

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN



## Berlin School of Library and Information Science



*“I believe that I can rightly claim that teaching in this state has received new impetus from me, and that [...] many signs of my administrative work will remain. Something that affects me personally more directly than anything else is the establishment of a new university here in Berlin.”*

Wilhelm von Humboldt (1810)

## **Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin – The Modern Classic**

Research and teaching are closely intertwined. Developing one’s own personality as well as maintaining the independence of research were the pillars Wilhelm von Humboldt had in mind when he founded the original University of Berlin in 1810. These future-oriented concepts became the epitome of the modern university – thus making Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin into the “Modern Classic”.

The first academic term began in October 1810 with 52 students and 256 academic staff. Today between 3,000 and 5,000 young people start their university education at Humboldt-Universität each year under the tutelage of more than 400 full professors. Since 1994 Humboldt-Universität consists of eleven faculties and numerous interdisciplinary centers in over 300 buildings throughout Berlin and Brandenburg. A broad spectrum of more than 240 different fields of study are offered including all the main academic disciplines in the humanities, the social and cultural sciences, human medicine, and agricultural science as well as mathematics and the natural sciences.

The University of Berlin – thanks to the commitment of scientist Alexander von Humboldt – pioneered the introduction of many natural science disciplines. In 2003 six of Humboldt-Universität’s seven Natural Science departments relocated to its south-east Berlin-Adlershof campus, called the City of Science, Technology and Media. On grounds where the German aviation pioneer Otto Lilienthal once experimented, more than 7,000 students and scientists are now learning, teaching and researching in state-of-the-art facilities.

Today’s students and professors are heirs to a tradition that includes 29 Nobel Prize winners. This tradition makes Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin well known internationally: around 13 percent of all students come from outside Germany and the university has partnerships with over 500 institutions of higher learning worldwide. Many foreign researchers come to Berlin: an average of 800 every year, which gives Humboldt-Universität a prominent place among German universities. Likewise, scholars from Humboldt-Universität are welcome lecturers at universities abroad.

**Berlin School of Library and Information Science**

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## The Berlin School Reborn

Close the school or transform it: that was the question that Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin had to answer in the initial years of the 21st century. The university decided on transformation and set about gathering the resources to make that happen.

In the past the School had offered a quality but fundamentally conventional German library program with a strong emphasis on history and the practical skills necessary to be effective in an entry-level position at a German library. The goal in 2006 became the creation of an internationally competitive “iSchool” on the explicit model of the School of Information at the University of Michigan. The school retained its German name, Institut für Bibliotheks- und Informationswissenschaft, but chose a name for English-language uses that more closely resembles those of other iSchools and thus officially became the Berlin School of Library and Information Science in 2008.

Key elements of its transformation included a curriculum with significantly more emphasis on the digital future and the skills necessary to function within that environment. The curriculum puts strong emphasis on research and research methods, partly because the Berlin School is the only library and information program at a research-oriented university in Germany, and partly because problem solving in the digital environment inherently involves research. The research emphasis was also intended to distinguish Humboldt’s program from those of the “universities of applied sciences” (Fachhochschulen).

Dorotheenstrasse 26: home of the Berlin School.



Like other ambitious programs world-wide, the Berlin School no longer sends its graduates only to positions in libraries, but also to publishers, electronic information services, research enterprises, and a variety of other organizations where the finding and management of information offers a competitive advantage. Breadth in the curriculum is clearly important. The Berlin School aims not merely at preparing students for entry level jobs, but for high-level future leadership positions. Berlin students understand the reasons for and context of complex problems and how they are likely to change in the future, rather than merely being able to carry out clerical or technical tasks. Doing a task is easy. Being able to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of a task and comparing it with alternatives is far harder. These leadership activities tie closely to the research topics and methods that inform the curriculum.

The Berlin School offers courses of study at three levels: bachelor, master (both a standard week-day program and a postgraduate week-end program), and doctoral. It is the only program in Germany where study at all three levels is possible. Students who begin in the bachelor's or master's programs have a significant advantage in their preparation for doctoral work, since the research methods that they will need are an integral part of the pre-doctoral curriculum.

