

INTRODUCTION · EINFÜHRUNG

aus:

**STORIES FROM 55 YEARS OF  
A TRANSATLANTIC FRIENDSHIP**

**GESCHICHTEN AUS 55 JAHREN  
TRANSATLANTISCHER FREUNDSCHAFT**

Smith College · Universität Hamburg 1961 – 2016

Edited by Jocelyne Kolb & Rainer Nicolaysen

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### **PRESERVING SELF-EVIDENT TRUTHS**

The origin of this story of origins is the celebration, in June 2011, that took place in Hamburg to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Smith College Junior Year Program at the University of Hamburg. We wanted to replicate in print what we witnessed in person: the voicing of vivid memories that were never identical but invariably familiar; the effortless manner in which people from two institutions and two countries met and mingled; the wisdom and wit with which participants reflected on the profound effect of studying and teaching thousands of miles away from home. We wanted a record of how this remarkable program came into being and of how people over the decades have responded to and remembered what is an exchange in the truest sense. The ease with which we were able to collect some 40 contributions testifies to the strong ties between Smith College and the University of Hamburg – between Northampton and Hamburg. The essays in this volume capture the regular and lively talk between our institutions and cities.

Our volume is one of friendship, that of Smith College with the University of Hamburg and our own friendship as editors. Friendship, as the Americans quickly learned from their Hamburg counterparts, is something serious and a durable good. For their part, the hosts in Hamburg learned from their American visitors about a more spontaneous and light-hearted version of friendship that is no less durable than the German kind. In its German and American manifestations, in theory and practice, institutionally and on a personal level, the 55 years of collaboration between Smith College and the University of Hamburg have witnessed and fostered friendship. Friendship has intensified the scholarly, intellectual, cultural, and diplomatic bounty of which our contributors speak, each with a distinct but recognizable sound. As this book goes to press in the Spring of 2017, when the truths we hold to be self-evident are being put sorely to the test, the transatlantic bonds of friendship are more precious than ever. They must be treasured and preserved.

A word is in order about the contributors themselves, who represent each component of what began as Smith's Junior Year at the University of Hamburg (its original name, as we know from the earliest stationery): the directors and staff in Hamburg; the Smith students on the program in Hamburg and the Hamburg

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students on the American Studies Diploma Program at Smith; and the faculty who participated in the short-term and long-term exchange that was signed into being in 1979 by Jill Ker Conway and Peter Fischer-Appelt, the presidents of Smith College and the University of Hamburg at the time (both of whom have contributed a brief preface to our volume).

Contributions from former students were chosen to reflect the evolution of the program as well as particular historical developments, most prominently the fall of the Berlin Wall. The first group sailed for Hamburg on August 19, 1961, just days after the Berlin Wall went up, and we have included three letters from Thomas Mendenhall, then Smith's president, about plans for the group to visit Berlin in the Fall of 1961: a letter to Reinhard Lettau, the first faculty director of the program, strategizing about how to reassure the students' parents; the letter that was sent to parents in which Mendenhall adopts a casual tone that is calculated to reassure them (and must have succeeded); and finally a parody of that same letter to parents that Mendenhall composed for Lettau's amusement with the heading "copy: to Reinhard Lettau" and not on College stationery. There are student testimonies from each decade of the program. One of them – the longest – offers an eye-witness account of life in the former East Germany shortly after the Berlin Wall came down, told by a student who was sent there on a Fulbright teaching fellowship and stayed on afterwards.

That a disproportionate number of contributors participated in programs led by one of the editors has a simple and practical explanation. Those are the students Jocelyne Kolb knows best and with whom she has regular contact. The youngest among them – Dinah Lensing-Sharp – helped us collect and organize the material for this volume during her own junior year in Hamburg. The closeness that develops between students and their directors is itself a feature of the programs and, like the accounts themselves, more representative than singular. The changes over the years, though dramatic, are less surprising than the continuities from one group to the next and from one decade to the next. Three contributions are from guest students, two of them from the years in which Smith and Yale had an informal consortial agreement. One alumna of the program, Deanna Gaunce Nebert, has contributed a full account – set out in 5 acts – of the 50th-anniversary celebration

that inspired this volume. She also belongs to the *côterie* of Smith students who returned to Germany after they graduated and made their lives there.

