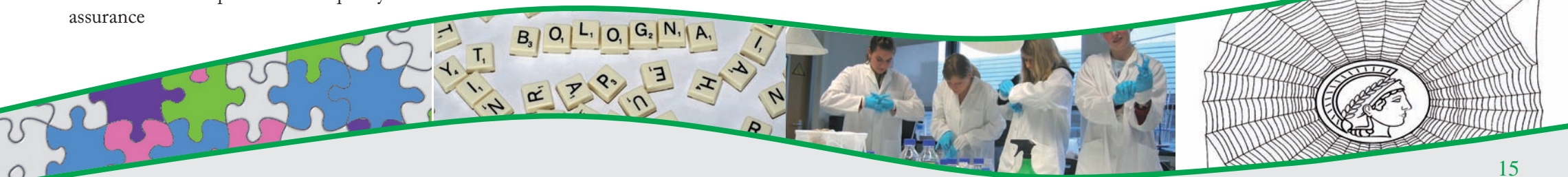
Additional information and all official documents about the process (such as the Bologna Declaration and the Communiqués of the biannual conferences) can be found at the Webpage of the 2009 meeting:

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/about/>

Workgroups of the PhDnet

On the following pages, we want to present you the work of the PhDnet in more detail; you will read about our recent events (the general meeting in Berlin – which was already mentioned several times – and the second interdisciplinary PhD workshop) as well as about the work of most of the PhDnet workgroups in the past year.

The workgroups are created every year at the general PhDnet meeting. Permanent workgroups are the Steering Group (consisting of the Spokesperson and the Section Representatives), the secretary group (who organizes information and communication within the PhDnet), the Meeting group (see page 16), the Web Group (see page 23) and the Seminar Group (see page 24). Four other workgroups were temporarily established in 2006: The Event Group (see page 20), the Alumni Group (see page 26), the Questionnaire group (who already conducted two surveys concerning the situation of PhDstudents in the MPS), and last but not least the Offspring Group who is responsible for this magazine.



PhDnet

Corinna Handschuh
Julia Steinbach

Meeting 2007

In the autumn of 2007 – as every year – PhD representatives from the MPIs all over Germany (and even beyond) came together for the PhDnet's general meeting. This time the location was the MPI for Infection Biology, Berlin. As was to be expected, the German capital drew about 80 participants to the meeting (the largest number of participants so far).

Giving an adequate summary of such a packed event is almost impossible. We will try to give an account of the three central aspects of the annual PhDnet meeting: first of all the operational and political part, secondly the scientific part, and last but not least the socio-cultural aspect of the gathering.

Split up into the different sections (CPT, BioMed and Humanities) the meeting participants discussed their specific problems – which turned out to be quite similar in most cases, as it was realised when the whole group met later again for further discussion. Some key questions and main problems were also discussed the next day with Prof. Gruss, the president of the Max Planck Society, and Ilka Schiessler from the general administration.

The following points were addressed to Prof. Gruss: Where is the German (and specifically the MPS) PhD education heading? Are PhD students “young professionals” or are they “just students”? Prof. Gruss told us that in his opinion PhD students are making a valuable contribution to the research within MPS, yet they are still in a training process. Generally he thinks that the German system will develop more into the direction of an Anglo-Saxon system of graduate education. This assessment is reflected in the International Max Planck Research Schools (IMPRS), the Graduate Schools, which have been set up (and will continue to be set up) at various MPIs.

Another question, also related to the status of the PhD students, referred to the EU Charter for researchers. Two parts of which were of special interest for us: First, that “all researchers” – and the charter is especially including doctoral candidates – “should be recognized as professionals and be treated accordingly”. Second, concerning funding and salaries, the charta says that “employers and funders should ensure that the perfor-

mance of researchers is not undermined by instability of employment contracts”, and should therefore commit themselves as far as possible to improving the stability of employment conditions for researchers. Many institutions have already signed this charter, but only a few of them in Germany (not including the Max Planck Society). We asked Prof. Gruss why the MPS has not signed, and if he would agree especially on the two paragraphs mentioned. He explained that the MPS already realized most of the contents of the charter. According to him, the main reasons for not signing it are concerns from the legal department regarding definition of research and other critical formulations. But he also mentioned that in his opinion, the charter discourages mobility.

