

INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY OF THE INSTITUTE OF GEOGRAPHY

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Internationalization Strategy: Background and Objectives

The Institute of Geography of the University of Bonn (GIUB) is one of Germany's largest and most attractive locations for research and teaching in the field of geography, enjoying a reputation for excellence. The Institute has a large international network of partners all over the world, and also has strong local ties through the Geoverbund ABC/J (the geoscientific network of the Aachen-Bonn-Cologne/Jülich research area) and several partnerships. In addition to highly popular German bachelor's and master's degree programs, the GIUB offers an international master's degree in "Geography of Environmental Risks and Human Security" in partnership with the United Nations University. Admission to this program, which has a high international profile, is extremely competitive.

The international orientation of the University of Bonn has always been an important factor in geographic research here. Efforts have been made to further enhance this culture of internationalism on all levels of the Institute in recent years, including by introducing a central office for International Coordination and appointing professors with outstanding international connections. The policies and action areas defined under the University of Bonn's internationalization strategy serve as the framework for the Institute's efforts in this regard. A commitment to promoting internationalism on all levels is a key element in the Institute's latest structuring plan as a path to enhancing the quality and competitiveness of research, study offerings and teaching at the GIUB and preparing students for the challenges they will face in the global job market.

1. Action area: international research

Status quo at the Institute of Geography

The University of Bonn is a place with a rich history in geographic research, and the Institute of Geography enjoys major visibility and an outstanding research reputation at the national level (see the 2018 CHE Ranking). In international rankings in the field, the GIUB currently falls in the 101–150 range.

Many of our working groups enjoy very high international visibility thanks to numerous international collaborations and major international research projects (see Appendices 1.1 and 1.2). The East and West Africa regions

are a research focus, where a number of joint projects with GIUB involvement (IMPETUS, WASCAL, GLOBE) have been conducted in recent years. Of particular note is the collaborative research project SFB/TR “Future Rural Africa” approved in 2018, the public relations and business offices of which are housed at the GIUB. This allows the GIUB to make a significant contribution to the University of Bonn’s Transdisciplinary Research Area (TRA) 6, “Sustainable Futures”.

The GIUB has applied for the UNESCO Chair for “Human–Water–Systems” in a move to establish an international think tank for this field and further intensify international cooperation.

Publications in international journals further heighten the Institute’s international profile, and in calendar year 2018, 64 percent of all GIUB publications appeared in international journals. The percentage of international publications by physical geography working groups is significantly higher at 82 percent than the 42 percent for human geography, reflecting their differing publication cultures (see Appendix 1.3).

Having a relatively high percentage of academics from abroad is a key element of the University’s international identity. Presently no professorate positions at the GIUB are held by a foreign professor, although the professorate holders have very strong international ties. Currently, 17 percent of GIUB academic staff are from other countries, slightly higher than the average of 14 percent for the University of Bonn as a whole (see Appendix 1.4). The GIUB is highly effective in attracting international scholars to its highly competitive programs, which include Alexander von Humboldt, DFG TWAS and BMBF Green Talents.

Foreign nationals currently comprise 28 percent of enrollees in the doctoral program.

Goals for the action area of international research

The GIUB intends to further heighten its international visibility, competitiveness and research performance.

Specific objectives

- 1.1. Increase the percentage of international academics.
- 1.2. Increase international factor among German academics.
- 1.3. Promote international academic networking.
- 1.4. Heighten the international visibility of research output.
- 1.5. Establish an International Graduate School.

Measures

Regarding point 1.1.

- 1.1.1 All open professorship positions are advertised internationally.
- 1.1.2 Visiting foreign professors are to be regularly invited for the summer semester. An application is to be filed with the DAAD for an international visiting professorship.
- 1.1.3 All open academic staff positions are to be advertised internationally where possible.
- 1.1.4 International staff positions for the SFB/TR 228 project are to be introduced for academics from Africa

Regarding point 1.2.

- 1.2.1 The GIUB supports German academics in obtaining international qualifications.

Regarding point 1.3.

- 1.3.1 ERASMUS Teaching Mobility and other programs are to be utilized to a greater extent to expand international collaboration and networks.
- 1.3.2 Increasing numbers of foreign academics are to be invited for international lectures.
- 1.3.3 As part of the UNESCO Chair, an international think tank is to be formed devoted to human water systems, for which symposia, workshops and summer schools will be conducted and a website created.

Regarding point 1.4.

