

How to lure (German) researchers back to Germany

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The **german academic international network (GAIN)**¹ informs German researchers working in North America about research opportunities in Germany. The implied intention is to lure German researchers back to Germany. GAIN project director Katja Simons explains:

Many german researchers abroad are highly interested in returning but they need support creating networks and receiving information on career opportunities in Germany. Germany has invested a great deal in their education and is in need of these bright minds and their experience they gained abroad.

GAIN is a joint initiative by the **Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH)**, the **German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)** and the **German Research Foundation (DFG)**. Their 8th annual meeting took place two weeks ago in Boston². More than 200 researchers working in North America participated, together with representatives from many German research organizations, including Matthias Kleiner, president of the German Research Foundation (DFG)³ and Margeret Wintermantel, president of the **German Recotors' Conference (HRK)**, the association of all higher education institutions in Germany⁴. Representatives from business and politics (members of the parliament) were also present.

To get a more personal perspective, I talked to two researchers that attended the meeting. **Alexander Maier**, a research fellow at the **NIH**, thinks that the GAIN meeting was a success. Sceptical at the beginning of the conference, he acknowledges that things have changed and that doing reseach in Germany has become much more attractive. The **excellence initiative** by the German Government is one big reason for that change⁵. The most rewarding part of the program for him was the workshop on how to apply for professorhips.

Florian Jaeger, an assistant professor from the University of Rochester (his blog is here⁶) is on the GAIN advisory board. He also got the impression that the German reseach system is changing, and that

Many institutions in Germany seem to be inspired to learn from the positive aspects of the American system (and maybe even to improve on it).

But both Alexander and Florian felt that the research environment in Germany is still far from perfect, and the German research organizations should not think that all problems have been solved. Startup grants are often relatively low and junior research groups are usually not as independent as in the United States. And Florian thinks that the research atmosphere – the way people interact and approach problems – is still more stimulating in the United States.

Most reports about the GAIN meeting are in the German media, including the newspapers Hamburger Abendblatt⁷ and Süddeutsche Zeitung⁸. I found one blog post from a German postdoc attending the meeting⁹. Nature Network is a good place to have a discussion not only about the research environment in different countries, but also to learn more about similar strategies carried out by other countries, e.g. France, Italy, Japan or China. Feel free to leave your comments about why you left your home country to do research somewhere else¹⁰, or why you returned after finishing your PhD or postdoc¹¹.

¹ **GAIN Homepage**

² **DFG news report of the meeting**

³ **DFG Homepage**

⁴ **HRK Homepage**

⁵ **Excellence initiative**

⁶ **HLP/Jaeger lab blog**

⁷ **Lockrufe der deutschen Forschung**

⁸ **In Boston werben Politiker für deutsche Unis**

⁹ **Sonja in the City**

¹⁰ **A Developing Passion**

¹¹ **Science in the Bel Paese**