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Support for Early Career Researchers Revisited

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Now, looking back to when I was a doctoral student, I realize the profound impact that Alfred Hornung had on my journey.

Let me illustrate: For many years, I have been managing graduate centers and working with guidelines for doctoral supervision and support for early career researchers. One of the key principles in supporting early career researchers is "integration of early career researchers into the academic community." The concept is straightforward: Supervisors should support doctoral candidates in their introduction to academic networks, fostering connections that will benefit their careers.

Initially, I was surprised by this rule. Not because it didn't make sense—to the contrary—but because it seemed so obvious to me. I then came to realize: Alfred Hornung has provided me with an exemplary model of integration into the scientific community.

Already as junior research assistants, we were actively involved in all the conferences he organized—many events in Mainz and beyond, with big names from all over the world. Our roles extended far beyond mere logistical tasks such as setting up tables and making coffee. In fact, sometimes there was hardly anything of that kind for us to do—making me wonder: Why are we here? In hindsight, I realize we were there because Alfred Hornung wanted us to learn about the inner workings of conferences, both in terms of content and the unwritten rules of academic culture.

By the way: Not all of the "established scholars" at the time thought it was a good idea to include us young researchers at the table. Someone once suggested to

us that the chairs "for the young folks" should be placed at the back of the room. But for Alfred Hornung, it was clear that we were not relegated to the second row.

Thus, being in the midst of events, I quickly became familiar with the conventions of the academic community. Besides valuable insights into literature and literary theory, I learned to navigate the complex dynamics of academic discourse. One example: If someone expressed harsh criticism of a paper, I soon came to understand that this might in some cases have nothing to do with the paper. Alfred Hornung would comment on such peculiar statements for us afterwards, saying, "They only wanted to show off." This simple phrase was an important insight into habits of discourse—one that I draw on regularly.

Later, as a graduate student, I soon found myself presenting papers to high-profile American studies scholars from around the world. Of course, I was worried about what people might say about my paper. Again, Alfred Hornung would help immensely by classifying comments as either valuable or "show-off" contributions. Under his guidance, I learned precious lessons about presenting, persevering, and staying focused, even in the face of criticism or adversity. And I am very grateful that he always made sure I presented these papers, despite my wimpy excuses ("I think I need to do more research first, better next time …").

Alfred Hornung also pushed our immersion into the community abroad. Besides the precious year at Columbia University, he also supported and helped to realize my idea to work with Gerald Vizenor in Berkeley for my Master's thesis. And made sure I got the right perspective on the research stay: "No, it is not a waste of money. Trust me, it is well invested." Of course, it was.

Being familiar with the community and customs in American studies has been an invaluable foundation for my work in research management. I know why the humanities matter, and how the community "ticks." I articulate it in strategic discourses; e.g., in discussions on third-party funding, when the focus is often on life sciences and natural sciences.

Beyond understanding rules of discourse and of the community, working with Alfred Hornung, I become aware of the importance of exchange and collaboration for professional life in general. From the very beginning of my career as a research manager, I attended conferences and built valuable networks. These networks have been instrumental in my daily work, providing me with a wealth of knowledge and expertise. And that I pioneered the exchange of the German Network for Research Management with the American partner institution with an internship at the University of Pennsylvania surely had to do with my "upbringing" at Mainz.

"Integration into the professional community" consequently became a core value in my leadership. I encourage my team to give presentations in front of "important" people, to attend conferences to learn, build networks, and thus professionalize themselves. Beyond the benefits of content and professional development, they also get to know wonderful people and places and can have a lot of fun after a hard day's

work at the conference (which, by the way, we had at conferences organized by Alfred Hornung—but that is a different story).

I am deeply grateful to Alfred Hornung for integrating me in such an exemplary way into the scientific community and, by doing so, also prepare me for professional life beyond American Studies. His influence continues to shape my career in many ways, and I consider myself privileged to have had the opportunity to work with him.