

Speech Dean of Studies

THE IBERO-AMERICAN RESEARCH SEMINAR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LEIPZIG
1994-2014

Vice-rector for research and young scholars, Professor Schwarz
Lord Mayor of the City of Leipzig, Burkhard Jung
Ambassadors from Argentina, Columbia, El Salvador and Peru, Counselors from the Embassies of Mexico and Spain
Director of the *European Forum* of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Professor Ruth Fine
Director of the Institute of Romance Studies of the Humboldt University in Berlin, Professor Dieter Ingenschay
Professor Emeritus Klaus Meyer-Minnemann of the University of Hamburg
Professor Dr. Alfonso de Toro and Dr. Claudia Gatzemeier, Director of the Ibero-American Research Seminar
Conference participants and guests

I am very pleased to welcome you to the anniversary conference of the Ibero-American Research Seminar of the University of Leipzig as a representative of the Office of the Dean, although I am afraid that I must do so in German, as I speak neither Spanish nor Portuguese, nor one of the national dialects.

In the eyes of the department, such an anniversary conference is an ideal place to illuminate research foci and gain perspective on key events in the past in order to establish potential for future research. Because research and instruction are so closely linked in the university's core concept, research significantly influences teaching here.

The Ibero-American Research Seminar of the University of Leipzig has generated international visibility for the Department of Philology in several ways. I only wish to name a few research projects.

- Over six years (from 1997 to 2003), the DFG financed the project *Diversity of discourses. Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Communication in the Context of Post-Modernism and Post-Coloniality. Latin America and the Diversity of Discourses*. Over 100 scholars cooperated on this transdisciplinary research project. In total, it produced seven volumes of publications and four dissertations.
- *Memoria in Latin America*. This project in cooperation with the Pontificia Universidad Católica Santiago de Chile and partners from other countries in the Americas was financed by the DFG in 2010 and 2011. It was continued after the end of the DFG funding period.
- From 2011 to 2013, the Federal Ministry for Education and Research financed a project called *New Hybrid Diasporas*. This project was designed and carried out by the Ibero-American and Francophone Research Seminars of the University of Leipzig, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and other universities in Morocco, Europe, and North and South America.
- Together with Professor de Toro, we hope that soon, the project submitted in the framework of *Horizon 2020, Migrations and Diasporas. Construction and Representation of*

'performative-hybrid' identities, gender and cities in Global Societies in a trans-disciplinary perspective will receive funding.

In addition to the research projects, many international conferences on *hybridity, diaspora, and Borges research* have been organized and hosted by the Ibero-American Research Seminar of the University of Leipzig. Their results have been published in high-quality series that have had visible effects on the international research community.

One of the major goals of the department, as well as of any institute or professor, is to support young scholars. So far, IAFSL has made an important contribution to achieving this goal in twelve conferences on the topics of Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula. Doctoral and postdoctoral candidates from German and foreign universities attend these research conferences each year. For some of them, these have been important stops on the road to their first assignments as professors. International visibility is also increased by means of a group of joint doctoral candidates, or cotutelles.

For a Department of Philology encompassing numerous philologies of foreign languages, internationalization is a must. IAFSL makes an important contribution to the Department's profile in this respect. Beyond the aforementioned research projects and guest professorships, IAFSL's contribution includes many initiatives that have led to university partnerships and a series of cooperation between Faculties. Some of the most productive have been the partnerships with the Pontificia Universidad Católica in Santiago de Chile and with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Through these international contacts, IAFSL has also repeatedly helped students to study abroad.

For the humanities, and especially for philology, cooperation with non-academic partners is often a challenge, as the value of research in the humanities is not always easy to convey and only translates directly to monetary value in rare cases. In this regard, IAFSL stands out. For two decades, IAFSL has maintained cooperation with the Leipzig Book Fair and the Haus des Buches, as well as with the City of Leipzig and different diplomatic institutions, thus increasing the visibility of humanities research outside the ivory tower of the university (which is neither ivory nor really a tower) so that it may give something back to society, which, of course, is responsible for funding universities.

These activities make the IAFSL a research location that, at twenty years of age, is only a few months younger than the Department itself. Its numerous publications have clear effects on the international research community and set the Department of Philology and the University of Leipzig apart. The international research orientation and the support provided to young scholars also affects teaching at the university. It offers the necessary means to broaden students' horizons that is so crucial to culture studies. As Dean and as a citizen of Leipzig, this seems vastly important to me, especially considering the fact that Leipzig's population of foreign inhabitants is well below the national average (D: 8.2%, L: 6,2%). Thus, these research and educational activities, along with the contacts outside the university, foster an international character and sharpen one's image of one's own culture against the backdrop of other cultures.

In looking back at efforts made and the effects they have today, we must also consider the future. Now, we see some dark clouds and hear thunder rumbling in the distance. The black and yellow coalition has demanded rigorous spending cuts of Saxony's universities. By 2020, 1,042 positions must have been removed, despite increasing numbers of students. For the University of Leipzig, this means getting rid of 24 positions per year. Whole institutes have

been closed: Pharmacy, Theater, and Classical Archaeology are on the list of cuts. But the Department of Philology is also affected: After cutting Onomastics and Comparative Literature, 10.5 additional positions must be identified and done away with. Along with other institutes in the Department, this affects Romance Studies in the fields of Spanish and Portuguese Linguistics. The consequences of this for IAFSL, which has these fields at its core, are unclear. We can only hope that our worst fears do not come to pass.

This bleak outlook should not put a damper on our anniversary conference. Hope will always be the last to die. So I wish you a fruitful conference, with eye-opening experiences that bridge cultures and continents, and that open doors, even in stormy weather. Let us once again make our research at the University of Leipzig bloom for all to see.