The plenum of PhD students agreed that we shouldn't rush into any actions concerning the EU Charter. So we asked the next steering group to decide whether they want to take any actions concerning this issue (e.g. writing an open letter) and possibly discuss it at the next meeting.

Again, Professor Gruss reassured us that he is very fond of the PhDnet and will provide us with all support he can give to strengthen local PhD initiatives.

A concern during the discussion with Ilka Schiessler was the question of enhanced liability for stipend holders which has caused a lot of confusion and uncertainty: if a stipend holder damages something at work, he/she is completely liable for this (there is no upper threshold such as the 3 months' salaries for contract holders). A private liability insurance doesn't cover damage at work and a business liability insurance is very expensive for stipend holders. Ilka Schiessler assured that the MPS is working on a solution for this, but she also stated that so far no case has occurred where a stipend holder had to pay an expensive damage by him-/herself.

Coming to the scientific aspect, the PhDnet meetings are a good opportunity to meet people from other MPIs working on similar topics and get connected with them.



Apart from that, there were also some scientific presentations on the schedule. In the three scientific talks of the meeting we could get an impression on the research currently being carried out at the MPIs in and around Berlin. Topics of the talks were widely stretched, including stem cell research, plant biomechanics and the developmental psychology of patience. Almost all parts of the talks were presented in a way understandable to non-experts in the field. That was a brilliant achievement – most of you will have experienced how hard this is trying to explain to your parents, grandparents etc. what your research is about.

The highlight of the scientific agenda of the PhDnet meetings is a public talk, open – as the name suggests – to the general public. This time the local organizers had chosen a very hot topic: global warming. The speaker, Mojib Latif, gave an instructive lecture about the effects humans have on climate change, commenting on facts and fiction being put forward in the

current debate. The talk was followed by a very lively and engaged debate with the audience in which also the speaker could learn a few things (if only about where, what and why Garching is).

Berlin's nightlife offers ample opportunities to socialize after a hard day of work. The local PhDs were helpful guides to find suitable evening activities for everyone. For example one could witness the famous "Kreuzberg nights" (as immortalized in a German song). And even see Piet's urologist – there is no reason to be concerned about his health, the urologist's surgery is simply the only noticeable sign on the door of an otherwise hidden Kreuzberg pub. Anyway, we had a lot of fun. Just before the farewell we had the opportunity to go underground on a guided tour through the air-raid shelters from WWII. The two guides (one in English and one in German) gave very insightful tours and were happy to answer all our questions.

All in all, Berlin 2007 was a successful and enjoyable meeting. Many thanks to the local organizers – Borjana Arsova, Martje Toenjes, Linda Hallen, Philipp Messer and Jan Peter "Piet" Böttcher – for making this possible.

Invitation

7th PhDnet General Meeting

The next General Meeting of the Max Planck Society PhD representatives will take place in Bremen at the

**MPI for Marine Microbiology
from November 27-29, 2008.**

All PhD representatives or other interested PhD students from Max Planck Institutes are invited to join! The preparation by the new Meeting group is already in process.

Detailed information on the next meeting can be found soon under http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/wiki/index.php/Meeting_group



Event Workgroup

Cornelia Graf, Regina Geyer
Wolfgang Engelsberger

Impressed by the 1st Interdisciplinary Max Planck PhdNet Workshop in 2006 a group of ten enthusiastic PhD students decided to arrange for a sequel by planning the 2nd workshop in 2007.

