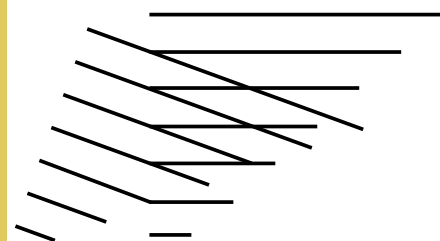


INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH GROUPS



FRIAS was founded in 2008 with the aim of using specialist academic schools to further promote four areas in which the University of Freiburg excelled, namely modern history, linguistics and literary studies, life sciences and soft matter research, and make them more visible to the international community. From the very beginning, and based on the concept of a “New Universitas”, the institute has regarded itself as a means for building bridges between disciplines and promoting new research initiatives to cross-link different subject areas. This soon led to the university’s desire for an additional programme open to all subjects and explicitly aimed at interdisciplinary work based on models similar to the Institute for Advanced Study in Wassenaar, the Netherlands, or the TEMA Department of Thematic Studies at Linköping University in Sweden. To achieve this purpose, an annual competition for Interdisciplinary Research Groups (IRG) was introduced in 2009, allowing academics from Freiburg, regardless of their discipline, to apply for a FRIAS fellowship with an interdisciplinary project.

From the start, the programme was very well received at the university and successfully helped to expand the academic range at the research college, attracting outstanding academics to the institute, particularly those from subject areas that were not represented in the four schools. This proved to be an optimal way of recruiting researchers from all eleven faculties at the University of Freiburg to become FRIAS fellows. In addition, many groups made use of the opportunity to involve external academics in the projects thereby bringing outside expertise to Freiburg. Most groups organised at least one international workshop in Freiburg.

Since 2009, a total of nine interdisciplinary research groups have been supported with a 10-month fellowship: projects of a concluding nature, projects which were converted into follow-up projects, such as proposals for Collaborative Research Centres (SFBs), as well as initiatives which had only just been founded and wanted to test out new academic waters. Having collaborated with linguist Anja Stukenbrock and psychologist Gabriele Lucius-

Hoene in a research project on the topic of “Narrative Coping with Threat, Trauma at Loss” at FRIAS in 2011/2012, physician Carl Eduard Scheidt stresses the significance of the programme for small open projects that are just starting out: “Although promoting interdisciplinarity is a goal that is frequently cited in science policy, it can usually only be implemented in large funding projects in SFBs or research groups. The structure of the IRGs therefore enables FRIAS to offer a unique development opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration in projects that have either not yet reached this level or because of their nature, do not want to reach it.” Scheidt’s project partner, Stukenbrock, speaks of the extensive experience she gained during the ten months of increasing knowledge in her own discipline and attaining interdisciplinary enrichment in the IRG.

Mathematician Ernst Eberlein, who worked on the “Information, Liquidity, and Trust in Incomplete Markets” project at FRIAS in 2009/2010 together with economist Thomas Gehrig, emphasises the additional benefit that emerges from collaborating with others in intensive, interdisciplinary project groups, both in terms of one’s own discipline as well as the common research field: “It is immediately clear that combining techniques from different disciplines enables you to deal with problems that could not have been tackled without this joint knowledge. In addition, this interdisciplinary discussion brought questions to light in the first place – questions that would not have been seen in the same way

if only one discipline had been involved. For me, it has repeatedly become clear that interdisciplinary collaboration increases practical relevance.” The aim of the programme for interdisciplinary research groups was to create a productive framework for precisely this kind of stimulating exchange, extending across discipline boundaries.

The programme has enabled FRIAS to create an explicitly interdisciplinary format that proved its worth as a fifth field alongside and equal to the four schools. It has also become a successful instrument for promoting innovative research projects that transcend boundaries at the University of Freiburg. Four competition rounds between 2009 and 2013 enabled FRIAS to bridge the gap between disciplines. The range of these combinations included cooperations between mathematics and economics (“Information, Liquidity, and Trust in Incomplete Markets”), psychology and computer science (“Coping with Emergencies”), law and business informatics (“Security and Society”), medicine and microsystems engineering (“Adaptive Optics for an MR-compatible Patient Motion Tracking System”), biochemistry and pharmaceutical chemistry (“Structure-based Epigenetic Drug Discovery”), human geography, political science and human ecology (“Mobility, Climate Change, Governance”), medicine, psychology and linguistics (“Narrative Coping with Threat, Trauma, and Loss”), medicine and theology (“The Support of Psychosocial and Spiritual Needs and Resources in Medicine”) and physics and psychology (“When the Chemistry is not Right for Sleep”).

