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Warm-Up Workshops

Ever since the start of the winter term, RUB students have had the opportunity to take part in the so-called Grenzenlos warm-up phase free of charge. Organised by the Career Service, two workshops will take place (not before the information event is launched, namely on November 5 and 6: “International Competencies” and “Applying for a Job in English”). For these workshops, registration is necessary (http://international.rub.de/grenzenlos/warmup.html.de). Culinary delights are likewise to be expected, as the RUB’s student service office Akademik will be serving food from all four corners of the globe during the entire week (November 7 – 9).

The programme includes an exhibition in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the EU exchange programme ERASMUS. RUB students give the visitors the opportunity to partake in their most memorable ERASMUS experiences. The photos displayed as part of the “My ERASMUS” exhibition have been supplied by RUB students who had spent some time abroad, as well as international students who are currently spending a term at the RUB International Office.

Details: Grenzenlos 2012 – International Days at the RUB, November 7 and 8, 11am to 3pm, Mensa foyer, organised by the International Office, Career Service and AKAKO. grenzenlos@rub.de, www.rub.de/grenzenlos

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We report about the theory of financing studies or work experience in a foreign country by means of a grant on a regular basis. Now it’s time to speak about the practice, which is why we have invited five RUB students to tell tales out of school. Supported by PROMOS, the DAAD programme aiming at enhancing the mobility of German students, our five interviewees have recently travelled in all four corners of the globe. We have asked all five of them the same nine questions:

1) Why did you decide to study / get a degree abroad?
2) During an informational meeting organised by the International Office and via its website.
3) To what extent has the RUB supported that particular university / tutor?
4) How did you learn about PROMOS?
5) In order to apply, you have to hand in a personal statement outlining the reasons why you want to go abroad as well as a recommendation letter from a university lecturer. I think that the personal statement (combined with positive grades) is a crucial factor in the decision-making process – this is where students have the opportunity to elaborate the reasons why spending a semester abroad is important to them. Getting a recommendation letter could prove more tricky if a student doesn’t have a close relationship to any lecturer – if for example, they don’t work as an assistant to a professor.

6) Sandra Zajac: spent one semester at the Macquarie University in Sydney. She got the place via the AEN University Network Exchange Programme, www.international.rub.de/reseal/studierenden/studienprogramme/ganzen/Concordia.html. At the RUB, she reads Management and Economics (Master).

7) The turning point was when I realised that I left home with the Portuguese language.
8) Every single encounter with the very fascinatingly operating Brazilian bureaucracy.
9) Go for it! As far as I can tell, the chances to get a grant are rather good, it’s very useful to have sound financial backup, especially if you opt for a country.

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So, the first place was Professor Friedlein who helped me get the place at UFMG; moreover, the PROMOS grant helped alleviate the costs of the stay – they were pretty inflated mainly due to the fare.

4) Prof. Friedlein has recommended PROMOS to me. I found all relevant information at the homepage of the International Office. I found the requirements easy enough to master, and the International Office staff offered extremely helpful advice in case of questions.

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6) It was very nice. I needed time to settle in, but the Brazilian people were so hospitable and the International Office staff at the UFMG so supportive that it was easy to feel welcome and to get to know the country and its people.

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& History and her Bachelor’s degree in Archaeology. After learning that it was not worth the effort.

5) The application took a lot of time and a lot of work, but in hind sight I can safely say that it was very much worth the effort.

6) I liked it very much – so much so that I am already considering living in China for at least a couple of years after graduation and have begun scouting the job market for options that might be open to me.

7) Meeting a multitude of people from different countries and travelling through beautiful Chinese landscapes.

8) Travelling as well – you need a lot of patience and nerves of steel as not to be utterly exasperated. Another thing that frightened me was the fear of expressing everything I wanted to express in Chinese, which made travelling even more difficult.

9) Don’t let the workload put you off it’s worth it! And have fun studying.