The goals of the 1st workshop were favoured and therefore kept the same:

- strengthen interdisciplinary exchange and broaden the perspective on science
- raise awareness of common interests within the research community
- build career prospects and networks
- communicate research to non-experts in the field

As topic for the workshop, we agreed on "Communication" which seemed to be a topic wide enough to attract PhD students from different fields. After a first meeting of the organizing team in October 2006, a proposal was presented one month later to the general meeting of the PhdNet and the cost estimate was accepted. The concept seemed catching, so an additional member entered the team during the meeting. During the next months the workshop assumed a definite form with the help of hundreds of emails and un-

countable telephone calls. After the team decided for Frankfurt/Main as the site of the 2007 workshop, a youth hostel had to be reserved, an advertising poster designed, a website created and keynote speakers contacted. For a second personal discussion, the organizing team met in Frankfurt/Main in March 2007. While testing the youth hostel, the schedule for the last months was fixed and the preparation was completed. The registration opened in the middle of April, three keynote speakers were won, almost 50 beds were booked at the Youth Hostel and after some busy weeks of design and error search the abstract book was printed.

Finally, the workshop took place from July 26th – 28th 2007. Forty-five participants from 23 different MPIs joined to present their research either in talks or in posters to a diverse audience. To enable interaction between PhD students of the Max Planck Society and the Helmholtz Association, three Helmholtz students also joined the workshop. The topic "Communication" was dealt with in three sections: human communication, biological communication,

and technical, physical and chemical aspects of communication. In addition to the PhD students, the three keynote speakers – Tanya Stivers (MPI of Psycholinguistics), Georg Kreutzberg (MPI of Neurobiology), and Jeremy Hills (MPI of Biological Cybernetics) – gave interesting insights into their fields of research. Participants whose topics did not fit into the theme of communication presented their work in an interdisciplinary section. It seems everyone enjoyed the meeting and it matched the goal to bring together PhD students of all Max Planck Institutes for scientific exchange and cheerful get-together. Contrary to the organizing team's fears, everything went fine – besides the forgotten laser pointer and a vegetarian meal that contained ham. To analyse the participants' feedback in more detail, last year's questionnaire was reused. Towards the end of the workshop, a group of motivated participants was formed that was willing to organise another interdisciplinary workshop for the year 2008. Thus, the workshop is on the best way to become an annual tradition.

More information about the 2007 workshop, also including pictures and documents, such as the abstract book, can be found on the PhdNet webpage: <http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/workshop/index.htm>.

More information about how to organize a workshop can be found at the PhdNet Wiki: http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/wiki/index.php/Workshop_Organization.

Members of the event group:

Cornelia Graf (MPI of Psychiatry, Munich), Bakr Badawy (MPI for Biogeochemistry, Jena), Daniel de Graaf (MPI of Infection Biology, Berlin), Esther Fischbach (Fritz-Haber-Institut, Berlin), Hella Riede (MPI of Chemistry, Mainz), Jens Weber (MPI for Colloids and Interfaces, Golm), Laura Herbst (MPI of Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen, The Netherlands), Pawel Buczek (MPI of Microstructure Physics, Halle/Saale), Regina Geyer (MPI for Plant Breeding, Cologne), Ricarda Rintisch (Fritz-Haber-Institut, Berlin) and Wolfgang Engelsberger (MPI for Molecular Plant Physiology, Golm).



Announcement of PhD workshop 2008

At the last general meeting of the PhD-net in Berlin a new event workgroup was established and is going to organize the 3rd interdisciplinary PhDnet workshop. The topic will be “The Art of Science and the Science of Art” and it will take place at the beautiful location Burg Schwaneck (www.burgschwaneck.de) near Munich, from August 29 – 31. We want to cover the whole field of research the Max Planck Society offers, therefore trying to get keynote speakers and attract participants from all three sections.

“The Art of Science and the Science of Art”, we don’t want this to be understood only as nice pictures or just visual things, as one may imagine at first. It’s also not about how one could make his data look as good as possible. It can also mean: the art of being a good scientist, the elegance of a well planned experiment or the beauty of a mathematical proof. Also, the second part of the title can be interpreted quite differently: for example, the establishing of new restoration techniques or the history, development and perception of art or the social meaning in the creation of artwork.

In short, “Art” can mean creation, design or skill, “Art” can be produced or perceived, done actively or consumed passively, and so can “Science”.

These few examples are just to show that the context of art and science and their relations to each other can be seen in many different ways and we are looking forward to an event with lots of open-minded speakers as well as participants.

