kieler anker

the new president of the cau kiel
new european masterprogram
the international café
sailing trips with the international center

special edition
Dear Alumni, dear Readers,

Welcome to the newest edition of the Kieler Anker!

Once again we have put together for you a colorful mixture of diverse topics about studies, life, and the University in Kiel.

We’ll inform you about new academic programs and about the latest research developments in Kiel. We accompany international guests on a visit to the Guest House’s International Café, and introduce you to the University’s new President, Professor Dr. Gerhard Fouquet, in a detailed portrait.

Perhaps a few of you can remember Mrs. Erdmute Jonathal, who used to work for the Evangelical Student Association? She is now retired, but she is still busy helping international students. For those of you who did not have the opportunity to meet her, you can get to know her through the portrait we give here.

In addition, we would like to introduce you to the International Center’s sailing program.

We hope that the articles arouse your interest and we would be glad to hear your comments and your ideas about this or about future editions.

With best wishes from Kiel.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Martina Schmode
Director of the International Center
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"and always a hand's width water under your keel!"

The sailing program of the International Center of the CAU Kiel offers international students the opportunity to experience one of Kiel's most successful sports – and hopefully an unforgettable day on the waters of the Kieler Förde.

The sailing program for international students at the University has already been around for over 50 years. It all began with a competition held by the German Scientific Philanthropy Association on the topic of intercultural encounters. The University of Kiel submitted a proposal based on the sailing concept and received the grant.

The sailing group of the International Center of the University consists of students and alumni of the University. Their goal is to foster contacts between German and international students and scientists. In a city like Kiel, what suggests itself more than to do this on a sailboat and to discover the city and the Förde from the water?

From mid-May until mid-September, day trips are organized three times a week. Even multi-day trips with international guests of the University are offered. Any guest who wants to participate can—it's not necessary to be able to sail yourself, as the ships are captained by two experienced sailors. But they do like to explain everything and they give people the chance to help out. They also maintain the ships during winter storage.

The International Center maintains three yachts for the sailing program. The three boats are between nine and ten meters long and offer space for at most 15 guests. The SY "Albertina" is a Bianca Riviera, the SY "Christiana" is a Seamaster 925, and the SY "Pocahontas" is a C&C 27. In addition to the regular weekly sailing trips, the International Center's sailboats are on the water every day during the Kieler Woche (Kiel Week) so that the great demand among international guests can be met. The main highlight for everyone is the chance to be on the water for the famous windjammer parade during Kiel's own world's largest sailing event. (ds)

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research in kiel

marine and climate research at kiel university awarded euros 9.3 million

New collaborative research center to investigate interactions between climate and oxygen budget of tropical oceans.

Marine and climate research, for which Kiel is already one of the leading German centers, is now to be further expanded in this city: The German Research Foundation (DFG) has approved the new collaborative research center (SFB) 754: “Climate – Biogeochemistry Interactions in the Tropical Ocean” of Kiel University together with the Leibniz Institute of Marine Sciences (IFM-GEOMAR). In this context the research center will receive EUR 9.3 million for the first four years of funding. The official start was on 1 January 2008.

More than 70 scientists of the IFM-GEOMAR and Kiel University will investigate the interactions between climate, ocean circulation and biogeochemistry of tropical oceans in 14 sub-projects. “The focus of our project is oxygen”, explains Professor Douglas Wallace of IFM-GEOMAR, spokesman for the new SFB. “In oceans oxygen acts as a switch controlling nutrient budget. This budget in turn is the basis of the marine food chain and the carbon balance. Climate change could possibly flip this switch through changes in physical, chemical and biological processes.”

Oxygen concentration is the same throughout the atmosphere, yet in oceans it is distributed much less evenly, and the interaction of influencing factors has not yet been completely investigated. There were periods in geological history when the oceans were dramatically lower in oxygen content, something that had extreme repercussions on the marine ecosystems of the time. Today, open ocean regions with a reduced oxygen concentration, known as oxygen minimum zones (OMZs), are exclusively found in tropical oceans.

The changes in the physical and biological processes brought on by climate change could drastically influence the scale and intensity of these OMZs. “The future ocean could dramatically change in terms of its biogeochemical composition, entailing positive and negative feedback effects on the climate, of which we can predict neither the intensity nor the consequences at the present state of science”, says Wallace. This new SFB is to contribute to a better understanding of these mechanisms and to help define a quantitative basis.

