

GCRI INTERVIEW

**GCRI Interview: Directors' Talk with
Dr. Sebastian Fohrbeck (SF) and Dr. Marion Müller (MM)****In your opinion, what are the key differences between the German and North American research landscapes?**

SF: Although Germany is much smaller than the U.S., the German research landscape seems more complicated due to the high number of non-university research organizations (like Helmholtz, Max Planck, Leibniz, and Fraunhofer). Their differences are difficult to understand – even for Germans. In the U.S., a higher proportion of research is conducted in universities, whereas in Germany, a good part of the Nobel prizes go to researchers at Max Planck institutes. This is why the German Center for Research and Innovation is important – it will summarize and simplify the German research landscape for the American and Canadian public.

MM: In addition to the structural differences that Sebastian has just outlined, one might add that the American research landscape puts more emphasis on selfmarketing. Also, generally speaking, the approach to internationalization and mobility is quite different in both countries. In Germany's case, one can speak of a "push" or export-based internationalization strategy: Germany "pushes" students and young scientists to spend extensive time within their academic career outside of Germany. They get immersed in labs, universities and research institutions abroad -- and there are also multiple sources of funding for these experiences abroad. In the case of the U.S., one could speak of a "pull," or "import-based" internationalization strategy. Internationalization happens mainly and automatically at home in the U.S. The domestic research environment is internationalized by importing foreign talent.

The GCRI is one of five centers worldwide created by the German government's strategy for the internationalization of science and research. What is the focus of the GCRI New York?

SF: The GCRI focuses on the North American science and innovation "market," which is the most important one worldwide – with the goal of successfully connecting German and North American researchers.

MM: The GCRI NY's focus is best summarized in its goals:

- to present Germany as a land of research and innovation to the North American market
- to enhance the dialogue between academia and industry
- to create a forum for the initiation and enhancement of transatlantic projects

- to provide an information platform for the German research and innovation landscape

Under the umbrella of the new GCRI, German research has the unique opportunity to gain greater visibility and an active presence in North America by pooling resources, ideas, and competencies, thus maximizing synergies.

What are the GCRI's primary goals for the next two years?

MM: Developing GCRI into a transatlantic hinge that, for Americans, opens the door to Germany's rich research and innovation sector while, on the other hand, serving a multiplicity of German stakeholders as a stepping stone to the American market. To put it shortly: to become THE forum for a transatlantic innovation dialogue.

Its two crucial tasks for the medium-term will be:

- 1) to attract top-level German players to be part of the enterprise; and
- 2) to position itself on the American market as the central point of easy access to the multi-faceted German science and research landscape.

SF: First, the establishment of a network of partners, comprising German and North American researchers and members of industry, including those in the general public who are interested in research and innovation. A second more long-term goal is to create an excellent website, which can serve as a gateway to the complexities of the German research landscape mentioned above. A third goal is to "showcase" German research and innovation through a wide array of lectures, workshops, and exhibitions. A preference will be given to topics with high relevance to the solution of problems in the 21st century (this does, of course, not completely exclude lectures on archeology, or Walter Benjamin, since the goals of the Center also encompass the humanities!).

What role will the GCRI play in enhancing the interface between research and industry?

MM: The GCRI intends to be an enabler, a facilitator, and a catalyst that strives to foster and enhance exchange and permeability between the private and the public sector. Through topics and questions of interest to both academia and business, the GCRI seeks to attract and engage stakeholders to produce mutually beneficial results.

SF: The GCRI will cooperate closely with German companies in North America and the German-American Chamber of Commerce. If you define innovation as "research put into practice," it becomes clear that wind energy, the car of the future, solar panels, healthcare solutions, etc., may be developed by researchers, but have to be put into practice by industry to be relevant for everyday life.

Why is the GCRI North America based in New York City?

MM: We are convinced that New York is the perfect location for this endeavor. The city is steeped in European and, in particular, German culture. It also provides the perfect environment for setting up and cultivating dense networks of contacts with universities,

research institutions and companies, and building strong ties between Germany and North America. The region boasts a multitude of research universities and national laboratories: eight of the 50 most innovative international companies are located in the greater New York area, as are numerous DAX-listed German companies. It is a hub of research universities, brain power, entrepreneurial success, and innovative potential – and thus forms an ideal starting point for GCRI.

SF: The decision, which was made in March 2009¹, was linked to the fact that the New York region has more students, confers more degrees, and spends more research money than any other region in North America, including Boston and the Bay Area. As a gateway to North America, New York is ideally located in the middle of the huge metropolitan area, ranging from Washington D.C. to Boston – with close vicinity to the most important Canadian metropolitan areas too. In addition to the geographical advantage, the German Academic Exchange Service, the German Research Foundation and 27 German universities are already represented in the “German House.” The building, also home of the German Mission to the United Nations and the German Consulate, creates tremendous synergies, and provides excellent facilities for public lectures, workshops, and exhibitions. The proximity to the United Nations on the other side of UN Plaza offers the possibility to reach out to more than 190 countries, and not just to cooperate with two countries (the U.S. and Canada) – and the GCRI already participated in a conference on the UN’s Millennium Development Goals...