### **BA Program**

The BA program requires students to take courses in fields other than library and information science. One reason for this is that subject knowledge plays a key role in organizing and searching information. While many students choose subjects in the humanities and more qualitative social sciences, such as history, the program encourages study especially in quantitative fields and in the natural sciences, where the subject expertise offers job market advantages as well as useful methodological experience.

The required courses in the bachelors program put a strong emphasis on understanding how information fits broadly into society. The goal is not merely for students to understand how a library works, but to understand the full information life-cycle from creation to end-user consumption. Interactions with information technology play a central role in this life-cycle today and therefore also in the bachelor curriculum. Learning to use a programming language is an integral part of one of the beginning required courses, so that students have a hands-on understanding of the way in which the digital environment functions. The Berlin School does not expect that its graduates will necessarily take future po-

sitions in software development, but that they will likely have leadership positions where they will give instructions to programming staff. The more they understand about the capabilities of the technology, the better they will be able to carry out this kind of job.

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Another important role of the BA program is to introduce students to the basic principles of the field, including the discipline-specific vocabulary and methods and research problems. The field is clearly in transition with exclusively library-centered views losing their significance – even within traditional libraries – and with concepts from digital environments gaining. The basic principles should, of course, be more stable over time, but in this era of transition they too must be examined regularly in order to avoid both hoary conventions and the inclusion of passing fads. A systematic and ongoing engagement with the international research in the field offers one of the best defenses against both extremes.



Professors at the Berlin School (left to right): Seadle, Gradmann, Petras, Schirmbacher, Umlauf

One example of an important specialty in the bachelor's program is electronic publishing. Electronic publishing is increasingly the method of choice for scholarly works. Scholarly journal publishers have offered digital versions of their print products for a decade or more, depending on the publisher, and libraries have learned that their users prefer searchable full-text on their computer desktop to walking to the library to find a physical copy, especially if they only want to find a particular reference. Prefer-

ences vary, of course, but publishers are so convinced of the trend that new scholarly journals often now appear only in digital form. International publishers of scholarly monographs are also starting to shift to digital formats, partly in response to e-book reading devices. Students going to positions in the publishing world need to understand the technology behind digital publishing and students going to positions in libraries need to understand how to manage and use these electronic resources. Copyright and digital rights management issues loom especially large, as do the options for and problems with long term digital archiving.

### **MA Program**

The Berlin School offers a new research-oriented MA program that builds on knowledge that students acquired in the BA program or in similar BA programs at other schools. A knowledge of the basic principles of the field is assumed as well as some knowledge of topical areas like electronic publishing. English language competence is also expected, at least in terms of reading and oral comprehension.

The required courses in the MA program address information economics and digital libraries. The former provides both an introduction to the economic issues involved in the creation of intellectual property, and some of the methods that can be used to analyze the economic issues and their consequences for libraries and other information-centered organizations. The course explores issues in the quantitative analysis of data relating to information products with particular emphasis on data quality, data cleaning, and determining how representative a set of data is. The digital library course continues this form of analysis with an empirical analysis of the various types of digital libraries, including digital repositories. The course contrasts hermeneutic and empirical definitions of digital libraries and puts digital libraries not merely in the context of special offerings, but as significant extensions to paper-based collections that may, in time, replace the paper collections as the chief source of information content for libraries. Multimedia contents are examined for their future role in information communication and user studies play a particularly large role because digital libraries, like traditional libraries, need to understand the interests and preferences of their user base.

One of the possible areas of concentration in the MA program is long term digital archiving. This topic is addressed directly in an elective module. The emphasis there is on the technical represen-



tation of social concepts such as integrity, authenticity and usability. The course examines existing archiving software as well as topics such as emulation and migration. Archiving topics have significant content in three other modules, including one on copyright and ethical issues, one on retrieval and semantic issues, and in the core digital library course. This area of concentration may become part of a European Masters of Digital Curation.

### **Postgraduate Master's Program (Fernstudium)**

The Berlin School offers a postgraduate Master's program (Postgraduales Fernstudium) that functions like an executive MBA course. The program draws students who generally have substantial work experience and are already university graduates. A number of the students already have doctorates and are pursuing an additional discipline-specific credential. The program requires substantial self-study and students are expected to come to Berlin on an average of once per month for face-to-face instruction and consultation on a Friday and Saturday. The program has a modest tuition requirement. As is often the case with executive MBA programs, some organizations pay for their students to have a place in the program. For these students the program also offers "Referendar" training as required for some German states.