1) every new aspect of daily life. I imagined the sheer wealth of new experiences, including a bonfire. The panorama over the plain from the plateau that we climbed was impressive and made the vastness of the land somewhat easier to grasp. You can’t find anything like that in Germany, of course not even anywhere in Europe. Visiting the Naigeria was likewise awe-inspiring. As structural engineer, I find the idea of waterfalls generating energy fascinating.

2) The fact that I couldn’t get tickets for the Stanley Cup Playoffs. To everybody’s surprise, the Ottawa Senators had made it to the finals and the entire city was awash in euphoria.

3) The time I spent in Canada was an awe-inspiring highlight. As structural engineer, I find the idea of waterfalls generating energy fascinating.

4) After the general requirements for eligibility staffs and the colleagues at the institute are friendly and helpful to me. My impression of the people here is definitely positive. Just before coming to Germany I was told that German people are very cold and standoffish. Now I can say that this misconception was entirely wrong! Life in Bonn is very different from that in Ho Chi Minh City. It is safe. I also like the shopping culture. I am surprised by the fact that you have the option of returning your items to the shop if you don’t like them. I enjoy a variety of foods, especially specialties from Germany, Italy, Chinese, and so on to my home country Vietnam. And the Menus, too, is fine: the food there is tasty and cheap!

5) The University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) is one of the largest and best public universities in Brazil. It was founded in 1927 as a result of a merger of the former faculties of Law, Medicine, Pharmacy and Bela Horizonte, the official language of the city since then. It has become a full-fledged university with a full spectrum of subjects and a variety of social and cultural activities. The university currently employs around 3,000 teachers, offers more than 250 degree courses and has about 40,000 students, and third of which are currently carrying out a master’s degree or a PhD (a very large amount for Brazil).
FOUR VIOCES
The IFHV – Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict

Established in 1988, the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (German abbreviation IFHV) at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum is international and interdisciplinary. The IFHV acts as a research and teaching body concerning issues of peace and armed conflict. Its Master’s degree is part of the European Inter-University Network on Humanitarian Action (NOHRA). The IFHV also teaches courses at the Ruhr Law School, School of Social Science, and Medical School, and works together with the EU’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Office. The IFHV is part of several European networks of higher education that focus on international law, human rights and humanitarian crises. In its research, the IFHV is trying to move beyond a normative perspective on humanitarian crises in order to concentrate on what is happening on the ground – this means that the institute is currently focusing on building up and developing its fieldwork. To offer insight on field research and their institute, four voices from the IFHV shared their perspectives on their personal and work-related experiences.

Prof. Dr. Dennis Dijkzeul

Dennis Dijkzeul is the Executive Director of the IFHV. Originally from the Netherlands, Dijkzeul studied at Columbia University in New York before being drawn to the Ruhr by the IFHV. As Executive Director, he manages the daily workings of the institute while also pursuing his own research. Dijkzeul is passionate about the research needed to make the IFHV more research intensive. For example, by setting up a new structured PhD program, he wants to help the young members of the IFHV team improve themselves and go out into the field.

This field research can be difficult yet rewarding. While Dijkzeul has done field research in many different countries, he is most intrigued by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). He currently studies the role of peacekeepers in the DRC and the issue of sexual violence in the country – and doing so can often be challenging. His average workday in the DRC is from 8 am to 9 pm.

“The main problems in field research are often not described in scientific articles,” Dijkzeul explains. “On the one hand there are security issues, and on the other there are also cases of people suffering that you don’t write much about, because these stories easily become sensationalized or sentimental.”

Dijkzeul says he has started observing himself when he works with traumatized people in the DRC so when in intense situations there, trying to figure out how he reacts, why he reacts that way and if his actions are helpful and positive. When those around you need help, Dijkzeul elaborates, you simply cannot stay on time and on track with your research. However, Dijkzeul says that once you have overcome practical problems of field research on your own you can begin to understand the local culture and reactions to the conflict. Dijkzeul thinks that many people enjoy field research because developing that understanding is energizing and inspiring. Then, there also the experiences that do not concern armed conflict. He enjoys going dancing with his Congolese friends to music of the region. In the IFHV, Dijkzeul emphasizes that it is vital to understand that those living in crisis are not just victims: they are people trying to maintain their dignity in challenging situations, people who are trying to move things forward.