Core questions are: How do tropical OMZs react to climate changes and changes in ocean circulation? How do oceanic depressions and sources of nutrients react to changes in the oxygen content? In which period and to which extent did and does the oceanic oxygen and nutrient balance change?

These questions will be investigated by oceanographers, marine ecologists, molecular biologists, biogeochemists, paleo-oceanographers, geologists and climate researchers. “Kiel is the forefront of expertise in this field”, former Kiel University’s rector, Professor Thomas Bauer, emphasises. “The recently awarded excellence cluster ‘The Future Ocean’ and the new SFB mean our network of researchers is growing more interlinked.”

Other international cooperation, in particular with researchers on the Cape Verde Islands and in Peru - the main regions of research for this SFB – is to complement the projects. “Marine research in Kiel is first-class, globally oriented and has an extensive network, which makes us internationally a prominent and popular partner”, adds Professor Peter Herzig, director of IFM-GEOMAR.
The fact that Kiel has acquired this collaborative research center – one of seven currently in the city – means the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein has managed to further consolidate its position as a center of excellent science. At the same time it provides a boost to expanding our expertise and educating young scientists”, according to former Minister of Science Dietrich Austermann. Half of the funding is intended for attracting additional staff, to support the researchers in Kiel with their work.

A collaborative research center is a long-term cooperation of researchers within an institution of higher education, lasting up to 12 years, in which scientists collaborate in a framework involving multiple disciplines.

Kiel University and IFM-GEOMAR already pursue, respectively have already pursued, joint research on ocean-related subjects in two collaborative research centres: the SFB 460 on Dynamics of Thermohaline Circulation Variability during the period from 1996 to 2006 and the SFB 574 on Volatiles and Fluids in Subduction Zones which started in 2003. Additionally the DFG awarded Kiel a cluster of excellence “The Future Ocean” in October 2006, which does multidisciplinary research on the subject of oceans on a similarly large scale.

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These researchers of IFM-GEOMAR and Kiel University will be leading the sub-projects. The spokesman of the SFB is Professor Douglas Wallace (first row, 2nd from left).

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inside cau

always all ears for international students

Erdmute Jonathal worked a great deal with international students in the Evangelical Student Association (ESG). “Mrs. Erdmute”, who is retired, received the Honors Pin from Rector Thomas Bauer in February, 2008. The Kieler Anker talked to this energetic woman and found out what her time with the ESG was like and how she is spending her time now.

Erdmute Jonathal was the “good soul” at Kiel’s ESG for 19 years, and more than a few former international students, when they look back on their time in Kiel, remember her first. The mother of three grown children herself has relatives abroad, as a few of her ancestors emigrated to Brazil and helped found the town of Blumenau there.

Having first put her training to use as a secretary and bookkeeper in the service of two pastors, she slowly over the years became more of an advisor and mentor for international students. “People told me that I should really have studied pedagogy,” she grins. But according to her, she “just grew into it.”

However, the work had a different focus when she started working at the ESG in 1988. “I can remember that everything back then was working at a basic democratic level”, she recalls. “We regularly held association meetings and planned on weekends so that we could get the activities brochure together for the coming semester or discuss the work being done in the individual groups.” Because most of the association members were students who were only active in Kiel during their student years, there was always a lot of movement and the students often came up with good ideas.

Over the years she herself experienced a lot of new things: “the active emancipation movement was new to me, I mean the women’s groups in the ESG. I had registered the emancipation movement more in the media than anywhere else, and I’d spoken about it as a housewife, but it wasn’t anything I’d practiced. And suddenly there I was in the middle of it, suddenly it was the ‘StudentInnengemeinde’ with the capital I in the middle [editor’s note: this explicitly signifies the participation of both men and women, which is otherwise difficult to do in German]. At the time, that was really necessary, it had to be brought to people’s attention.”

Asked what the lasting impact of that time was, Ms. Jonathal ponders: “Right now people are resting on the heels of the gains of the past. Women with children have to be mobile, they cannot be left behind. Unfortunately, these women’s groups don’t exist any more. The young women who worked intensively on those efforts eventually completed their studies, and no one came to fill their shoes.”