More information about the workshop, the expected keynote speakers and other details will soon be available in the event workgroup portal on the PhDnet wiki: http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/wiki/index.php/Event_group

Web Workgroup

Tobias Lenz
Thomas Kahle

The Web presence of the PhDnet is currently maintained by a motivated two-men-workgroup. All online-related communication issues were managed using resources provided by the GWDG in Göttingen, where our webpage www.phdnet.mpg.de is hosted. It is maintained by Tobias who also implemented interactive features like an online registration for events. These resources are also made available to other groups; e.g. the Questionnaire group successfully used it to conduct two questionnaires completely online-based. Until last year, we also hosted a forum but after a long discussion at the 2006 PhDnet meeting it was decided that the necessary work to maintain it was too much, mainly due to spammers and various other attempts of abuse. As an alternative, we decided it would be interesting to try the new possibilities that a wiki offers. A wiki is an online based content management system where everyone (with suitable permissions) can participate. There is one wiki that everyone knows: Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia. Now, after almost one year the PhDnet wiki is up and running at www.phdnet.mpg.de/wiki - and everyone

of you is invited to participate! Thomas used a version of MediaWiki, the same software that makes Wikipedia work. He also implemented access restrictions, making it possible to protect certain areas. Already the wiki has become a very practical tool for the communication within the work groups. The steering group, for instance, intensively uses their internal section that can only be read and edited by them. Still, for the future we would like to establish the wiki as a communication platform also for science-related information and even trivia. In this sense the wiki is surely useful to keep bureaucracy as low as possible but it can become even more: a platform for the discussion of interdisciplinary ideas.

Since some people stated that it would be useful to additionally conserve the possibility of fast communication of opportunities (as job offers etc), we have also revived the PhDNet mailing list. Everyone can subscribe to this list to receive up-to-date information, so do not hesitate to join!



Seminars

Workgroup

Ann Falk
Joachim Ritter

Science is organized knowledge. Wisdom is organized life. (Immanuel Kant)

The focus of PhD education is mostly on gathering expertise in one special field of research. Nevertheless, within this period of three to five years your personality should also be shaped in a way to become a responsible scientist, an enlightening teacher and a motivating leader. Learning these skills can easily be forgotten within routine work. Even worse, some students do not even have the opportunity to acquire these personal skills. For this reason, the Seminar Group was established to give students access to non-scientific courses. These so called "soft skills" may have an enormous positive impact on their further PhD time and professional life afterwards.

Up to now, the seminar group offered the following courses:

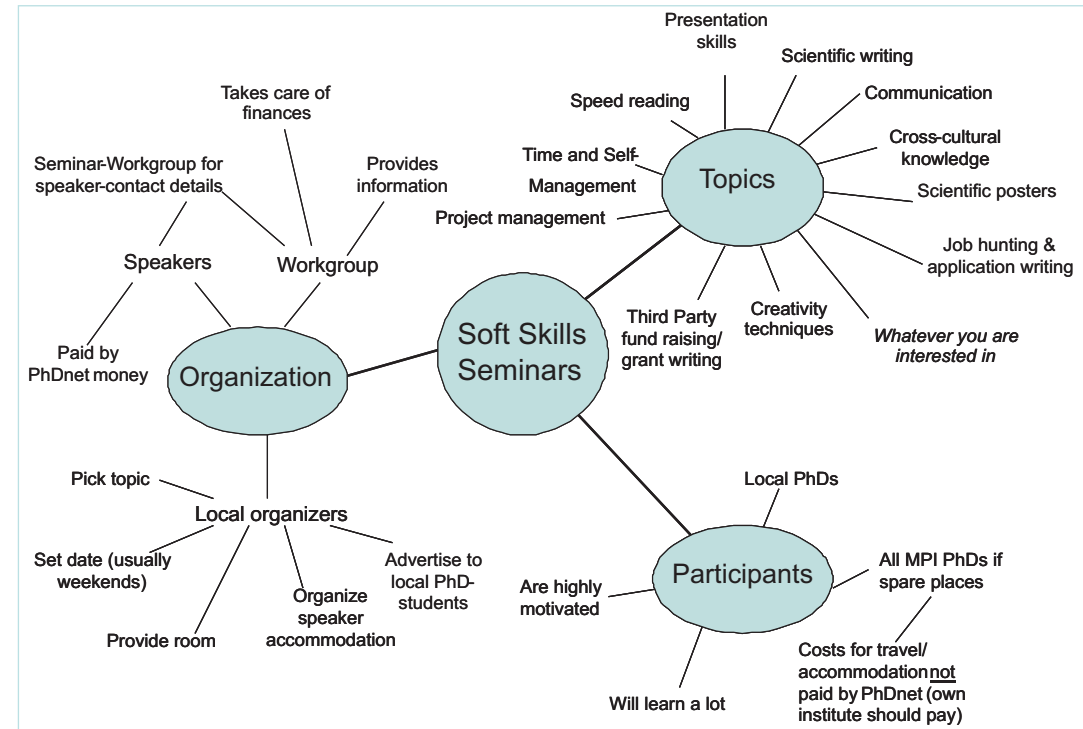
- Speed reading (0.5 days)
- Presenting (1.5 days)
- Scientific writing (1 day)
- Project Management (1 day)
- Job Hunting/Application Training (1 day, new since 2007)