- 1.4.1 Incentive schemes for international publications are to be introduced to achieve greater international visibility for research output.
- 1.4.2 English publications of the GIUB are to be proofread by native speakers and professional translators as a rule.

Regarding point 1.5.

- 1.5.1 An application is to be filed to host an International Graduate School devoted to the topic of Risk.

2. Action area: study offerings and teaching

Status quo at the Institute of Geography

Over the last ten years, the GIUB has made major efforts to promote internationalization in its teaching and various study offerings, increasing the number of courses taught in English, for example, tripling the number of outgoings and enrolling a substantially greater number of international students.

Teaching

Since 2013, the GIUB has offered an international master's program in Geography of Environmental Risks and Human Security jointly with the UNU. Enrollment is highly competitive, and the program has a high international profile because of the unique partnership with the UNU.

The German-language bachelor's and master's degree programs in Geography have also been made more international by increasing the number of English-language courses offered. In the master's program, this has been done by opening up the modules from the joint master's program for student enrollment. The English-language courses offered in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 academic years are listed in Appendix 2.1.

Additionally, an interdisciplinary seminar entitled "Germany – an Introduction into Geography, History and Politics" has been offered since 2014 as a special course for international students, with lecturers from the History and Political Science departments. There is a high level of student interest in this seminar, which is viewed as a model for the design of the university-wide European & German Studies module for incomings.

For financial reasons, bachelor's students can only take two language courses at the Language Learning Center currently, and master's students can only take one.

Taking exams in English is allowed under the examination regulations, an increasing number of which have been offered over the last several years.

International students

The percentage of international students at the GIUB has risen in recent years (see Appendix 2.2). The current percentage in the joint international master's program is 60 percent, although in German-language courses enrollment is much lower at around 3 percent.



The number of ERASMUS incomings between the years 2015 and 2019 has varied between 3 and 14, but an overall uptrend is apparent.

The International Coordinator supports incomings in close cooperation with the International Office. The Department has a Geography Buddy Program and other structures in place to support the integration of incomings, for whom a range of activities are offered (outings, international cookouts, etc.).

Mobility

Student mobility has significantly increased over the last few years, leading to the systematic implementation of a range of measures, for example to improve the information and advice offering. This includes conducting an International Day event, providing information at first-semester events, providing more advice on studying abroad to students at the GIUB, an increased number of exchange places and university partnerships (see Appendix 2.3) and simplified, transparent crediting for the mobility phase and presentation thereof in module plans. The Institute of Geography has some 65 ERASMUS outgoing currently, comprising around 50 percent of all ERASMUS outgoing of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Science. In 2017/18, 21.7 percent of students in the German-language bachelor's and master's degree programs in Geography (including students pursuing a teaching degree) who were in the mobility phase (5th–6th semester of the bachelor's program, 3rd–4th semesters of the master's program) completed either a program-relevant study abroad stay or an international internship.

The GIUB, which currently has 36 ERASMUS partner universities in 16 countries, represents one of the best offerings available at the University of Bonn. It includes five partner institutes in the UK and such prestigious institutions as University College London, the Universities of Vienna, Amsterdam and Utrecht. The number of exchange places and the number of partner universities have risen over the past five years (see Appendix 2.4). Demand for ERASMUS study places in anglophone countries often exceeds the already considerable supply. Further ERASMUS program deficits include a lack of exchange agreements with partner universities in Spain for master's students and an insufficiently appealing offering in Sweden.

Goals for the action area of study offerings and teaching

The GIUB aims to further internationalize teaching and structure degree programs to be more attractive to international students.

Students of Geography are to receive optimal preparation for today's global job market.

Specific objectives

- 2.1. Further internationalize the German-language degree programs.
- 2.2. Increase the number of international students and incomings.
- 2.3. Enhance outgoing mobility.
- 2.4. Create better internationalization@home opportunities.

Measures

Regarding point 2.1.

- 2.1.1 Further expand the offering of courses taught in English. For both the bachelor's and master's in Geography, courses for approximately 24 CP are to be offered in English per semester. Any synergy potential with international degree programs is to be exploited.
- 2.1.2 More contract lecturers from abroad are to be recruited to expand the English-language course offering.
- 2.1.3 Exams in courses in English-language bachelor's and master's modules may be taken in either English or German, in consultation with the instructor.
- 2.1.4 The array of courses offered jointly with international academics and/or students at partner universities is to be expanded.
- 2.1.5 Online modules are to be developed for international courses.

Regarding point 2.2.