International students had relatively little to do with the German students at the time and participated little in the association’s activities. “You have to imagine: they came to us as people in need of something, which is of course a bit humiliating.” That’s why Erdmute Jonathal was always discreet. If anyone needed financial assistance or simply “just wanted to talk,” he or she was offered a half-hour meeting time outside of normal hours so that things would be quiet in the house, either before opening or after closing.

“That way, the students were able to tell me what for they were coming to me about. Sometimes pro-
problems with their studies were the main reason, but sometimes it became apparent during the conversation just how many concerns and worries the students had here. On the one hand there was the homesickness from living in a different culture here in Kiel, but also there were worries about family at home, about parents or siblings. I always had an open ear for those issues, I was sort of a “mother figure”.

But she was also able to help, in the name of the ESG, with financial concerns. “Bafög” (the German public student loan program) was only available to domestic students, so the ESG had means at its disposal which were intended for students from the ‘third world’, as it was called, who were studying without financial support from the university and who had to keep their heads above water with the classic “student jobs” and a little help from home. “Many people showed up with 1,500 DM (German Marks), sometimes with the savings of their whole families or their whole villages. They came by bus across the Straits of Gibraltar and thought they’d get by for a long time on this amount. But then they’d notice that, with a few overnights in a youth hostel and a few meals out, a portion of the money was already gone. With the matriculation fee, health insurance, and the security deposit on their rooms in student housing, a further big chunk of the money was gone, because the cost of living was so high. Nobody had warned them about that at home.”

The ESG receives its funding from “Brot für die Welt” (Bread for the World), a religious aid organization. They have a fund, corresponding to between 3.4% and 3.7% of total donations, intended for emergency assistance to international students. The fund was divided among the various university cities and the Deaconry Service of the provincial churches, and from there it made its way to the ESG. The fact that the ESG was not an official church organization was never a problem in this respect. “I’ve encountered many confessions, but it would never have occurred to me to proselytize. If anyone can’t see from my personality and from the things I say that I’m a Christian, I must be doing something wrong. “If any took it upon themselves to ask me about that, and these were mostly Arabs, then I would talk with them about God, but I would never tell anyone that I’m on the right path and they’re on the wrong one. I’m sure we have a loving God, the both of us, and whoever reads the Koran carefully will find that there as well.”

Of course there were minor hurdles on the part of those seeking assistance, for example in the choice of language: “There were only a few language problems, most of the people who came to me had learned a lot in the excellent classes offered at the University. Of course I only speak little English, and whoever wanted something from me had to speak German, even in their first few semesters. Often that was a little more difficult, but we knew we would get through that together. I was able to understand quite a lot despite the language difficulties, since the problems of the first weeks tended to be very similar from student to student.”

Regular contact on a personal level did not last with most of the students, however. In contrast to her predecessor, who was very involved in the German congregation and often acted as witness to a wedding or as godmother to a child, Erdmute Jonathal kept her personal life and her work separate as much as possible. “Sometimes someone calls and asks how I’m doing, because fortunately you take your phone number with you when you move within Kiel. Otherwise I don’t and didn’t have much personal contact with the students. Problems were talked about inside the four walls of the office. I was a part of a time in their lives that ended when they finished their studies. I was part of a sometimes dark time, and once a problem is solved, you of course want to distance yourself from the situation.”

But Ms. Jonathal still has not completely stopped occupying herself with students’ problems even in retirement. The dedicated woman is still a member of a group that supports international students. “The members make a monetary contribution, and we
often seek out donations,” she explains with a smile. She is also very active in other ways: “Even as a retiree you can put yourself out into society. I’m so busy that I hardly have a chance to read, and I don’t have a television in the first place. I watch my grandchildren two days a week, then there’s the charity group and a small circle of friends – my schedule is full.”

But her big project, which also takes up the most time, is the chorus of the Catholic congregation of downtown Kiel that she participates in and which maintains an active exchange with an orchestra in Russia. “We have a lot of contact with Kaliningrad. This year is even our tenth anniversary. We meet at least once each year, either the orchestra visits us, like they did last December, or we go there, like we’re doing this coming July.” The planning and organization of the travel formalities and of the performances that the chorus and the orchestra put on together is done by Ermute Jonathal. “This summer we’ll have a few dates, in the cathedral and in Tilsit. The chorus and the orchestra are traveling there together. But we also travel privately, for example to hear organ concerts.”