“They are people with their own goals, ideas and agency and that’s an important topic to study,” Dijkzeul concluded.

Lisa Hilleke

Born in Bochum, Lisa Hilleke studied in Frankfurt and Bochum before completing her second Master’s at the IFHV. She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree at the Institute of Development Research and Development Policy (EEI) at the Ruhr, with Prof. Dijkzeul as her supervisor. The 29 year old is researching coping mechanisms with regards to water challenges in protracted crises triggered by Iraq, Kurdistan and as a case study – she is identifying and analyzing the way the local populations deals with water challenges. She describes her work as seeing how people creatively deal with being in distress.

While she has not been involved in her pursuit of information in Iraq, the researcher has run into some obstacles. During the latest trips, the IFHV has had to ask the local community for permission to write their names on the stories they want to share. For example, the Kurdish community is very open and friendly. However, when the institute went to areas of Iraq, the local community was not always open to sharing personal stories. Additionally, she says that making plans is something that goes against the humanitarian culture and can be frustrating if one tries to keep it up.

“Never want to dye my hair brown. I went to the hairdresser in order to dye my hair a darker blonde than my natural light blonde, as it makes a difference to be spotted from all distances looking like a light house compared to having a hair color that fits into the society. Then people need to approach you and look at your face before noticing you are different, but my hairdresser did not understand the idea of dark blonde and dyed my hair brown. I am happy to be back to blonde,” Hilleke said.

Although she has faced a few challenges in her field work, the doctoral student has had a positive experimental experience and developed a higher sense of value for Iraqi society. She built up a solid network beforehand and was lucky to have a place to stay, as well as to know and meet helpful people who introduced her to the local culture. She says that Kurdish people are generally open and friendly in interviews and that she has made strong connections with them. Additionally, she has learned that practical work on water resource needs in Iraqi Kurdistan, and that there are many history some times block effective implementation of such practical solutions. Spending time in Iraq reassured her once more that she is passionate about her research topic. “When you do on your own topic, you will not be bothered with the standard difficulties you face during your field research so much, but actually get more passionate about your work when you master a new challenge.”

Prof. Dr. Zeynep Sezgin

Zeynep Sezgin is originally from Ankara, Turkey and received her B.A. in Turkey, M.A. in Canada and PhD in Germany at the University of Freiburg. She came to the Ruhr in 2007 as coordinator of the project “Diffusion and Contextualization of Transnational Migration Movements in Europe” (TRAMOS), which was directed by Professor Ludger Pries. At a workshop in Mexico she met Professor Dennis Dijkzeul, who shared her research interests on the humanitarian activities of migrant organizations. Consequently offered her a position at the IFHV which Sez gin took after the completion of the TRAMOS project in 2010.

While the working atmosphere and the support of her colleagues are what drew Sez gin to the IFHV, she also appreciates the general mindset of every one.

“My colleagues in the institute mainly believe in the social relevance of their work and they are not just it’s not a scientific interest. They look at their humanitarian crises originate and evolve, how they affect people, institutions and societies, which makes them to trigger, and how they should be handled in the future, and I like that very much about the institute,” Sezgin said.

Her current post-doc research is titled, “Legitimacy-building humanitarian organizations in Asia, Africa, and the USA.” Americans have a different understanding of human rights – they usually see more as a political thing, not as rights that a person can actually claim. It is a bit harder to do research on socio-economic human rights in the U.S. when the USA doesn’t really believe in them,” Sez gin said, but added that “It’s never easy or any dramatic problems while researching abroad.” What is important for researchers who work in other countries, she says, is that they should not presuppose anything and to maintain a critical approach. She says that, for example, she should maintain an analytical mindset. “The promotion of human rights in a desirable objective, but I find it a bit depressing if the end result is fixed before you do your research. We should follow a methodology and be open to what the results of our own research will be,” he said.