



University-Based Institutes for Advanced Study in a Global Perspective:  
Promises, Challenges, New Frontiers

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## Mapping the world of UB-IAS

An introductory survey based on the questionnaire sent to all participating  
institutes

### 1. Introduction

When first considering to organize such a global reunion of University-Based Institutes for Advanced Study about 15 months ago, we started out with an internet search and were surprised to find so many institutes of this kind worldwide.

Previously, we had been in touch with independent and widely renowned IAS of the Princeton variety, looking at them as models for setting up an institute like ours. We did indeed travel to Princeton and visited other famous institutes like the National Humanities Center, the institutes at Palo Alto, Uppsala, Wassenaar or the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, receiving a very warm welcome and the most generous hospitality and advice at all these wonderful places. We learnt a tremendous lot through these encounters, getting to understand the basics and essentials that make them work, with components ranging from the vital necessity of rigorous academic standards and selection procedures to the importance of community-building, cultural activities and more practical matters such as regular meals shared by all fellows of the institute. So, yes, we have every reason to be grateful to these outstanding institutions and to revere them as highly attractive models. They have set the stan-

dards, and the high public reputation which the term “IAS” enjoys today is really due to their pioneering work and effort.

And yet, one fundamental difference could not be denied, for, after all, the premise of these visits was that we were building up an institute with one seminal objective in addition, namely to serve our university and to integrate the new institute into the existing academic framework of a 550 year-old university. Over the course of time we found that this feature of establishing an IAS *within* a traditional university and as part and parcel of this university made all the difference you could imagine, posed different challenges and opened up different potentials. And it is with the ambition to learn more about the specifics of this new and ‘hybrid’ type of UB-IAS that we have invited you all as representatives from institutions similar to our own in this one, central respect: We all belong to Institutes for Advanced Study within a larger university context, institutes for whose identity it is vital to constantly define and re-define their relationship with their home institutions.

Of course, once we decided that we would scrutinize this particular type of university-based institutes more specifically, we immediately found out that in this field, too, there is a wide and diverse spectrum of institutions with names like IAS, Center for Advanced Study, Collegium for Advanced Study and the like. And, of course, it is evident that in many respects these centers are fairly different from each other.

So, the first question really is whether UB-IAS do at all constitute a type of institution in their own right or whether we find ourselves confronted with a multifarious continuum of different institutional settings, where the boundaries between UB-IAS and university departments, humanities centers, research clusters or other types of inter-departmental centers are fuzzy and blurred. Or, to put it more bluntly: Does it make sense to have invited exactly this selection of institutes represented here in this room today?

As you will see, your answers to our questionnaire *do* lead us to the positive conclusion that there is indeed a set of common features that could serve to draft a working definition of what constitutes an UB-IAS. Yet, having said that, we need to be aware, at the same time, of the specific differences and dissimilarities existing between our institutes – and the next three days will give us ample opportunity to discuss them in great detail.

## 2. Key Features of UB-IAS

Based on the information provided by your answers to our questionnaire; we would, in the following, like to outline a number of relevant characteristics of University-Based Institutes for Advanced

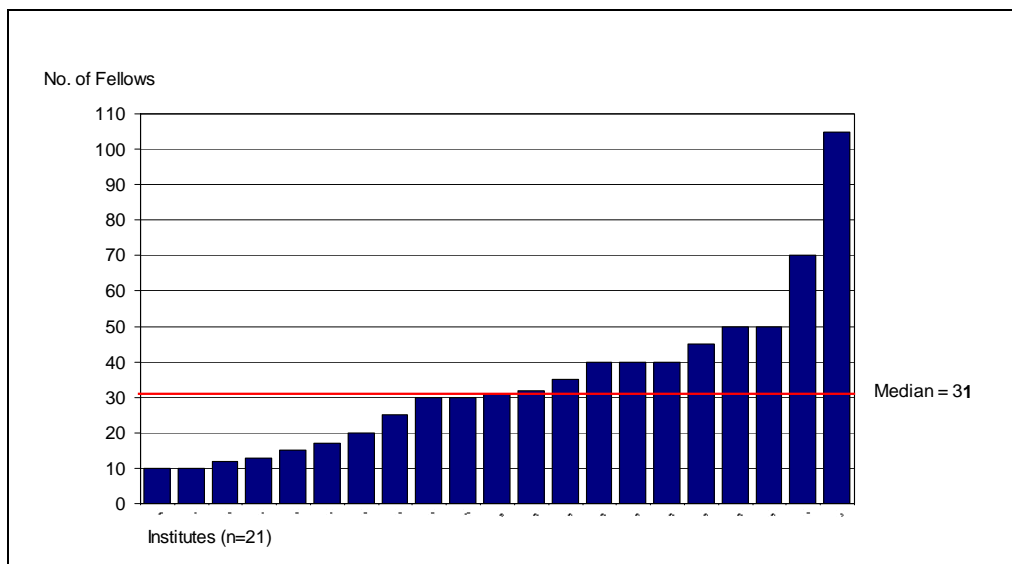
Study, stressing common traits as well as distinctions. After sketching some general characteristics we will look at some particularly interesting aspects in more detail.