Upon her return to Germany, there is usually work waiting for her with the charity organization, and she never tires of doing it, if only for the personal interaction and the new things she continuously learns about her own country: “The nice thing about Germany for international students is that here you can see that everyone – without having to be rich – has a chance to do something for him or herself.” (ds)
Scientists of the Kiel University reached yet another breakthrough in research into inflammatory diseases.

Kiel researchers have for the first time identified genes that cause the chronic inflammatory bowel disease, ulcerative colitis (Colitis ulcerosa). The study conducted by the research group at the Institute of Clinical Molecular Biology at Kiel University was published in the most recent issue of Nature Genetics. In their search for genes causing Crohn’s disease, the researchers discovered three genes that can only indicate a risk of colitis. Six years ago, Professor Stefan Schreiber’s team had already found the first risk-genes for Crohn’s disease, which is closely related to colitis.

Following on from the most recent studies into Crohn’s disease, the Kiel scientists investigated random samples of people with Crohn’s disease (1,850), with ulcerative colitis (1,103) and healthy subjects (1,817), taken from the German National Genome Research Network (NGFN) and the Popgen North German Biobank. They found changes in the genes PTPN2, HERC2 and STAT3 that were unique to ulcerative colitis.

Ulcerative colitis is an ulcerous, chronic inflammation of the large intestine that starts at the anus and can spread throughout the large intestine. Ulcerative colitis is currently incurable and can occur at any age, although the disease usually starts between the ages of 20 and 40. Over 300,000 people in Germany suffer from ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s disease.

The Cluster of Excellence “Inflammation at Interfaces” is conducting research into what triggers these and other inflammatory diseases and how they can be treated and prevented. This Cluster of Excellence is a network of collaboration between 70 research groups at the Universities of Kiel, Lübeck and the Leibniz Centre for Medicine and Biosciences at the Research Centre in Borstel. Their spokesman is the Kiel gastro-intestinal specialist Professor Stefan Schreiber.

The results of this research are already being used in specialist consultations for Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis at the Clinic for General Internal Medicine at the Schleswig-Holstein University Hospital in Kiel. This is where a new therapy against the inflammatory messenger compound “TNF” was recently developed, which has now been authorized in the USA.

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Ulcerative colitis, an inflammation of the bowel mucosa, spreads continuously from the rectum to variable degrees throughout the large intestine.

Copyright: Competence Network for Bowel Diseases
my vision is called "full university of the future"

As of summer 2008, Gerhard Fouquet is the new President of the Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel (CAU). The Kieler Anker spoke with him and learned about how he would like to conduct this newly created office.

Professor Fouquet, you were born in Ludwigshafen and studied in Gießen and Mannheim. What brings you so far north to the CAU Kiel?

I did my post-doc in 1994 in Siegen, and while I was still working on it, I got a call from Kiel telling me there was a C-4 professorship to be filled and that I should apply. So I came here in 1995. It was a professorship that related to my research interests in Medieval History. I had already specialized in social and economic history in my dissertation on the Speyer Cathedral Chapter, and the combination of social and economic history fit ideally into the structure of my research.

And how was the transition?

I felt very comfortable right away at the History Department, and at the University in general, although it was really completely different from anything I had known before. I made the transition very quickly, probably because my family was with me, and especially my wife didn’t want to leave from here again. We’ve taken to the weather and to the landscape, which I’d always been fascinated by, and also to the University.

Later you were Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. Did you find dealing more with administrative matters in the university hierarchy instead of teaching hard to take, and did you apply to be Prorector for that reason?

Actually not. When you become Dean of the Philosophical Faculty, it’s first and foremost an honor. I didn’t have any further ambitions in the university administration at the time. I did and still do see myself as a researcher and I find the profession very fulfilling. When I was asked if I’d be willing to serve as Prorector, I thought that I’d go back to devoting my full attention to research again after the three years. And then the question came up just last year if I would also apply for the President’s Office, which represents a completely different situation.