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Alumni meet at the Humboldt stand at the Bibliothekartag (German Library Association meeting) in Erfurt.

The Postgraduate Master's program is more explicitly library-oriented than the MA program, in part because most of the students already have positions at libraries and want to move up within them. While this means more emphasis on traditional library subjects and skills, the focus is still on preparing students for leadership positions within their organizations and on being able to manage the changes that libraries can expect to encounter in the coming decades. Students must write a research-based masters thesis to get their degree and receive training in some research methods as part of the problem-solving emphasis.

One example of this can be seen in the modules on human-computer-interaction. This is not an area where most contemporary librarians have any training and yet library staff depend constantly on interactions with machines in order to do even ordinary tasks like find where a book is shelved in the stacks. Libraries depend on automation systems for cataloging works and for checking them out to users and on their web presence to give users information about hours, locations, policies and links to the online catalog. Nonetheless, few librarians have the tools or training to make judgments about the efficiency and effectiveness of their human-computer interfaces and interactions. At one time librarians had little choice and had to accept what a vendor gave them. Today the vendors offer a large range of configuration choices and many libraries design their own web pages. Students are introduced to testing methods such as the GOMS Model that can give librarians a metric for comparing the efficiency of computer-based interaction options.

### **Doctoral Program**

The doctoral program at the Berlin School offers the only opportunity in Germany for a student to get a PhD in library and information science. Candidates for the program require an acceptable university degree, generally a MA, and must find an advisor who will work with them. At present the doctoral program follows the traditional German model with little or no required coursework on the assumption that students received sufficient methodological training during their MA studies and while writing a substantial MA thesis. This model offers valuable flexibility to doctoral students who already have jobs and have research experience. It is designed for what in US terms would be called an ABD ("all but dissertation") student.

The Berlin School is, however, beginning to provide more explicit methodological training and support for doctoral students in some subject areas (Lehrstühle). A doctoral colloquium meets

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once per semester on a Friday and Saturday. The format includes at least one lecture by a professor, generally on a methodological theme, and two to three presentations by advanced doctoral students who then get comments from peers and professors. A monthly research colloquium provides more intense training and interactions for doctoral students in the areas of digital libraries, knowledge management, and information retrieval.

## **Research for the Long Term**

The famous saying of Wilhelm von Humboldt, “die Einheit der Forschung und Lehre” (the unity of research and teaching) describes the model for the Berlin School. Most of the research is done in teams, sometimes involving students as paid assistants, sometimes involving students in the classroom. Students also have an opportunity to appear as co-authors on articles in scholarly journals.

### **Methods of Research**

Research methods within library and information science vary broadly and most build on methodologies established in other fields. One line of research emphasizes hermeneutics and linguistic analysis. This method is appropriate for a range of topics involving the establishment of the ontologies and vocabularies that form an integral part of contemporary search and retrieval methods. It involves the analysis of texts for context and meaning and addresses cross-language dissimilarities that impact retrieval in a multi-lingual information collections.

Another and larger set of research methods involves empirical approaches, often using data from human subjects in either the form of answers to questionnaires or interviews or observations. Bibliometric and scientometric research also falls into that empirical group. This involves the analysis of publications, often focusing on citation analysis to measure significance. Empirical research dominates many allied fields, including information economics. Cultural anthropology is also clearly an empirical discipline, though one whose data often comes in the form of qualitative observations. The Berlin school puts particular emphasis on teaching students how to gather and how to analyze data,

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A third approach to research in library and information science comes from applied computer science and engineering. This research generally involves the design and construction of a new information service and testing it against live data. The school's technical infrastructure allows for prototyping and implementation on internal systems. Evaluation of the service is almost as important as the service itself. The school puts heavy emphasis on various testing methods. In this sense it also has an empirical orientation, since the quality and appropriateness of the test data and the test method matter.

Doctoral students.



### **Research Projects and Themes**

The types of research projects and research themes at the Berlin School vary broadly. Many projects have partners at other units of Humboldt-Universität, other German universities, or institutions in Europe and abroad. The following is a sampling of important research themes and associated projects.