Taking up the **main idea** of traditional Institutes for Advanced Study like Princeton or the Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin, UB-IAS pursue the promotion of excellent and innovative research by providing space, time and other facilities to outstanding researchers and promising young academics. Exempt from (some or most) other duties, the beneficiaries of these institutes, most often called “fellows”, are enabled to (fully) concentrate on their research and pursue their projects – be it as individual researchers or in close collaboration with research groups or teams. The basic idea is that excellent research needs excellent working conditions, and this includes the creation of a lively and inspiring academic environment. By creating this space *within* the university, UB-IAS support the maintenance and enhancement of scholarly excellence within their university as a whole and play an important role in the promotion of young scientists.

Furthermore, UB-IAS typically are characterized by the ambition to bring together the best researchers for a certain period of time, and these researchers are, more often than not, recruited both from the institute’s own home-university *and* from the worldwide academic community. Thus, UB-IAS provide a platform for international scientific exchange and bring top-level scholars to their university; they are a formidable tool for furthering a research university’s internationalization and strengthening its inter-institutional collaborations. Some institutes, however, prefer to concentrate on the academic potential of their home universities; a few others admit external scholars only. This could lead us to questions about the right balance between researchers from outside and from within the university.

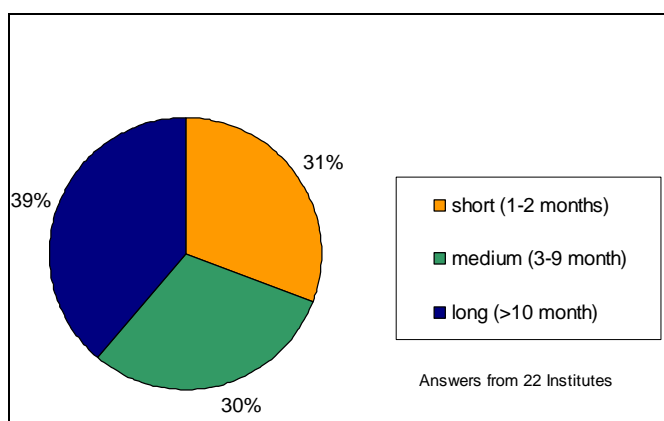
Focusing on individual researchers and their profiles, **fellowships** are the most important, most frequently applied and most visible instrument to support and invigorate excellent research. The promotion of outstanding *individual investigators* is a core objective of many of our institutes. Nevertheless, research *groups* or *teams* play an important role in the setting of many institutes as well, especially in connection with interdisciplinary research activities (to which we shall turn a little later).

There are vast differences in the number of fellows visiting our institutions every year. An average size for a UB-IAS would be somewhere in the range of 30 to 50 fellows per year, but there are lots of institutes with smaller figures as well.



**Diagram 1: No. of Fellows per year at different Institutes**

There is obviously a wide scope of possible arrangements and types of fellowships: internal/external fellows, resident fellows, visiting fellows, summer fellows, senior fellows, junior fellows, early career fellows, postdoctoral fellows, even teaching fellows.