Deciding to lead the University for six years also means withdrawing to a large extent not only from teaching but also from research.

That was indeed a big step for me, but of course I had the chance to try it out for three years. Mr. Bauer and I led the university together for more than half a year after Mr. Eckert passed away.

As the first President of the University, you have the chance to make your own lasting mark on the position. Have you made any concrete plans for your term?

First of all we realized that I won’t be the first president of the University of Kiel after all. The history of a university of course has many facets and I was told that there had been a few presidents in the 1970’s. The 70’s were time of blossoming in Germany, there were incredibly dynamic processes at work, especially at the universities. In this atmosphere, people apparently tried out the presidential structure in Schleswig-Holstein.

But thanks to the new Higher Education Act (HSG) I’m the first president who’ll be serving a six-year term, which is a significant change. The Rectors who acted at this university previously served at one point a term of one year. Then it was two years and then four years.
You can of course undertake some larger-scale projects during a term this long, since there won’t be a successor the following year who scraps all the plans again. Have you set your sights on any concrete goals?

It’s not as if you come in like a politician or a government science minister and say, “I’m going to remake everything!” As far as innovation and research are concerned, a president can’t change anything anyway. He can only try to create an environment in which researchers can achieve their goals. We’ve undertaken to do quite a bit – the important thing is that we have a vision. This vision was first laid out at the Dean’s Conference in Tannenfelde at the end of the last winter semester, and it will have to be even more strongly disseminated among the faculty, especially in the Senate.

What will this vision look like, and does it have a name?

I call this vision “Total University of the Future”, and it will be an interlocking scientific system. That means that we will have a more interdisciplinary focus than was the case in the old Universitas-structure. We’ve defined research foci that are interdisciplinary and involve people across the different faculties. We’ve defined two areas of focus that we’ve already been discussing for years, in which we’ve also gotten two Excellence Clusters: Ocean Sciences and Biological Sciences. We also have an additional initiative, the Graduate School.

Can you describe the Graduate School for us? What plans do you have for it?

The Graduate School is positioned at the intersection of the sciences and the humanities. We want to generate a third major research focus in the Graduate School, which might be called something like “Cultural Spaces and Opposed Spaces”. The School is called Human Development in Landscapes, and the research focus will be designed accordingly.

What exactly will this research focus on?

The German term for the School means literally ‘development of human societies in landscapes’ and indicates our desire to look at how people throughout history have dealt with and survived in various environments. ‘Various environments’ means that we define a natural environment as well as a cultural one, an economic one, etc. In the third major research focus, we want to work on and illuminate this process of humans coming to terms with their environments.

A fourth major research focus is also being discussed: Surface Sciences. Because this area depends very heavily on nanotechnology, we have to consider this very carefully. The study of surfaces is very costly research. We have to see if the CAU is well situated to bundle enough resources in order to bear such a large research focus, or whether we need to seek out competent and able partners to cooperate with.

In summary, we could say the “Total University of the Future” means that we want to have a university that focuses strongly on major research areas that are interdisciplinary, integrate the Faculties, and cooperate with external partners. As far as teaching is concerned, we want to continue with and emphasize the degree programs, because “Total University” also means that we continue training in individual fields in addition to the interdisciplinary approach.

We want to expand the traditional university training to include graduate and post-graduate studies, although we prefer to refer to this as a betterment of the career chances of our academic students. We want to create a space for doctoral students in various fields to meet and communicate-this is what we call the “Interdisciplinary Graduate Center.”

Through this Center we can give doctoral students the opportunity to further their training, not so much with regard to their own fields, but so that they can expand their competence in other fields that will be important for their careers later on.
What role do international visiting scientists play in your vision of the “Total University of the Future”?

The major research areas I’ve mentioned cannot exist without close connections to international research, the Excellence Cluster “The Future Ocean” is an example. On the one hand there are international scientists working within the project, and on the other hand they are extremely well connected with European and American institutions, because they are doing research at an international level. The language of research in the Ocean Sciences is English, because people in these fields are constantly meeting and working together internationally. It’s the same in the Life Sciences, since a research focus combining science and the humanities won’t be confined to domestic matters either. Pre- and Ancient History, which will be a central discipline, has a completely international structure. Its scope includes Scandinavia and Eastern and Southern Europe. These are absolutely international fields.

