



Dr. Georg Schütte is a secretary of state in the German Federal Ministry of Education and a Fulbright alumnus.

## »Sharing knowledge fosters a mature society«

Since December 2009, Dr. Georg Schütte has served as a secretary of state in the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). He heads its international department, the department for higher education and research and the department for basic research and sustainable development. From 2001 to 2003, he was the executive director of the German-American Fulbright Commission in Berlin. In 1987, he studied at City University of New York with a Fulbright scholarship.

### **Germany's Federal Minister of Education, Anja Karliczek, places a great deal of emphasis on making science and research more accessible to the public. What do you think constitutes effective science communication?**

When researchers are interested in open exchange, the outcome is always positive. Good science communication isn't a one-way street; it means engaging with children, young people and the general public in a way that benefits everyone. It's not just about coming up with new findings for your own research question, it's about entering into a dialogue on developments that affect society. That's become more important for social cohesion than ever before. We want to foster a culture of scholarship in which responsible citizens participate directly in research.

### **People often say it's hard to stay informed about current academic research.**

That's exactly why communicating with a wider audience should be a given for researchers and institutions. Especially today, when discussions are often emotional and lack objective

grounding, researchers need to be in the public eye, sharing their findings in an accessible way. They're in the position to counter superficial and emotional communication on the internet with scientific objectivity and fact-oriented perspectives. That being said, it takes skill to present complicated research in a way everyone can understand.

Science writers also have a role in giving a shape to the flood of information. The Science Media Center Germany is a good example of a collaboration between scientists and journalists: it maintains a database of experts in science and compiles fact sheets on topics such as medicine, life sciences and the environment.

### **In which research fields is communication particularly important?**

Many people are concerned about the decline in biodiversity—an irreversible loss that affects the entire world. The BMBF is tackling the problem with a conservation research initiative. We want to make use of the collective know-how of German research to address gaps in knowledge. This initiative is meant to provide orientation, practical information and tools for decision-makers and engaged citizens. In addition to offering workshops, it explores urgent research questions and new interdisciplinary research projects.

This includes the climate targets which we'll only meet if we successfully execute a turnaround in energy policy—but that doesn't mean each and every one of us doesn't need to be engaged. We need to introduce sustainable energy into our homes, modes of transport and industries. We need to see this energy transition in a more international context. That's why BMBF is focused on systemic and technology-oriented research such as the Kopernikus projects. The collaboration of education, science and research on both an international and a European



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level is crucial. We can only come up with good solutions to problems such as climate change, demographic change and migration if we work together.

### **What challenges do you anticipate when it comes to international research projects?**

Unfortunately, freedom in teaching and research is currently being restricted or threatened in many parts of the world. This is something we want to counteract, since these freedoms are a prerequisite not only for the prevention and management of crises, but also for the development of sustainable structures. For our relationships with partner countries to be successful, we need to foster good relationships with international institutions and work together at establishing a collaborative rapport. The Ministry of Education and Research is applying this collaborative approach in its Africa strategy, for example, which was jointly devised by German and African pedagogues, scientists and researchers. At the Federal Government's roundtable event, »Internationalization of Education, Science and Research,« we initiated the first interdepartmental synergy projects in Africa.

### **What goals have been set for national research?**

I think it's important to continue pursuing science with the German federal states. For one, this means maintaining the »excellence strategy« we've developed to optimize the quality of research. There are also new measures in place to provide support for research and staffing at universities of applied sciences. We want Germany to stay a leader on the international scene, so having a first-rate education and research system is crucial. A strong system attracts students and researchers from abroad and is the best foundation for international partnerships that will take us, as well as our partners, further.

### **Do German higher education institutions have enough of an international appeal?**

The fact that we have almost 360,000 international students studying in Germany shows how attractive it is when it comes to academia and research. At the same time, we also wish to increase mobility among German students, especially those who have been less inclined to study abroad so far. This is particularly true of students at universities of applied sciences or in cooperative courses of study, for whom the path to studying abroad is often fraught with obstacles. The Fulbright Commission really makes a difference, thanks to the diversity of its programs.

### **What experience during your time as a Fulbright scholar 30 years ago made the biggest impression?**

My year abroad changed my life. Living in a city as multifaceted as New York expanded my horizons. My perspective shifted from a national to an international one. Since then, encounters with people from different countries, whether in Germany or abroad, have always been deeply enriching for me.

For the German version of this interview, download **Fulbright Germany's annual report 2017/18** at [www.fulbright.de](http://www.fulbright.de)