**Diagram 2: Duration of stay / Length of Fellowship**

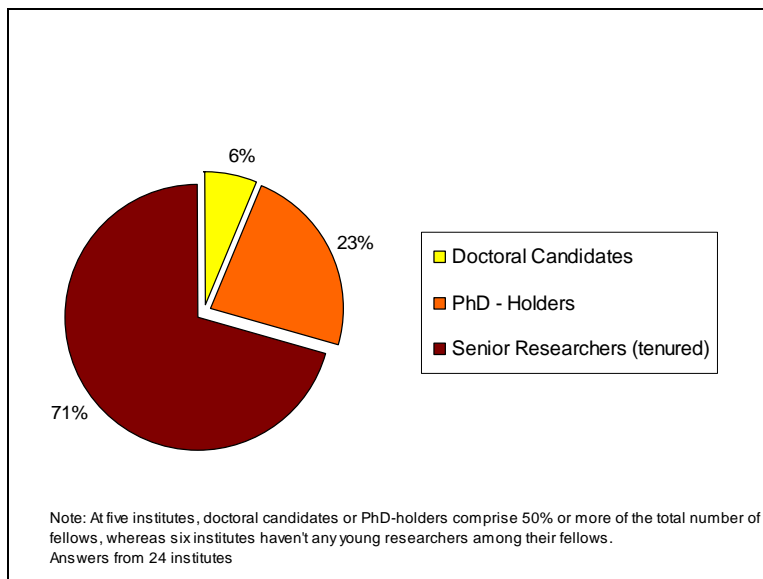
The duration of fellowships typically varies between a couple of weeks or months and several years; permanent fellowships are the rare exception, though they do exist. Most institutes recruit their fellows through open advertisement and an (international) application process often monitored by their advisory boards or other high-ranking selection committees; some also invite outstanding researchers *ad personam* to assume a fellowship at their institute. It would be interesting to learn from your experiences in this field: Which procedures and arrangements did you find to be successful for identifying the best possible candidates for a fellowship and for promoting outstanding re-

search? Are there differences between the academic disciplines; different needs; other priorities and considerations?

What do the institutes expect from their fellows in terms of **involvement** and **commitment**? Most institutes expect regular participation in their academic activities like seminars, colloquia, workshops etc. As a rule, fellows are asked to present their work to other fellows and/or members of the university during their fellowship and to actively participate in other fellows' presentations and the ensuing discussion. Some institutes consider regular social activities like joint lunches, dinners etc. (several times a week or even daily) an important part of their program; and quite a number of them have an explicit residence obligation. Again, what are your experiences? How do you deal with the inherent tension, even the possible conflict between concentrated leisure and undistracted time for research, on the one hand, and commitment, involvement and active participation in the institute's activities, on the other hand? Or is there, in your experience, no such conflict at all?

Concerning **teaching**, most institutes do not have formal teaching requirements, but some expect their fellows to give lectures which may often be public (or at least accessible to a wider university audience), and a small number particularly combine fellowships with teaching (mainly postgraduate teaching) and stress the importance of teaching or other forms of exchange with young researchers (e.g., acting as supervisor for research students). This leads us to the relation between **research and teaching**, which is a highly relevant topic in the context of German higher education and research policy and in connection with the next round of the Excellence Initiative.

Judging from the answers to our questionnaire, most institutes open their events for students, but teaching is usually not required, and only some institutes have specific graduate or postgraduate programs of their own. At some places there are elaborated programs and strong efforts to involve students, mostly graduates and doctoral candidates, in the institute's activities, others have a very limited degree of student participation and some none at all. There obviously exists a broad spectrum of possibilities between the strong integration and the total exclusion of students.



**Diagram 3: Career status of fellows**

Again: What are your experiences and respective 'philosophies'? Should teaching be an element of the UB-IAS's role and mission? What do your universities expect from your institutes in terms of teaching and student participation?

At the FRIAS, we have a strong interest to learn more about different Institutes' strategies in handling their **disciplinary and institutional organization**. It appears from the questionnaire that only few institutes have defined disciplinary schools or departments. This minority includes the FRIAS with its two schools in the humanities (School of Language & Literature, School of History) and two schools in the natural sciences (School of Life Sciences – LifeNet, School of Soft Matter Research).

Most institutes are generally open to all disciplines, or a wide range of disciplines, but quite a number of them do focus on a smaller set of disciplines, be it from the humanities, the social sciences or the natural and technical sciences. Only some have very strong disciplinary foci or explicit disciplinary exclusions.

