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TIRF TODAY

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Research Spotlight: International Graduate Center for the Study of Culture



Michael Legutke

Editor's note: In this piece, [TIRF Trustee Michael Legutke](#), Professor Emeritus of TEFL at Justus-Liebig University (JLU) in Giessen, Germany, shares information about the International Graduate Center for the Study of Culture at JLU.

Founded in 2006, the [International Graduate Center for the Study of Culture](#) (GCSC) at Justus-Liebig University in Giessen, Germany offers systematic and structured support for doctoral and post-doctoral researchers in a team environment. Two of its main goals are 1) to provide its members with opportunities for an interdisciplinary and international dialogue while they are working on their own research projects, and 2) to enable them to gain a wide variety of additional academic qualifications. Here, young scholars can find an interdisciplinary context that will support them in the development of their research interests.

The [eight Research Areas](#) (RAs) of the GCSC provide the necessary framework to achieve these two aims. Among these RAs are: [Media and Multiliteracy Studies](#) (RA5); [Cultural Identities](#) (RA6); [Cultures of Knowledge, Research, and Education](#) (RA8). Together with other doctoral students, postdocs, and professors, GCSC members organize projects and events in these research areas. These events include symposia, lecture series, and regional and international conferences.

GCSC cooperates very closely with the [Giessen Graduate School for the Humanities](#) (GGK), founded in 2001, and the International [PhD Program in Literary and Cultural Studies](#), founded in 2002, as well as the [PhDNet Literary and Cultural Studies](#). These programs paved the way towards the establishment of the GCSC.



All four programs jointly constitute the Graduate Center for the Humanities of Justus-Liebig University Gies-

sen. As of January 2015, the Center hosts 120 doctoral students (36 of them with full scholarships), 12 post-doc researchers, 32 principal investigators, 45 associate researchers, and 11 distinguished senior professors.

TESOL International Association Updates its Research Agenda

The TESOL International Association has published its [2014 Research Agenda](#). TIRF Board members Jun Liu and Kathi Bailey were members of the task force which developed this research agenda, as was former TIRF President Neil Anderson.

According to Deena Boraie, the 2014 President of TESOL, the association "plans to use this research agenda as a catalyst to bridge the current gap between research and classroom practice. We hope to encourage researchers to focus some of their academic investigation as a way to help practitioners meet the

The GCSC engages in several types of activities and services. For example, regular PhD coursework is offered in cooperation with the GGK and the different departments in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Doctoral students have the opportunity to broaden their theoretical frameworks, refine their research designs, to jointly evaluate their methodologies, and present findings to peers, professors, and senior researchers.

In addition, various interest sections and research project groups as well as emerging topics working groups have been constituted, which are systematically fostered by the Center. Three examples are the working groups on [Game Studies](#), on [Empirical Social Research](#), and on [Foreign-Language Teaching/Learning with Digital Distribution and Communication Media](#).

The GCSC pursues bilateral cooperation with universities that enhance the organization of international conferences and symposia. Activities include jointly organized conferences and symposia, the exchange of scholars and students, and binational PhD-supervisions. Among the partners are Macquarie University in Australia, Cornell University in the US, Saint Mary's University in Canada, and the University of Graz in Austria. For a comprehensive list of partners, please [click here](#).

Through the European "PhDnet" [Literary and Cultural Studies](#), scholars and PhD candidates benefit from a tight network of jointly organized symposia, conferences, key note lectures, and master classes. Forms of [multi-dimensional international PhD supervision](#) have also been established.

The [Teaching Center](#) of the GCSC provides a unique service to prospective university teachers: A structured program, designed to qualify doctoral students to teach, offers not only the opportunity to become familiar with participant-based and task-based approaches to university teaching and learning, but also useful support in planning and running academic courses. The focus here is on developing teaching ability, analyzing problems within teaching and learning, and doctoral students reflecting upon their own experiences. Doctoral candidates are required to document their teaching experience in a teaching portfolio, which will be accredited by the Center.

growing challenge of improving student outcomes in various contexts. TESOL will showcase this document through various media outlets including press releases, blog posts, convention sessions, and virtual seminars."

As Deena notes, these activities are designed to raise interest in TESOL's research direction as well as to bring researchers and practitioners together in the field of English language teaching. She added that, given its commitment to research, TESOL plans to start commissioning research in July 2015.

Join Us in Toronto for Our Panel Presentation!

Title: "Building Bridges in Language Planning, Teacher Development, Research, and Assessment"

Time/Date: 9 to 10:30am on Thursday, March 26, 2015

Location: Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Room 206B



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Kathleen Bailey,
Chair of TIRF

February is "Discover Languages Month®"

February marks the annual celebration of "Discover Languages Month," an initiative developed by The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). According to ACTFL's website, Discover Languages Month was created to raise public awareness about the many benefits language learning

provides. [Click here](#) for more information.