Are there efforts underway to increase the presence of international visiting faculty in Kiel?

Yes, although we are already very well-positioned in that regard. For one, the Excellence Clusters in the major research areas are constantly holding conferences hosting international guests. In the Human Development in Landscapes graduate school, there’s also a program planned in which we’ll be inviting international visiting faculty so that fellowship students and other affiliates of the School will have the opportunity to meet the celebrities and partial celebrities of the international scene, so to speak.

Are these programs also directed at international students and grad students?

All programs in teaching and research are also open to international students, and the Graduate School has also advertised its fellowships internationally. Right now we have between 10% – 20% international fellowship recipients, which corresponds to the proportion of international students at the CAU as a whole. We would like to have made even more awards, but that depends of course on the applicant pool. The Graduate School wants absolutely the best qualified students, after all.

Do you yourself have contact with international students?

In the Humanities, especially in History, there aren’t that many international students. I’ve advised international students from time to time, and right now I’m advising two doctoral students with international backgrounds. One of them is from Kyoto, Japan, and I’m also advising a Polish woman from Krakow who is working on a 15th Century merchant from Gdansk. It was recommended to her to come to me because of my teaching and research on economic history. She had spent a semester in Kiel previously and attended one of my seminars, and now she came to Kiel for her doctoral studies. Unfortunately I’m taking on the President’s job shortly and I won’t be able to advise the two of them to the extent I’d like.

Have you already visited any of Kiel’s partner universities?

Primarily it was always the role of the Rector to make such visits. But as President, I’ll carry on the tradition. In my view, it’s one of the most important tasks of the University President to maintain and expand contacts with partner universities. In this area, I would of course wish for these contacts not to always be such window dressing, but instead for our young scientists to be brought into a stronger exchange program. It’s already working quite well with the Chinese universities, but things are also improving with the other partnerships. This too will be one of the many tasks I’ll be taking on as President of the CAU.

Thank you very much for speaking with us! (ds)
The CAU Kiel has created a new Master’s Program together with the European partner universities Portier, Coimbra, and Norwich.

A new European Master’s program for Applied Ecology is being planned by the University of Kiel in conjunction with the universities of Poitiers, France, Coimbra, Portugal and Norwich, UK. The European Master’s in Applied Ecology was selected by the Erasmus Mundus Program as one of 13 German proposals out of 176 in all. This cooperation and mobility program of the European Union supports multilateral Master’s Programs of the highest quality and seeks to improve the recognition and attractiveness of European university studies worldwide. The program begins winter 2008/2009. Representatives of the participating universities met in the spring of 2008 in Kiel to discuss organizational details.

“In Europe, national research and implementation concepts on environmental matters are growing together increasingly,” explains Professor Jürgen Grotemeyer, former Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. “That also applies on a broader international level. Qualified ecologists, who are also multilingual, are in demand, not only in research but also in the public and the private sectors.”

The English-language Master’s Program is designed to convey advanced knowledge in Applied Ecology to 24 students. Eligible are applicants with a career qualification (those who have completed a course of study such as a Bachelor’s Program) in Biology, Ecology, Population Genetics, Evolutionary Biology, Environmental Science, or related fields. According to the academic focus at the participating universities, students can specialize in the following areas: Ecotoxicology and Ecological Process Indication (University of Coimbra), Applied and Theoretical Population Ecology (University of Poitiers), Environmental Science and Conservation Ecology (University of Norwich), and Terrestrial, Coastal, and Aquatic Dynamics Studies (University of Kiel).

At the University of Kiel’s end, the Ecology Center, the Biology section, and the Leibniz-Institut for Ocean Sciences IFM-GEOMAR will carry out the students’ training in the new program.

The international students will spend the first semester in Poitiers and Norwich. In the second semester, the group will split up between Coimbra and Kiel, before each of the students spends the whole second year at one of the partner universities according to his or her specialty. The program leads to a joint degree from the participating universities. In addition to very attractive scholarships for applicants from non-EU countries, there will also be financing for appearances by leading international scientists.

Further information online at:
http://www.master-emae.org/

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more than coffee, cake, and day-trips: the international café

For over 15 years, international visiting faculty and their families have been meeting in the guest residence of the University for coffee, cake, and conversation. The Kieler Anker dropped in on one such meeting.