The organization of a seminar usually starts with the application of an institute (typically done by PhD representative) and the selection of a topic. Then speakers are recruited by the Seminar Group. While speaker recruiting, announcement of the seminars and the application and admission procedures are centrally organized, the local organization of the events is done by PhD students of the respective Max Planck Institute.

Given that the general administration has promised us an increasing budget if the demand is high enough, we hope to finance not only the current 6 or 7 seminar weekends per year but many more in the future. We would also like to organize new kinds of seminars, like cross-cultural communication or creativity techniques, if there is an audience for this. If you have any other ideas for seminars, just ask us, maybe we can arrange something.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Ilka Schießler from the general administration for helping to organize the seminars and the Deutsche Bundesbank for the financial support.



If you want to learn how to do such MindMaps (™) and how they can help you with your work, you should participate in the Project Management seminar.



Alumni

Workgroup

Simon Bungers

Many American universities and an increasing number of German universities allow you to stay attached after achieving your degree by becoming an Alumnus. Some MPIs already had and still have a vivid alumni community, which uses internet-based databases and platforms, forums, and alumni meetings to stay connected. However, for the majority of institutes and on the global level of the MPS this was not the case.

Therefore, in 2006 the Alumni Workgroup of the PhDnet was established – originally, to set up an internet-based platform for MPS alumni. However, soon the workgroup realized that technical resources and manpower for accomplishing such a task were not available, so the wish for help was addressed to the general administration of the MPS. They recently established the Department of Alumni Affairs, who developed an internet portal called maxNET.

During the PhDnet meeting 2007 the question arose whether the Alumni Workgroup is still of use now, since the original task already has been accomplished. We came to the decision that there are still a number of things left to do: first of all we can promote the alumni network among PhD students.

Besides, we would like to help with the planned extension of MaxNET into a Max Planck employee network. We would like to support this with our ideas and demands and monitor the development of this platform.

At the PhDnet meeting in Berlin, Claudia Kahmen and Dr. Andreas Trepte from the Department of Alumni Affairs agreed to the idea to technically assign the Alumni Work Group leader as the alumni officer of the PhDnet. In this way, the PhD community will have a representative who has direct influence at the alumni officer meetings, which are organized by the department of alumni affairs.

Last but not least, the Alumni group members can support the local alumni officers in organizing alumni events etc. In summary, the tasks of the Alumni Workgroup are now more of a “communicative, informative and lobbying” nature.

If you want to participate in our work, visit our internal work group section in the wiki and state your comments in the “Ideas and Comments” section!

Become a MPS Alumnus!