See also the measures outlined under 2.1

- 2.2.1 Support and activities for international students are to be consolidated. The Institute will be utilizing its own funds to conduct these activities.
- 2.2.2 Social media and website videos are to be utilized for marketing.
- 2.2.3 The Geography Buddy Program is to be expanded.

Regarding point 2.3.

- 2.3.1 ERASMUS exchange agreements are being expanded to achieve improvements in the identified deficit areas.
- 2.3.2 New exchange agreements with non-European partners are being sought, for example within the ERASMUS-KA107 or ISAP frameworks.
- 2.3.3 Existing information and support offerings are to be consolidated.

Regarding point 2.4.

See the measures outlined under 2.1

- 2.4.1 The number of language courses Geography students can take is to be increased.
- 2.4.2 The Geography Buddy Program is to be further expanded (see 2.2.3) and non-mobile students are to be better integrated into the program.

3. Action area: internationalized administration

Status quo at the Institute of Geography

At this time it is not possible to complete most administrative processes at the University of Bonn without knowing German. As part of its internationalization agenda, the University of Bonn aims to anchor a culture of internationalism within all units, both central and peripheral. At the GIUB as elsewhere, many administrative procedures are designed for German-speaking staff, and colleagues from abroad require assistance from German speakers to complete these. To make administrative tasks at GIUB easier for international staff members to perform, efforts commenced in early 2019 to translate central-office documents and policies into English. An English-language intranet was also launched in the summer semester 2019 providing information on administrative procedures at the GIUB. Email correspondence (regarding general management, degree program management or IT support-related matters, for example) will continue to be conducted in German, as will meetings.

The GIUB created an International Coordinator position in 2011 whose role is to oversee all matters of international relevance such as student mobility, foreign student support and international partnerships and functions as contact person for the International Office. All matters of international import are discussed in the International Affairs working group formed in 2011, which is led by the International Coordinator. Relevant information is then passed on to the executive committee and the working groups.

Goals for the action area of internationalized administration

The GIUB is to further internationalize administration and anchor a culture of internationalism within the Institute at every level.

Specific objectives

- 3.1. Increase the provision of information, forms and other administrative documents in English
- 3.2. Internationalize the administrative and technical staff

Measures

Regarding point 3.1.

- 3.1.1 Continuation of work to translate central-office documents.
- 3.1.2 The central room map in the entrance of the GIUB and door signs are to be made bilingual.
- 3.1.3 Bilingual email signatures and business documents are to be introduced.

Regarding point 3.2.

- 3.2.1 The GIUB will support administrative and technical staff in obtaining and furthering their international skills and qualifications.
- 3.2.2 New hires to the administrative and technical staff are required to have good English competency

4. Action area: location factors

Status quo at the Institute of Geography

The GIUB has closely cooperated with Bonn-based international organizations for years. These include the United Nations University (UNU), with which the GIUB offers a joint degree program. Other key partners that operate or are based internationally include the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), the German International Cooperation Society (GIZ), the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE), the Bonn Innovation Campus and the Center for Development Research (ZEF) as well as UNFCCC, UNSPIDER and other UN secretariats. A close research collaboration is in place under an agreement with the Bonn Innovation Campus.

The GIUB joined the Bonn-based International Disaster Protection and Risk Management network formed in 2017 and conducts an international lecture on this topic jointly with the City of Bonn.

Goals for the action area of location factors

The GIUB intends to continue existing cooperations with international organizations in Bonn and further expand these.

Measures

- 4.1.1 Partnerships with international organizations in Bonn are to be expanded through such measures as organizing joint workshops and lectures
- 4.1.2 An increasing number of international research projects are to be initiated and conducted jointly with international organizations based in the region.
- 4.1.3 Bonn-based international organizations are to be involved in teaching.

5. Action area: strategic partnerships

Status quo at the Institute of Geography

The GIUB has numerous international research collaborations in place. These are documented by the partnership database and listed in Appendix 1.2. ERASMUS partnerships are also a key element alongside research collaborations. New ERASMUS agreements are only concluded with universities that are already part of the University of Bonn's research network to ensure that the partnership will be sustainable on all levels (research, teaching and administration) over the long term.

At this time the GIUB does not have research collaborations with the University of Bonn's strategic partner universities (St Andrews, Waseda, Melbourne), but some working groups have expressed interest in establishing such relationships. The GIUB has many research and ERASMUS collaborations in place in the strategic partner countries of France and the UK. Some GIUB researchers have relationships in other partner countries such as the US, Israel, the Netherlands and Australia (see Appendix 1.2).