A larger number of institutes, rather than identifying themselves through disciplines, announce thematic programmes or particular research fields and gather individual researchers or research groups (from different disciplines) around these topics. Generally speaking, to many institutes the arrangement of their activities around projects or programmes seems to be more attractive than a structure based on the departmental affiliation of fellows. Again, it would be interesting to learn more about the reasoning behind these concepts and about your experience with these different models: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the various options, i.e. of thematic or disciplinary foci as opposed to a broader orientation?

### 3. Specific Aspects and Goals

#### 3.1 Interdisciplinarity

*Interdisciplinarity* has become an omnipresent buzzword in the academic world. According to your answers to our questionnaire, almost all institutes confess to a strong interest in the promotion of interdisciplinary research, exchange, collaboration, and dialogue. They support and encourage exchange between the disciplines and provide time and space for it. They also stress the interdisciplinary orientation of many of their events. But only some institutes communicate interdisciplinary research as their main objective and criterion for the application and selection of their scholars.

As the definition and practice of interdisciplinarity seems to be one of the most challenging objectives, we would like to look at this aspect in some more detail:

- There are rather “light” forms of interdisciplinary exchange, e.g. interdisciplinary conferences with participants from different disciplines looking at one subject from different perspectives; or general/informal exchange between fellows from different disciplines. This kind of exchange seems to be very common.
- “Stronger” forms of interdisciplinary exchange include actual collaboration in joint research projects between fellows from neighboring disciplines (e.g. between historians and archaeologists or between mathematicians and theoretical biologists).
- “Strong” forms of interdisciplinary exchange include collaboration between different “academic cultures” (e.g. between fellows from the humanities and natural sciences), thus crossing established boundaries between the academic disciplines/cultures.

An interesting German example for this kind of “strong” interdisciplinary setting is the Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Forschung (ZIF) at Bielefeld, where interdisciplinary research groups (drawing scholars from different disciplines) build the core of the institute; we have seen similar institutional arrangements at other places.

#### 3.2 Relations between UB-IAS and the University

The very coining of the term UB-IAS suggests that the specific relationship between an Institute for Advanced Study of this particular type and the university it is based on or affiliated to is a key-feature of its identity and therefore deserves special attention. Through our questionnaire we wanted to learn more about this special constellation: How is your institute integrated into the larger institutional framework of your university? To what extent is it dependent on the university and how high is its degree of autonomy?

Relations between research centers of our special kind and 'their' universities at large concern different levels: In terms of **governance** it is interesting to describe administrative, financial and scientific autonomy as opposed to patterns of dependency. The following constellation seems to be representative for a large number of institutes: They are relatively autonomous in their academic and research curriculum, yet more or less completely dependent with respect to their financial budget and usually closely linked to the university's administration. Nevertheless, there are also a few cases of budgetary autonomy. But most institutes depend, to some extent at least, on their university's **funding** (combined with other sources like state funding, private donations or endowments). In times and contexts of limited, often shrinking university budgets, finding alternative ways of funding, not the least from private sources, seems to be one of the most important and challenging tasks for the future.

What are the **benefits** of the IAS for the university? Or, quoting a provocative idea from the questionnaire: Is an Institute for Advanced Study an important and invigorating elixir to the university or just pure luxury? In our opinion – and in accordance with many answers in the questionnaire –, Institutes for Advanced Studies ideally function as incubators for innovative research fields and assemble a critical mass of outstanding researchers who, benefitting from relatively favourable conditions and making the best productive use of them, produce outstanding research. Thus, research centres can inject energy into the research culture of the university and enhance the university's academic excellence and visibility.

IAS can play an equally important role for the internationalization of their universities by attracting international top-level researchers and connecting them with the local academic community. Of course, there are considerable differences regarding the extent to which members of the faculties are integrated into the institute, or the degree in which university students and teachers join forces in fruitful contact with the fellows of the research institute.