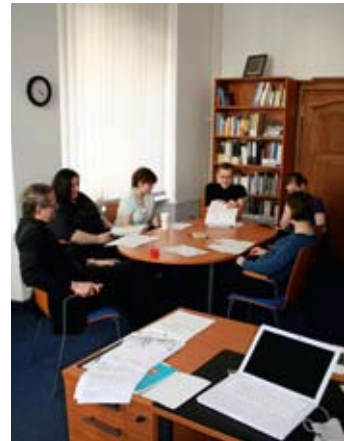
## Long Term Digital Archiving

The need for and problems with long term digital archiving intersect the majority of the research areas of professors at the Berlin School, in particular the areas of digital libraries, electronic publishing and knowledge management. The Berlin School and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin are partners in the “nestor” project, whose goal is to build a network of expertise in digital long-term preservation.

The research on digital archiving addresses at least three aspects. One focuses on technical questions about interoperability. It is unlikely that any one archiving system will survive unchanged over the centuries. The current multiplicity of systems makes it likely that some will fail and need to have their contents migrated to other systems. This makes auditing important so that it is possible to know whether an archive has what it claims to have and whether its digital objects meet acceptable integrity and authenticity standards. These are social concepts that have technical expressions which change over time.

Another aspect of research involves digital rights management. Current copyright laws grant protection that lasts effectively for a century or more for most works. Knowing the circumstances under which a work in an archive may be used and knowing when it becomes part of the public domain are key issues for any archive that does not intend to remain permanently closed to the public. A key trigger for contemporary copyright laws is the author's death date. This information is often not readily available for the vast majority of authors and when the death date is known, it needs systematically to be archived if it is to be used 70 years later to trigger the release of a work into the public domain. Most archives have no mechanism for gathering and storing this data. There is also no guarantee that death date will remain the trigger mechanism. In the US before 1978 the publication date, not the author's death date, determined when a work went into public domain. Today the creation date can play a key role for anonymous documents. Developing a digital rights management system that works to release documents as well as to protect them is a large task.

Usability is a third aspect that needs research. The issue is not merely emulation versus migration, though both are potentially important approaches. Scholars need to think about how works might be used at some point well into the future. Even with simple text documents it may not be reasonable to assume that contemporary paper-oriented formatting will make sense for reading



A graduate seminar in Seadle's office.

devices in one hundred or more years. Rather than capturing exact layouts, it may be more important to put attention on relatively simple encoding to preserve the intellectual contents in a flexible and robust form, such as the simple ASCII used in the Gutenberg project. Predicting future usage patterns may not be possible, but predicting what contemporary evidence shows about usage changes is.

### **User Study: Reading**

The Berlin School conducts user research projects. One is called “Benutzerstudie: Lesen” (User Study: Reading) and takes place in a project seminar in which nine students take an active part both as experiment designers and as subjects. The context of the seminar comes from an issue raised in research about long term digital archiving: how does reading change over time and how will that affect the way that digital objects should be preserved? The scholarly literature recognizes that many users prefer to read on paper instead of on a computer screen, but this preference and the studies that established it came before the arrival of the new e-book reading devices such as the Sony, Kindle or iReX. They also tend not to distinguish between desktop and laptop screen reading experiences.



Students working on a project.

One goal of the seminar is to train students in how to design and carry out experiments and how to analyze the results. The objective is to give the students sufficient hands-on experience that they can conduct and evaluate focused experiments later in their careers. The subject not only has ties to ongoing scholarly research but helps to answer very practical questions that a traditional library might raise about new reading devices.

Analysis plays an especially important role because students need to know what they can reasonably learn from very small samples and where they must refrain from drawing unsupported inferences. These are essential skills for those in leadership positions in modern libraries, who often need to evaluate statistical trends, whether among users or in costs. The initial results of the latest experiment suggest no significant difference in reading speed for fiction between e-book reading devices and paper print-outs or bound texts. Further testing needs to be done, before such results could be published, but if and when they are, these students have made a direct contribution to scholarly research in the field.