In addition to ties with universities in strategic partner countries, the University of Bonn also has close relationships with research institutions in Norway, Austria and other European countries.

Cooperating with universities in the Global South is a high priority for the GIUB, in geographic development research and in many other research areas. The focus countries are currently Tanzania, Kenya and Namibia, as part of the SFB/TR project "Future Rural Africa". There has also been extensive contact and research cooperation for many years with universities in Ethiopia, Benin and Ghana under joint projects financed by third-party funds. Many workshops, summer schools and other activities on capacity building have been conducted as part of cooperations (see Appendix 5.1). Advising doctoral students from countries in the Global South is a key part of the GIUB's capacity-building efforts, such as within the framework of the WASCAL Graduate Studies Program and the partnership with the Center for Development Research.

Goals for the action area of strategic partnerships

The GIUB adopts suitable measures and utilizes grant funds made available by the University of Bonn to strengthen existing cooperations in the University's strategic partner countries.

Cooperations with key partners in countries of the Global South are being expanded while additional universities are being identified as strategic institute partners.

Specific objectives

- 5.1. Establish cooperations of interest to the GIUB with strategic partner universities
- 5.2. Expand cooperations in the strategic partner countries
- 5.3. Forge a strategic partnership with a partner university
- 5.4. Expand cooperations in countries of the Global South

Measures

Regarding point 5.1.

- 5.1.1. An ERASMUS partnership is to be established with the University of St Andrews in the field of Geography.

Regarding point 5.2.

- 5.2.1 An ERASMUS partnership with another anglophone university is to be established.
- 5.2.2 The partner countries should be given preference in inviting international guest professors and lecturers (such as within an international lectures framework).

Regarding point 5.3.

- 5.3.1 A university is to be identified as a strategic institute partner for cooperation to then be expanded on all levels.

Regarding point 5.4.

- 5.4.1 Existing partnerships with countries in East and West Africa are to be deepened.
- 5.4.2 Capacity building measures are also to be conducted as part of projects in partner countries in the Global South.
- 5.4.3 The ERASMUS program line KA107 is utilized as an opportunity to strengthen partnerships in countries of the Global South.
- 5.4.4 The DAAD alumni programs and other scholarship programs (AvH, DFG, TWAS etc.) are to be utilized to and expand networks and further partnerships in the Global South.
- 5.4.5 “International Staff” positions are to be introduced for African academics within the framework of SFB/TR 228 with the aim of making these eligible PIs for the next funding phase of the SFB (2022–2025 – see measure 1.1.4)

6. Action area: public relations

Status quo at the Institute of Geography

Over the last ten years the GIUB has increased its English-language public relations activities as part of internationalization efforts. All information about the Institute and the central organizational units has been translated into English. Only some of the courses and study offerings are available in English. News and other current information on the Home page and Facebook page are occasionally posted in English depending on the topic and target group.

Information on study and internships abroad, international partnerships, projects and data on internationalization at the GIUB are published in an “International” section of the GIUB website. The Institute’s English-language public relations activities include working group websites, project websites and Facebook pages for individual projects. Presently, 10 out of 15 working groups have their websites in English. Three working groups do not provide information in English, while two working groups partially provide information in English (see Appendix 6.1.)

Designed in 2018, the English brochure presents the Institute's degree programs, research areas and offerings for international students in a compact format. This informational brochure is sent out to partner universities and used for promotional purposes in networking events and at conferences.

Goals for the action area of public relations

The GIUB aims to communicate a more international public image.

Specific objectives

- 6.1. Enhance the quality of the English-language web pages.
- 6.2. Increase the visibility of the GIUB's international activities

Measures

Regarding point 6.1.

- 6.1.1 News about international projects, workshops and publications are posted in English on the Home page of the GIUB website.
- 6.1.2 The English-language web pages on study offerings and teaching are to be revised to enhance quality.
- 6.1.3 All working groups post a brief report on their activities in English on the website at least once annually.

Regarding point 6.2.

- 6.2.1 A section of the website entitled "International Guests" is to be created.
- 6.2.2 An increased number of Facebook and Twitter posts are to be made in English.

7. Action area: language policy

Status quo at the Institute of Geography

The primary language of communication at the Institute is German, but some working groups have a very high percentage of international academics who communicate principally in English (see Appendix 7). The International Master's Program is conducted and administered exclusively in English.

Goals for the action area of language policy

The GIUB will continue promoting multilingualism among all of its status groups in accordance with the language policy of the University of Bonn.

Measures

See the measures per 1.1., 1.2, 2.4 and 3.2.

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