

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

JUNIOR FELLOWS TELL US
HOW FRIAS HAS INFLUENCED
THEIR ACADEMIC CAREERS



ANDREA ALBRECHT
Junior Fellow (Emmy Noether
Fellow) of the FRIAS School
of Language & Literature
(2008 – 2012)

One of the reasons why I came to Freiburg was because I knew that FRIAS was being founded and that it would not only be possible to enjoy active involvement in the German Department, but also to receive support from FRIAS in terms of organisation and ideas. FRIAS was actually launched shortly after I arrived and, straightaway, I was able to arrange a conference with very little bureaucratic fuss. Spontaneous acquaintances, including with External Senior Fellows, became professional collaborations, which will certainly continue beyond my time at FRIAS. What's more, FRIAS gives you greater academic visibility than you could ever imagine possible. My appointment to a chair in Stuttgart was without doubt only possible thanks to this visibility. And the interdisciplinary reading group that Olav Krämer and I were able to establish is known as far away as Berlin. Here, mathematicians, physicists and literary scholars discuss literature and science issues amidst a pleasant, focused environment in a small, intimate discussion forum, a far cry from the large conference rooms. The fact that we were encouraged to set it up as a junior research group and also received the means to regularly invite external speakers was truly unique.



AURELIO MATEO-ALONSO
Junior Fellow of the FRIAS
School of Soft Matter Research
(2009 – 2012)

The very generous start-up package allowed me to build up my first group very quickly, to practise science from day one and to attend conferences all over the world. This is crucial, especially if you are a young scientist, as it allows you to focus on research and communicate your results and thus build up your career quickly. Here, I was given the opportunity to organise workshops and seminars with other colleagues, and I have been able to establish a network of collaborators with different backgrounds. As a matter of fact, we are supported in organising scientific events, and we have free range to choose our own topics. Also, FRIAS promotes and facilitates in-house collaborations, which is particularly easy since there is no overlap with my colleagues who are spread all over the different departments in campus and all over the world in the case of external fellows. This opens the door to truly multidisciplinary research and provides specialised knowledge and instruments that would be hard to access otherwise. As a foreigner who does not speak German, I incurred absolutely no problems when developing my career at FRIAS, as the FRIAS administration works bilingually, in both German and English. If you sum all this up, it is easy to see why FRIAS offers a unique research experience.



JÖRN DENGJEL
Junior Fellow of the FRIAS
School of Life Sciences – LifeNet
(2008 – 2013)

I value the international nature of FRIAS very highly. The External Senior Fellows meant that FRIAS was home to many high-calibre academics, with whom I was able to exchange ideas. They gave me lots of useful input that I would certainly not have received at other institutes. As a result, my research has taken a new direction. FRIAS shines a type of spotlight on you: you are invited to conferences and lectures, to which you wouldn't otherwise be invited. I probably wouldn't have been offered a professorship at the University of Düsseldorf if I hadn't led my own working group at FRIAS. And if FRIAS wasn't FRIAS, I would have accepted the offer, too. But, here I have the freedom to carry out research as a Junior Fellow without directly depending on anyone. This removes any constraints normally faced even by experienced scientists, who still depend on a boss whose decision it is to employ people and who ultimately decides what work is being done. FRIAS has given me the freedom to carry out my research in a way that works for me.



JULIA OBERTREIS
Junior Fellow of the
FRIAS School of History
(2008 – 2009)

My time at FRIAS contributed greatly to my habilitation thesis. Firstly, discussing the contents at length with individual colleagues who were also fellows provided lots of stimulation. Meeting Sven Beckert from Harvard was particularly important to me; at FRIAS, we exchanged, read and discussed parts of our manuscripts. Secondly, the debates in the school colloquia were very interesting, where we conveniently explored the topic of "Modernity", which also plays a major role in my work. My own presentation in the colloquium was the highlight of the year for me. After the very extensive and lively discussion, I carried on the discussion in the kitchen with a couple of colleagues and knew after a few cups of coffee how many potential links there were between my topic and others. Another important contact for me was Marie-Janine Calic, with whom I spent enjoyable lunch breaks in the "Coffee Factory" discussing the promotion of equal opportunities for women and mentoring programmes at universities. Marie-Janine was also, to some extent, a role model for me in an academic culture which is still very male-dominated.