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### **Information Infrastructure for Intellectual Property**

The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG or German Research Society) has just funded the project “Establishing an Information Infrastructure for Intellectual Property for Teaching and Scholarship.” Like many DFG projects in library and information science this combines practical infrastructure-related goals with research about how to achieve them. The goal of the project is to set up a document server with information about a broad range of copyright issues and a network of experts who can help to address problems and answer questions. The project combines skill-sets from computer science, law, and library and information science. Staffing comes in part from doctoral students at the Berlin School and from the Universität Konstanz.

Intellectual property laws were written with conventional paper-based publication in mind and they focus on protecting commercially valuable works. The contemporary publication culture for scholarly materials tends to be both electronic and non-commercial, with the goal of wider readership rather than gaining income from royalties. This is particularly true for open access publications, whose authors explicitly allow non-profit copying of their works.

One of the research goals of the project is to build up a resource with answers to as many of the frequently asked questions by scholars as possible. This is not a simple matter of knowing the German or even international copyright laws. It is a matter of understanding the social context of information, the meaning of terms within that context, and the different cultures of intellectual property with their interpretation of the meaning of the laws. The US “Fair use” statute (17 USC 107), for example, allows po-

tentially significantly broader use of protected materials than the German law and US protection for databases is much less extensive than in the European Union.

### **Europeana**

The Berlin school plays an important role in the development of Europeana, the European digital library, museum and archive. After the development of a first prototype in November 2008, two European Union-funded projects are under way to develop a production-level, feature-rich infrastructure, which will serve searchers and researchers across Europe. Europeana v1.0 and its sister project EuropeanaConnect will develop backend technology, a full scale business model and key components for Europeana such as workflow processes for data ingestion and export, user interface development for mobile devices or a standardized licensing structure.

Professors at the Berlin school coordinate work packages that develop a semantic layer to enhance metadata records for subject browsing or searching and create multilingual access modules to support query translation. The semantic layer is a key component which will make Europeana a network of interoperating resources for object discovery and use. The multilingual access modules will allow Europeana information and objects to be searched and presented independent of the language of both the searcher and the object descriptions. An important aspect of research at the Berlin school is the needs assessment and evaluation of technical solutions for these problems.

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Brainstorming for Europeana.



## Open Access Repositories

The construction of a network of open access repositories in Germany is a DFG-supported project of the Berlin School and the university's Computer and Media Service in collaboration with the universities of Göttingen and Osnabrück. This project is also an example of the Berlin School's interaction with organizations like DINI, the Deutsche Initiative für Netzwerkinformation (German Initiative for Network Information), whose certification is setting quality standards for repositories. The project's goal is to intensify the networking of Germany's 100 or more open access repositories in order to integrate them better into electronic publishing projects and to provide added-value services such as user statistics and citation analysis.

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Open Access has long been a major theme of the Berlin School, which is committed to developing scholarly alternatives to commercial publishing venues. While important parts of the work on a project such as this are technical and take place at the Computer and Media Service, the Berlin School provides key bibliometric analytical capabilities that are essential foundations for the new services. Developing effective measures of scholarly output relates to other funded research at the Berlin School, including a project specifically on Open-Access statistics and the European Union-funded EERQI project (European Educational Research Quality Indicators).

## Library Hi Tech

The Berlin School supports multiple publishing projects that involve students in the editing and peer-review process so that they have a good understanding both of the standards within the library and information science field and of the mechanisms of peer review so that they can better judge how it functions in the scholarly literature in other disciplines. This work cuts across all parts of the curriculum and has, in the last three years, involved students at every level.

Editorial responsibility for the peer-reviewed commercially published journal Library Hi Tech is located at the Berlin School because the editor, Michael Seadle, is a professor at the School. Library Hi Tech is quintessentially about cutting-edge technology and its contents are part of the required reading in classes at the

Berlin School and other library and information science programs. The presence of this journal has given a number of students a chance to engage directly with contemporary research and to learn how a well-established, ISI-indexed journal functions. Some students have had a chance to serve as peer-reviewers or to help to manage the peer-review process.

One of the interesting research questions is whether an established journal benefits from this kind of active engagement with students. Many similarly well-established journals have policies that discourage student submissions and never involve students in the reviewing process. The result may be to push back against new ideas that established reviewers and editors find unfamiliar and perhaps even discomfiting. The closer involvement with students represents an experiment to see how much it influences the direction of the journal and the nature of the research that it presents. The measurable results in terms of submissions and readership seem positive thus far.