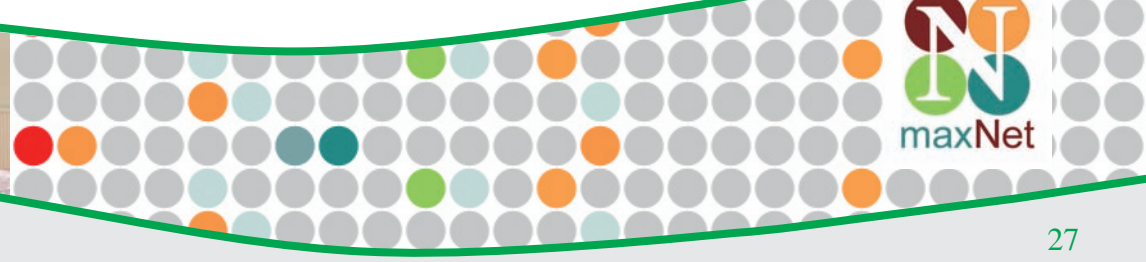
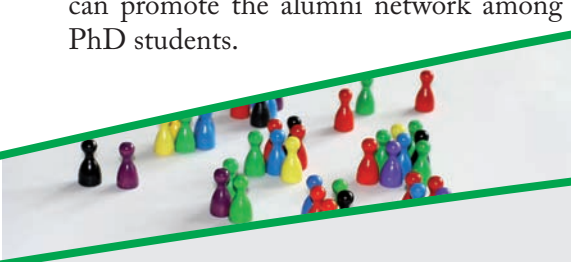
As you already read on the previous page, the General Administration of the MPS has recently established the Department of Alumni Affairs. They have set up an internet portal for alumni of the MPS, called maxNET. This internet portal works much like the other social platforms on the net: Facebook, studiVZ, Xing & Co. You only upload the information you want to be visible and you can search and find other alumni, join groups etc. Being developed by the MPS itself, you have of course special science-related features such as listing your publications and of course you are linked to your former MPI.

One drawback of this platform is that at the moment only alumni of the MPS can register but not people currently working for the MPS. Therefore, though it is possible for a former MPS PhD student to become an alumnus it is not possible for a student still working for her or his degree to get in contact with alumni. However, an extension of maxNET for current employees is already under development at the moment.

Since the Department of Alumni Affairs was only established quite recently, maxNET is not very well known among former PhD students and PhD students which are close to finishing their thesis and might be interested to become an alumnus.

In order to change this, we would like to present in short how you can join the network:

Just go to <https://maxnet.mpg.de/> and register! Your request of registration is then validated by your former MPI. In this way the Internet portal stays restricted to former MPS employees. At every MPI a member of the staff has been assigned to validate the requests. These so-called alumni officers are also responsible for informing former scientists and people leaving the institute who are interested in becoming alumni. You can find your alumni officer in a list at the Alumni group section in the PhDnet Wiki.



Vectorial – Networking Life Scientists

Bryan Downie

While scientific progress has benefited enormously from the success of internet-based communication, there has been little progress in developing new communication technologies for scientists. E-Mail technology has changed very little in the past 20 years, journal web sites still maintain a primarily unidirectional information distribution model, and conference attendance is limited by space, time, and cost. Yet the development of innovative communications technologies such as instant messaging, social networking sites and streaming video provide opportunities for scientists to communicate and collaborate with each other in new and exciting ways.

Two years ago, I had a problem. I had received my Bachelor's of Science in Neurobiology, and my education until that time had focused primarily on neuroanatomy, ion channel function and kinetics, and neurodevelopment. Yet during the first year of my PhD research, we made a discovery implicating an ion channel in the formation of new blood vessels, a process known as angiogenesis. While angiogenesis is of great interest to cancer biologists for its involvement in tumor progression, it had been largely ignored

during my bachelor's training. I subsequently embarked on a frenzied printout of a thousand myriad reviews on the regulation of angiogenesis, teaching myself the molecular and cellular regulatory mechanisms for this critical process.

A year later, we began collaborating with a group in a neighboring institute who had expertise in the regulation of angiogenesis. After describing our results, our collaborators advised us of several controls missing from our experiments, suggested several antibodies and staining protocols, and pointed out experimental design flaws. Because of our lack of experience in a new field, we had wasted both time and money on technical mistakes and design flaws.

