

Press Release
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The Plurality of German-American Friendship: Fulbright Discusses Diversity
The demands and challenges of diversity in international exchange

“We need more diversity in schools and public administration,” said Prof. Dr. Gökçe Yurdakul at the first Diversity Conference of the German-American Fulbright Commission (Fulbright Germany), this past weekend in Berlin. The fact that one in four Germans has a migration background is underrepresented. “Diversity is an asset,” said Yurdakul, a professor in the Department of Diversity and Social Conflict at Berlin’s Humboldt University.

At the two-day Diversity Conference, organized as part of the European Fulbright Diversity Initiative (EFDI), more than 180 Fulbright fellows, staff, and directors from twenty countries met with international experts from government and academia to discuss ideas and concrete proposals for increasing diversity in schools and businesses. Some groups worked on recommendations specifically for the Fulbright Commission.

Dr. Oliver Schmidt, managing director of the German Fulbright Commission and initiator of the conference, considers the meeting an important step on the way to greater inclusion, diversity, and equality—both at Fulbright and in an increasingly polarized society. “For too long we have taken values such as democracy and diversity for granted. We have to stand up for them again.” For Fulbright, diversity has long been an important issue. For over a decade the exchange organization has been sending US teaching assistants to schools throughout Germany’s sixteen federal states. Fulbright Germany is also strengthening its programs for Germans with migration backgrounds, who often experience a vastly different approach to diversity in the US, where they often view their own identities anew.

The German-American Fulbright Commission is the only bi-national exchange organization in Germany with a focus on the United States. It is shaped by the founding spirit of US Senator J. William Fulbright and the experiences of World War II, which saw common humanity sacrificed to ideologies. Since 1952, Fulbright Germany has been working on cross-border understanding between nations through academic exchange, funding over 46,000 scholarships. In pursuit of more equal opportunities, Fulbright Germany is supported by the German Foreign Office, the US Department of State, and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

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