Once a month, volunteers at the guest residence of the University of Kiel lay out a rich coffee spread, in which tea must also not be lacking—and the invitation goes out for the “International Café”. Everyone who comes is stopped and given a nametag which reveals to other guests its bearer’s name and what country he or she came to northern German Kiel from.

After just a few minutes the first guests start filtering in. The crown is a colorful mix of old and young, and the nationalities are spread out across almost all the continents. The conversation switches regularly from German to English and back again.

How did this monthly tradition arise?
Karin Wiegmann-Lux, one of the organizers of the Café, tells us: “The women who got the project started are all scientist’s wives and accordingly they’ve experienced more or less lengthy stays in foreign countries. They’re familiar with the challenges of having a family in a foreign country, the insecurities, the questions, and sometimes the isolation. Mrs. Brodowsky had been warmly received by a similar group during a stay in the United States and thought it was so great that she wanted to start a similar project here in Kiel.”

The meetings have taken place in the guest residence since the very beginning.

Right now, ten women see to it that the table is always well-set. According to Mrs. Wiegmann-Lux, that goes relatively smoothly: “Mrs. Willebrand and I set the date together. Once a month, I write personal invitations at Mrs. Ritter’s – she’s the superintendent of the guest residence – and then Mrs. Ritter distributes them. Then I send out an email reminder to all the participants. The rest – that’s the baking, the decorations, etc. – happens by itself. In an emergency I’m always ready with a box of pre-fabricated cake and a package of cookies.”

The turnout always depends on the constellation of visiting faculty at the University. Sometimes there are families with children staying for an extended period who come regularly, and sometimes there are scientists who are staying in Kiel for a few months, far from their families—and who are correspondingly lonely. Mrs. Wiegmann-Lux laughs: “And so sometimes it’s quiet and cozy, and other times we run out of plates and it’s very lively and loud. There’s no way to predict how many people will show up, we just wait and see each time.”

But for the visitors, it’s not always just about a cup of coffee and a piece of cake: “There’s always a very positive response among the guests, who are happy to find such a warm welcome although they’re far from home, and who aren’t left alone with their questions. People have questions about every conceivable facet of life like school, kindergarten, or local attractions.

And so it happens that real friendships develop according to people’s personal preferences, among the scientists and their families as well as the organizers. Sometimes there has been continued contact through the exchange of letters and packages after people have parted ways. People have on occasion met again: “Sometimes our guests come back to Kiel and they look forward to seeing us and coming to the Café meetings. And we’ve got contacts all over the world that we can’t even get around to visiting, though we’re sincerely welcome.”
In addition to the meetings at the Guest Residence, some activities are held elsewhere, for example when they go on bigger or smaller day trips: “When we organize a trip with a lot of participants it’s always a bit difficult to plan for transportation, so that kind of thing only happens once or twice a year. For example, we took a day trip to the west coast in one of the CAU busses, we went to Schleswig by car, we took a trip down the river Schwentine, we had a tour of the Botanical Gardens, and we’ve already walked along the canal to the “Obstcafé” in Warleberg. We’ve also had a tour of the art museum. In the summer we like to have picnics.”

It’s not that difficult to help people with their individual interests, something the organizers also do, if they’re asked. Mrs. Wiegmann-Lux explains: “Something like just going to the opera with someone. Or – what people really enjoy – baking Christmas cookies in a German home.”

Reminiscing about the meeting of cultures, she can remember one amusing situation: “It’s always interesting when we become aware of cultural traits for the first time through the eyes of the guests. A Japanese family was here once whose son was to begin school. Suddenly the whole family was worried because they’d seen the ‘first-day-of-school-cornets’ that the stores sell for the first day of school. They thought the children were supposed to wear these cornets of cardboard on their heads like hats on the first day of school, and the boy didn’t want any part of something so ridiculous. They were so relieved when they found out that the ‘school cornets’ were filled with sweets and little presents given to children in Germany on their first day of school!”

Contact:
You can learn more about the International Café through the International Center (see masthead), or online at http://www.uni-kiel.de/gastwissenschaftler/internationalescafe.shtml

Scientists of different countries in a discussion.

Picture: Daniela Sonders