The idea for Vectorial (<http://vectorial.ning.com>) arose from this experience, out of the realization that there is a better way to find and communicate with other scientists. We began with the model defined by highly successful social networking web sites such as StudiVZ, Facebook and LinkedIn. In Vectorial, users build personalized profiles, and describe their research interests, location, language fluency, and a short description

of their research. Other features have also been implemented, such as the ability to search for other users who have particular scientific interests, the ability to invite friends and collaborators, and the ability to join groups based on research interest, location, technique, hobby, or any other defining characteristic. Public forums are available to discuss topics of general interest such as career development, grant application, and fields of biology discussions.

Because personal data such as contact information and research interests can also easily become outdated due to the mobility of young scientists as they transition between jobs, Vectorial can serve as a central repository for this information. In this role Vectorial could enable potential employers and fellow collaborators to easily find and contact one another, while still maintaining individual researcher privacy. Finally, Vectorial can serve as a forum for career development resources for young life scientists.

At its core, Vectorial is a forum for life scientists of all ages to connect with each

other. These connections will enable researchers to leverage each other's expertise and knowledge to improve data collection and analysis. With future success, we hope to help bring scientific communication fully into the interactivity of Web 2.0.

About the Author: Bryan Downie (USA) is a PhD student in cancer biology at the



Max Planck Institute of Experimental Medicine in Göttingen, Germany.

Originally trained as a computer scientist, he has extensive experience in

the field of web site design and maintenance, having worked from 1995 to 2000 for companies as Apple Computer and Hotmail. He received in Bachelor's degree in Neurobiology from the University of Washington in 2004. He can be contacted at downie@em.mpg.de.



Vectorial
Networking for Life Scientists

Getting along in Germany

Julia Steinbach

By most Germans, the German bureaucracy is known to be annoying and hard to cope with, so for foreigners coming to Germany it is an even harder ordeal. Foreign scientists and PhD students have to cope with quite a number of bureaucratic issues but additionally, even the daily life in Germany can be quite challenging and some things seem strange and confusing in the beginning. Here, two “newbies” tell you about their experiences when first coming to Germany:

Starting a new life in Germany



by Julia Marshall, Postdoc from Canada, now working at MPI for Biogeochemistry in Jena

“As a foreigner arriving in Germany one of the first things that you might need to do is buy yourself something to eat, which will lead you to the grocery stores. There are quite a few chains of “discount” stores in Germany, which, if you’re not used to them, can be quite a surprise. Rather than having the goods arranged on the shelves they’re left in the boxes in which they’re shipped from the wholesaler, and just stacked up. It’s also common for the discount stores to not stock many common things, sometimes even fresh milk. Still, the savings can be quite good.

At the non-discount grocery stores things look more like what I was used to in Canada, though the selection is rather different.

One thing you ought to be prepared for is the checkout. In a laudable effort to cut down on waste in Germany, most stores don’t provide free plastic or paper bags at the checkout, asking instead that you bring your own from home, or buy some sturdy reusable bags there. Even when you come prepared with your own bags it can still be

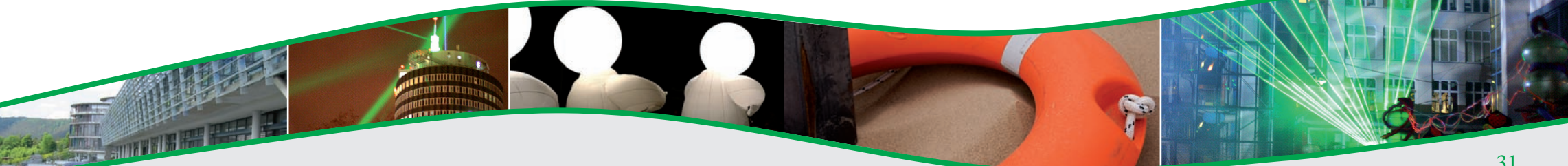
an awkward struggle to stow everything away in bags while getting out the right change to pay.