In 55 years, 22 people have directed the program, seven of whom have contributed to our volume. Of those seven Hans Vaget is the first, having directed the program from 1969 to 1971 and been charged with revising the program. The changes he introduced persist to this day with just the right amount of healthy variation and progress. Of the other directors, Gertraud Gutzmann and Joseph McVeigh win the prize for having directed the program most often (seven times apiece). Margaret Zelljadt and Jocelyne Kolb are close on their heels with six times apiece. And although Hans Vaget directed the program “only” three times, he returned to Hamburg once on the long-term faculty exchange, when he taught seminars on Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* and exile literature, and three times on the short-term exchange; he remains a regular and loyal visitor to Hamburg and an important scholarly presence in Germany. Each director shapes the program, regardless of how often he or she has come. Nelly Hoyt left her mark after only one year, for example, and the same can be said of Joel Westerdale.

The documents published in the appendix give a vivid picture of how the program came into being, of how it came to Hamburg, and of how it evolved. Most of the documents are typewritten, some by a secretary; there are handwritten notes on the typewritten documents and some evocative doodles, most of them easy to identify (no one makes an exclamation point like Gertraud Gutzmann!). Together these papers reveal the rapidity with which the study abroad program led to a reciprocal agreement whereby two students from the University of Hamburg receive full fellowships to study at Smith on what was to become the American Studies Diploma program. From the German side, two DAAD fellowships were established to support Smith students in Hamburg. In 1979, a faculty exchange was introduced that thrived through 2013. A list of faculty directors and a list of faculty who participated in the exchange are printed at the end of the section “stories.”

Throughout the years, the study abroad program has remained true to the original goal of integrating students into German culture, specifically German university culture, and the corresponding requirement that German be the language of the program. Those objectives received a boost when students began



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living in dormitories during the late 1960s (housing being another concrete example of Hamburg's generosity and openness). Using German has become a struggle in the past ten to twenty years, because so many people in Germany speak English and want to practice with native speakers. Nevertheless the original formula of living in dormitories and using German has retained its validity. It is a formula that also includes the hiring of tutors for students' classes at the University of Hamburg or institutions such as the Technical University in Harburg – one of the open secrets to the program's success and durability. Since the program began in 1961, a faculty member from Smith College (and once from Smith's sister institution Mount Holyoke College) has accompanied the students to Hamburg. That model will be replaced just after our volume appears, and in the Fall of 2017 the program's philosophy and practices will be sure to thrive under the astute and trustworthy stewardship of a new but very familiar director: Jutta Gutzeit.

The current volume seeks to recapture the origins and the evolution of a successful initiative in cultural exchange. It also aims to memorialize people who brought the program into being and are no longer alive: Marie Schnieders and Thomas Mendenhall, the actual founders of the program; Reinhard Lettau, who directed the program for the first two years, and Willy Schumann, who directed the program in its third year and three more times before retiring in 1993. A plaque in honor of Marie Schnieders hangs on the wall of the Smith Center, but the students need to be told why it is there and what they owe to her energy and foresight. Throughout the volume there are repeated references to our much beloved, much admired German colleagues Peter Borowsky and Manfred Bonus. For nearly 30 years, beginning in the late 1960s, Peter Borowsky taught history to Smith students in Hamburg; as a participant in the long-term faculty exchange he also spent four semesters at Smith College. Manfred Bonus participated in each Orientation Program from 1993 until he died in 2015, teaching grammar to Smith students with unflagging dynamism, rigor, patience, and humanity. In spirit these people remain very much alive. They epitomize the friendship between Smith College and the University of Hamburg.



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