Beyond describing such perceivable profits for the universities (international exchange, productive interplay with excellent researchers, connection to innovative research fields, etc.), it does seem legitimate, however, to ask yet another, somewhat wider question: To what extent does the institute play back into society at large? This leads to the question of public outreach, which was often mentioned in the questionnaires: Apart from offering typical academic "formats" such as seminars, conferences, workshops and lectures, some institutes in particular emphasize their role as public "think



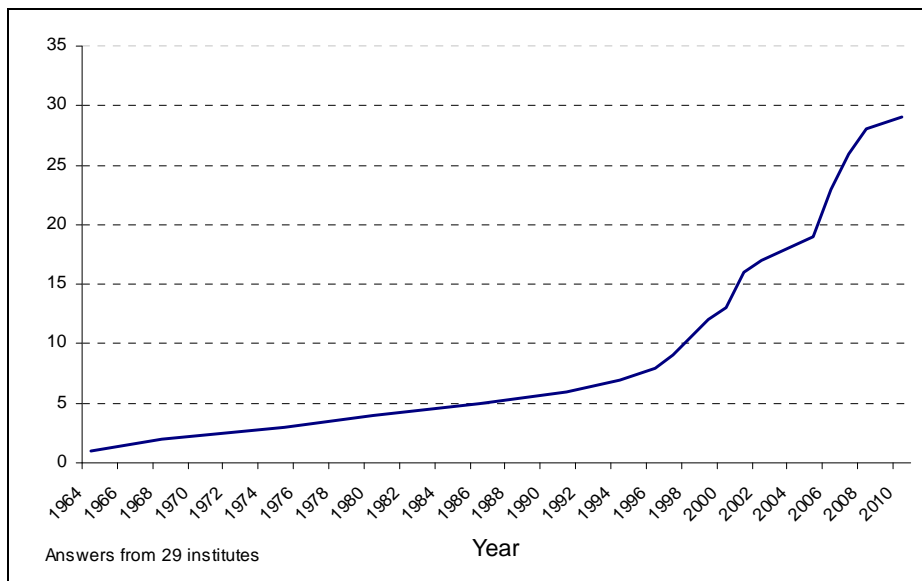
tanks” and put a lot of effort into planning events of greater public outreach and resonance – like public lectures –, explicitly aspiring at public attention, impact, and debate. Some institutes also engage with the arts, staging art exhibitions or offering fellowships for artists in residence. It would be interesting to learn more about your respective ventures in this direction.

### **3.3 Networking, interaction**

After organizing a UB-IAS conference, where representatives from different institutes of a certain family resemblance can meet and exchange their views, it might be considered a logical next step to establish a special UB-IAS network with regular conferences, shared information, joint programs, etc. It is obvious from the questionnaire that international and/or inter-institutional collaboration and exchange are considered highly important features by all institutes, but again there are varying forms and degrees of collaboration – from loose contact to formal agreements and partnerships. Almost all of the institutes already interact on national and/or international levels, and some are members of already existing networks like SIAS (the aristocratic and quite exclusive association of “Some Institutes for Advanced Study”, founded by the traditional IAS of the autonomous Princeton type), NetIAS (a network of European IAS operating under a somewhat arguable “one country, one member” rule) or CHCI (the well established international Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes). A number of other Institutes have defined formal partnerships with selected institutes of their own choice.

## **4. IAS and the Future of the University**

Overall, our findings show that UB-IAS are an institutional type flexible enough to adapt to very different local conditions, yet at the same time consisting of a recognizable set of relatively stable features and characteristics. Looking at these will help us to interpret the last finding from our small questionnaire: Considering the founding dates of the institutes assembled at the conference, a steep rise since the late 1990s becomes apparent. And this holds true although the concept of the IAS, and even that of the IAS connected to a university, is everything but new.



**Diagram 4: Year of founding of participating institutes**

Of course, this diagram poses the question how things will develop in the next few years. Are we going to witness the foundation of yet more UB-IAS in the years to come? And what will their specific function be in the wider picture of higher education and research worldwide?

One assumption, a rather defensive one, could be that a number of universities, unable to thoroughly transform the whole of their institutional setup, might instead be tempted to concentrate financial and intellectual resources in such centres and use them as flagships or figureheads, diverting attention from the shortcomings of the larger “rest” of the university. In the face of continuing budget cuts in many countries and the inability or unwillingness of many state governments to invest substantially into their underfinanced universities, this might be a strategy we have to reckon with.