As for finding supplies that may not be stocked in a typical German grocery store, most cities have small import shops that provide goods from around the world. Your best bet might be to ask other foreigners where they buy things.

The effort to cut back on waste extends past the grocery bags of course. The German recycling and garbage system can be quite a science, with different bins for paper, recyclable packaging (marked with the “grüne Punkt”), compostable food waste, and other garbage. Glass and plastic containers on which a deposit (“Pfand”) has been paid can be brought back to the point of sale for a refund, and other glass has to be brought to big communal bins found every few blocks and sorted into white, green, and brown glass. Be sure to check the times on the bins before dumping glass inside!

In addition to the sensible rule telling you not to break glass outside other peoples’ apartments in the middle of the night, it’s also often forbidden to dump glass during the quiet time after lunch, from 13:00 to 15:00. This quiet time is also stipulated in many leases, which was quite a shock for me (but then so was the sheer size of my 17-page lease which I spent a full day typing into Babelfish in a vain attempt to understand it before signing).

And if everything seems altogether overwhelming and hopelessly different, rest assured that it will get better. When I first arrived I noticed so many things that were different or unfamiliar, but as time goes on things seem more and more like home.“



Spare a thought for a JJC



by Joseph Atóyèbí, PhD student from Nigeria, working at MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig

“The acronym JJC is a parlance in the Nigerian pidgin which means Johnny-Just-Come. This is equivalent to the well known expression New-kid-on-the-block. There is no better way of referring to my humble self in my first days in Leipzig.

It was the first of September 2006 and before coming to Germany, I had never traveled out of the shores of my beloved country Nigeria even though I was 33 years of age. I found myself in a confused state on my arrival at the Hauptbahnhof. I came out of the gigantic edifice and to the amazing sight of streams of speeding

cars and trams rolling in and out of the tram station. The trams all had numbers and to my consternation I realized I did not know in what direction to head and what tram to take. The only information I had was that I was supposed to report at Deutscher Platz 6, where the MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology is located.

I must have asked someone for direction who only advised me to take the tram 16. He was not patient enough to show me where and how to get a boarding ticket. After roaming for close to half an hour, I finally settled for the option of taking a taxi. Though it was an expensive option, nevertheless, I guess it was cheaper compared with the possible embarrassment of wailing in the open with hot tears streaming down my proud cheeks while passers-by begin to wonder aloud in Deutsch (“warum weint der schwatze mann?”)

My second challenge was the weather. September 2006 was a fine month. But by October, the whole place was beginning to feel like the interior of a freezer. I had formed the habit of going home every afternoon for lunch since my apartment was only about five minutes walking distance from the Institute. One freezing afternoon, I planned going home as usual, but

by the time I stepped out of the Institute’s revolving doors, I got hit by a burst of very harsh cold wind that I could barely move my legs. Corinna, my concerned office-mate, she saw my predicament and counseled me to get some warm clothing, especially a jacket. But at the C&A shop in the city center I bought a jumper instead of a jacket. Maybe I was only exhibiting a defiant attitude to the cold or outright ignorance by not realizing how really cold this part of earth could be. When I got back to the Institute with the jumper, Corinna was amused at what I got for myself, then she took me personally back to the C&A shop to get what I really needed to combat the murderous weather.”

Are you a foreign PhD student and have you made similar first experiences in Germany? What seemed strange or funny to you when you first came here? Or are you a German PhD student who spent some time in another country? What are your impressions, which difficulties or problems did you have to face in the beginning?

Send us your stories or small anecdotes; we will publish them in one of the next issues!

And for getting along better in Germany, have a look at PhDnet-Wiki: http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/wiki/index.php/Getting_along_in_Germany.

There you will find important information about everyday life: about things like food and water, emergency numbers, medical care, transport, bureaucracy – but also a number of links to other, more comprehensive compendia – like “A Manual for Germany” from the German government – also in different languages!

Like all parts of the Wiki, this compendium also lives from your contributions, so feel free to update the information there if it is no longer up-to-date, to add information you consider missing or to provide links to other sources of information!

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