

Graduate Education in an Age of Globalization – What You Need to Know in the 21st Century?

On November 24th, 2009, the new German House of Research, Science and Innovation (DWIH) in New York City in cooperation with Bucerius Education organized a luncheon discussion. Its topic focused on what graduates need to know in the 21st century and what modern education should be like to prepare them. The 45 attendees ranged from graduate students, post-docs from German and US universities, lawyers and professors to professionals members from different New York graduate schools like the Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Columbia University and the assistant Dean for Graduate and International Programs at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law (Yeshiva University).

Trudy G. Steinfeld, director of the Wasserman Center for Career Development at New York University, acted as the moderator for the luncheon discussion. The panelists Dr. Sebastian Fohrbeck, director of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in New York, Dr. Marion Mueller, director of the DFG-German Research Foundation North America Office, and Dr. Hariolf Wenzler, CEO of Bucerius Law School in Hamburg, Germany discussed how the globalization of learning and jobs has effected graduate level curriculum.

In response to the question of what the most important trends in globalization are, Dr. Marion Mueller stated: ongoing world wide competition, a lifetime of learning, deregulation, new technologies and multi-faceted careers. As for university graduates, essential skills would be critical thinking, problem solving, soft skills, communication skills, media and technology skills and cross-cultural understanding. The panelists were in agreement that as specialized knowledge quickly becomes obsolete, it is therefore necessary to learn transferable skills as a graduate student. According to Dr. Fohrbeck, a graduate of theoretical physics has demonstrated himself capable of working independently, researching complex topics in several papers and has thus proven his or her fundamental aptitude for taking on other areas of work. Furthermore continued Dr. Fohrbeck, in order to learn to adapt and feel comfortable when surrounded by foreign culture, each graduate should have at some point been in the minority for a period of time. Dr. Wenzler added that the trend of internationalization of education is formed generally speaking by the needs of the market and for lawyers in particular by an increase in international clientele. Those graduate schools who can tie both interdisciplinary and intercultural skills into their education within highly specialized fields, would be best equipped to meet the challenge of the 21st century. Through the pursuit of this goal the Bucerius Law School hopes to become one of the top 20 worldwide law institutions.

For German universities and funding organizations the course toward internationalization – according to Dr. Mueller – has been set through the "Bologna Process" which began in the early nineties with the aims of restructuring of the post secondary education in Europe, secondly through an increasingly structured graduate education in Germany and last but not least through Germany's "Excellence Initiative". Proof of the success of those measures are various mobility indicators and the international popularity of graduates of the German system. Finally, Dr. Mueller said, what was remarkable about the ongoing protests of students in Germany is that next to complains about general study conditions, curricular questions were in the center of discussion. The protests were against overly regulated and commercialized education and in favor of an education of free/critical thinking and discourse. The

question whether such protests would be imaginable at American universities then became the center of an animated debate that compared the educational systems on both sides of the Atlantic with regards to what system has thus far better adapted to the future's global challenges. Once more, it became obvious that there are remarkable differences in the internationalization strategies "made in Germany" and "made in the US", as well as what the each respective country's job market expects of graduates. In Germany, substantial experience abroad is considered crucial to achieving a successful career in academics or research. In the US, international experience is appreciated but not considered as important as in Germany.

Dr. Mueller summed up what she considered the main points as:

- make academic systems more compatible without forcing them to lose their respective identities
- make career paths more permeable
- make better use of "Grenzgänger" (people at home in two or more academic worlds)

(MP)