A more optimistic view might perceive UB-IAS as laboratories, an experimental and vicarious playground where universities contemplate in which direction to transform themselves in the future. UB-IAS would then be an indicator for the need of such processes of re-orientation – and might themselves be a helpful tool in steering this change. In this vein, it seems legitimate to ask what kind of lessons our experience with the particular institution that is an UB-IAS could teach us about the future development of universities at large.

These different driving forces in mind, let us briefly consider five core aspects of the UB-IAS concept and discuss them both as indicators of possible shortcomings of universities as a whole *and* as indicators how to proceed with the transformation of universities in the years to come.

The key-component of all UB-IAS activities is probably that of bringing academics from different universities, countries and continents together for a duration long enough to allow for dense communication and personal acquaintance. These, in turn, form the basis for all meaningful and pro-

ductive academic collaboration. IAS in a certain sense occupy the middle ground between meeting at a conference and hiring academics for longer periods or on a permanent basis. Evidently, many universities feel the need to better support such medium-term exchange.

Secondly – as we have seen – most IAS do stress the individual personality and profile of the academics invited. IAS explicitly are not just integrated research institutions. Rather, an important part of their work is to grant their fellows the freedom to pursue projects of their own choosing. From our German perspective (and perhaps from other national backgrounds as well) this can be interpreted as a counter-reaction against the managerialism and the ensuing red tape that often characterizes today's university life. Although this sort of freedom takes on different forms in different disciplinary areas, the idea behind it appeals to the humanities as well as to the social and natural sciences. Should we not wish for other parts of the university to enjoy the same freedom? Or is this wishful thinking?

Thirdly, we might interpret the growing number of UB-IAS as a means of universities to reassure themselves about the culture of academic life. This is very much about the lost intimacy and intensity of dialogue, which sadly characterizes the realities of many of today's universities in a mass higher education system. The established IAS evidently function as an inspiration in this respect. Do not all modern universities feel the drawbacks of their size and experience the massive division of labour in modern research environments as obstacles for communication and exchange?

Fourthly, UB-IAS are a symbolic acknowledgement of universities' self-obligation to give extra support to high-level research and to commit themselves to very high standards of excellence. These, of course, need to be upheld across the whole of our respective universities. To safeguard these standards surely is one of the most important tasks for all university leadership. In this perspective, UB-IAS may serve as a constant example or reminder for upholding the highest quality standards.

Finally, a surprising aspect of this boom of newly established IAS may be that this is a type of institution that emphatically excludes teaching. Isn't it a surprising twist that universities are adopting a model – IAS – that once was an explicit alternative to universities and their overload of teaching and training? UB-IAS surely are not just another university department. How then can we explain that such institutions prosper at a time, when the world's leading universities nearly unanimously stress the continuing importance of integrating teaching and research? This holds true for Germany as well where the ideas of Humboldt are still an important orientation mark. UB-IAS certainly cannot be a model for universities in this respect. However, we do feel that, in many ways, research within universities does need additional – or better – support. If UB-IAS succeed in this respect, this in turn

opens up the possibility to reintegrate advanced and graduate students, providing valuable opportunities for them to participate in research and academic discourse at a truly advanced level. As there are certain tensions between these different aims, so we can perceive different viable solutions. Obviously, we have an important topic to discuss here.

## 5. Conclusion

We tried, in this brief presentation, to give you a first glimpse of the kind of self-description of a representative group of UB-IAS-Institutes as conveyed in your answers to our questionnaire: just a first impression of different institutional designs and setups, of the core characteristics as well as of the manifold varieties and options linked with the realities of existing UB-IAS institutes in their specific local contexts around the globe. This was meant as an introduction only – our panel discussions and informal conversations over the next days will certainly provide a much richer and more detailed picture and we are looking forward to learning a lot more from your contributions. Certain as we are that these discussions will be instructive and useful for all of us, we are planning a documentation of this conference which will include the main results of our deliberations and exchanges. We firmly hope that this conference will provide orientation and stimulation for the further development of our existing institutes as well as encourage all those universities worldwide that are presently considering the establishment of similar institutes. The future of the university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the role of UB-IAS in the further advancement of academic research are a topic of truly global importance that concerns us all, and we do look forward to hearing your views on these exciting matters in the further course of this conference. Thank you once again for being here, and thank you for your attention.