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GREGOR THUM
Junior Fellow of the
FRIAS School of History
(2008 – 2010)

I felt that my time at FRIAS was a period of intellectual refuelling; a time of intensive reading and reflection that you do not always get if you are tied up in everyday academic life with teaching and administration. It was important to get away from this hectic schedule for a while and to really focus on research in a pleasant environment. Exchanging information with colleagues and making new contacts were also important aspects which, for example, led to a conference and an anthology of articles. In terms of my own career advancement, a major factor was that I was able to make good progress with my second book and to supervise the English translation of my first book. The timely publication of this translation probably played a key role in my being offered the professorship in Pittsburgh. Having a year or two of this freedom and time to dedicate to your own research sustains your academic creativity in the long term.



ANJA STUKENBROCK
Junior Fellow of the FRIAS
School of Language & Literature
(2008 – 2013)
and Interdisciplinary Research
Group Junior Fellow
(2011 – 2012)

I have benefited in many ways from FRIAS; in terms of discipline, I have learned much through intensive discussions with External Senior Fellows, who are leaders in my field of research. What's more, the interdisciplinary nature of the institution was crucial to developing my academic profile; this is true both for the exchange between literature and linguistics within the LiLi School as well as for the trauma narratives project, a field in which I have been interested for a long time and was now able to put together an interdisciplinary research group at FRIAS together with Prof. Scheidt from psychosomatics and Prof. Lucius-Hoene from psychology. I also found it extremely exciting and enjoyable to join with academics from other disciplines in informal discussions on general theory and methodology, the development of higher education and a great deal of other topics on many different occasions. In all of this, it was still important for me to be close to university life: not to give up teaching altogether but continue to offer seminars, to inspire young researchers to investigate their own topics and to supervise doctoral candidates, which was also a challenge and opportunity for us as Junior Fellows.



TOM MICHOEEL
Junior Fellow of the FRIAS
School of Life Sciences – LifeNet
(2010 – 2012)

The scientific focus of the School of Life Sciences matched perfectly with my background. Here, collaboration is promoted between experimental life scientists on the one hand and people with a background in mathematics, physics or computer science on the other hand. In many universities these two types of scientists work separately and are very rarely found together in one school. All in all, it was a great opportunity to build up a whole network for future collaboration.

In terms of interactions with the other schools, people often ask how there can be collaborations between history and life sciences or literature and soft matter. I don't think it is really about concrete collaborations that result in a paper or a grant. It is about creating a stimulating environment and thinking about things in a different way. It is very eye-opening and enriching from an intellectual point of view to see that even across disciplines people face the same kinds of problems and have to deal with the same questions, but approach them in very different ways.



SABINE LUDWIGS
Junior Fellow of the FRIAS
School of Soft Matter Research
(2008 – 2011)

I have benefited a great deal from the Freiburg environment. I conducted my research at the Freiburg Materials Research Centre, where I was fortunate to have an outstanding habilitation mentor, Rolf Mülhaupt. My research was funded within two junior research groups, the Emmy-Noether group and the FRIAS Junior Fellowship group, so by my last year in Freiburg, I had already built up a team of twelve people. Throughout my research, FRIAS made it possible for me to gain easy access to interim financing on several occasions, allowing me to bring in a postdoc to join our team for a few months, for example. I have been in Stuttgart since April 2011, and my group has now grown to 20 members. My time at FRIAS prepared me very well for independently holding a chair, as I had already become familiar with many of the necessary management tasks in Freiburg. I was also able to take six staff members and several pieces of equipment with me from Freiburg so that we could get straight to work in the lab. In addition, a bridge was created between the different academic disciplines within FRIAS. This aspect was really great too, as it allowed us to learn about different approaches and ways of thinking. Thanks to this, many genuine professional friendships have been forged.