ACTFL has created a website filled with ideas and classroom activities, information, and research studies, as well guidelines to help teachers, students, parents, and supporters communicate about the benefits of language learning. The campaign

also seeks to provide a unifying effort among all language professionals to help them work collaboratively, promote language education, and identify resources to meet the needs of the constituent groups of language professionals.



Chair's Report — "Othering"



Martin Luther King, Jr.

Editor's Note: Each year in the US, the third Monday in January is celebrated as Martin Luther King Day. To commemorate Dr. King's vision, Kathi Bailey

shares her experience of "othering" with our readers.

I am a middle-aged white woman living in a middle class neighborhood in California. I know most of my neighbors. One day I came home from work early and saw a stranger walking around our cul-de-sac. His back was to me. He was a big man, wearing a hooded sweatshirt, with the hood up. What was he doing? Could he be casing the area, looking for houses to break into?

I pulled into my driveway and took my time getting my belongings out of the car. I wanted to delay long enough to get a good look at the man so I could describe him to the police if there were any robberies in the neighborhood. Why was he taking so long to come around the circle of houses? Was he avoiding letting me see him? I rearranged the items in my trunk, taking my time.

Just then, he came around the bend. For the first time, I saw his face. He was a black man. Definitely not one of my neighbors! Why was he walking so slowly? Should I speak to him? Should I ask him what he's doing here? I had to decide whether to accost him or let him alone.

Suddenly, a perky little dog burst out of the shrubbery and pranced up to me, his body wriggling with unbridled Chihuahua friendliness. I was captivated.

"Hello! Who are you?" I asked the tiny dog, letting it sniff my fingers.

"Oh, that's Smokey," said the mysterious stranger, a broad smile creating happy wrinkles around his eyes.

Oh! The perceived threat dissolved before my eyes. This hooded man was simply walking his dog. We exchanged a few words about the dog, which trotted happily off along the sidewalk. The man said goodbye and followed his energetic little pet.

In the weeks to come, I would sometimes see them in my neighborhood in the early afternoon—the big man and his miniature dog. The man always waved at me when I drove by.

At some point I began to worry about our first encounter. The entire interaction took no more than a few minutes, but my mind was made up in a matter of seconds: I was sure that man was a potential threat. Why had I been so suspicious? Was I a racist?

I hadn't thought so. I believe in diversity. I've taught lessons on stereotyping. I have friends from many cultures and ethnicities—so why the immediately suspicious fearful reaction to an unknown person walking quietly through my neighborhood?

Was it because he was black? No. I'm relieved to say I'd already perceived him as threatening before I saw his face. His size, his hooded sweatshirt, the fact I did not recognize him immediately from behind all led to the snap judgment: Stranger!!

But I am ashamed to say that when I did see his face, the perception of possible danger increased. Was that because he was black? I hope not. I hope my reaction was based on the fact that he was definitely an unknown person, walking in my immediate neighborhood at an unexpected time of day.

Fear is an old and bitter drug, but it is potent. Its residue—like radioactive waste—permeates the environment for ages. I have never been accosted or even threatened or taunted by a black person (or by anyone except white people, for that matter). Yet the color of this man's skin added

to my existing perception of "otherness."

In his blog, Scott Thornbury wrote that "othering is the way members of one social group distance themselves from, or assert themselves over, another by construing the latter as being fundamentally different (the 'Other')."

How easily fear and suspicion are aroused! And yet—happily, in this case—how quickly they can be dispelled. The poet Carl Sandburg wrote about how fog comes in "on little cat feet." For me, understanding arrived that day on little dog feet. The fact that the man was walking his dog completely changed my perception of his possible intent.

After several months, history repeated itself. I came home early one afternoon and saw a hooded figure walking around the cul-de-sac. It was the same man. I asked him if we could talk. He graciously agreed and I told him about my first reactions, my knee-jerk stereotyping, and my subsequent soul-searching. He introduced himself and gave me a hug. He understood my suspicions and concerns. He listened to my confusion and accepted my apology. He told me about himself. Five minutes of fear and months of worry were counteracted by five minutes of communication with him. The frightening "other" became a gentle neighbor.

As I thought about this experience, I came to see the cul-de-sac as a metaphor for my thought processes. It means "the bottom of the bag." The term refers to a street that has only one inlet, which is both the entrance and the exit to the neighborhood. My mind had been in a dead-end of doubt and suspicion. I am grateful to my neighbor and to Smokey for helping me find an exit from the cul-de-sac of fear.

Kathi Bailey