## **Service in Germany and Abroad**

The Berlin School plays an active role in professional organizations in Germany and to a lesser extent in Austria and the US. Faculty, staff and students also serve on committees of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). The School also serves the profession via projects such as the DABI database, which catalogs and indexes articles on library science in the German speaking world. Below are further examples of service.

### **iCaucus Membership**

In 2009 the Berlin School was elected to membership in the iCaucus, which is the leadership group of the iSchool Project. Members of the iCaucus have a minimum average of one million US dollars in sponsored research annually over at least a three year period. They are also institutions whose programs go beyond the limits of traditional librarianship and put special emphasis on the skills and knowledge needed to cope in the digital world. Many iCaucus schools see themselves as change-agents.

The Berlin School is one of two European members and has acknowledged special responsibility for representing the iCaucus and its interests in the European Union, as well as representing European interests in this largely North American organization. The language of the iCaucus is English, not only because of the 21 North American members, but because it is the only common

The student-designed  
“project pillar”



language among the German, Danish, Singaporean, and Chinese members. The Berlin School offers both lectures and seminars in English and all professors are able to teach in English as well as German.

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Closer interaction with other member schools brings advantages to students and researchers. It is important that foreign institutions understand European approaches to, for example, doctoral programs. North American doctoral programs assume that students have relatively little methodological training in their Masters degree programs and do not expect that the students have written a Masters thesis. German doctoral students have all had to write a serious research work in their Masters thesis, and generally have had methodological preparation as part of that program. These interactions take advantage of electronic communication as well as travel opportunities.

## **BBK**

The Berlin Bibliothekswissenschaftliches Kolloquium (BBK or Berlin Library Science Colloquium) offers presentations by notable persons in the field of library and information science every Tuesday during the semesters. Some speakers come from Berlin. Others are German or international guests who happen to be passing through Berlin or were invited specifically to come to give a presentation.

One of the new options has been to invite speakers from abroad using video-conference technology. Video-conference technology offers a low cost method of communication that uses internet

connections to transmit high-resolution image and voice in real-time connections. While the camera and microphone costs for a room-size video-conference are too high to equip every classroom with such facilities, Humboldt-Universität has several rooms with the appropriate equipment. The use of this technology means that physical presence is no longer a requirement and enables a much greater range of international speakers.



Discussions at the BBK

While the BBK targets students and staff from the Berlin School, professionals from libraries and from information service organizations from throughout Berlin and Brandenburg are among the regular audience. Discussion is a key element of the BBK. Presenters are asked to restrict their remarks to 45 minutes in order to leave an equal amount of time for questions and discussions, many of which are lively.

### **Weblog**

The IBI-Weblog (<http://weblog.ib.hu-berlin.de/>) is a (mainly) German language blog that offers students an informal publishing outlet and gives them a chance to call attention to interesting topics and links in the world of library and information science. It is a highly democratic forum in which everyone from the youngest BA student to the oldest professor can contribute on an equal basis.

The blog and its indexing gives students hands-on experience with Web 2.0 technologies and lets them share their ideas with the world at large. It is not unusual for the blog entries to mirror discussion in classes and for classes to build on blog information.

## Conclusion

The Berlin School of Library and Information Science has made a radical transformation into a 21st century research and teaching institution with worldwide recognition. It is home to significant German, pan-European and international projects. As an iCaucus member it has achieved international recognition at a level that only one other European institution can claim.

This success depends on people. The School is committed to recruiting and retaining the best scholars in the field, regardless of origin, and to producing students at all levels who will have the necessary preparation to assume leadership roles in Germany and abroad. The Berlin School is not merely proud of its past – it is proud of the future it is helping to shape.

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## **Faculties and Institutes**

Faculty of Law

Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture

Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences I  
*Physics, Biology, Chemistry*

Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences II  
*Mathematics, Computer Science, Psychology, Geography*

Faculty of Arts I  
*Philosophy, History, Library and Information Science,  
European Ethnology*

Faculty of Arts II  
*German Literature and Linguistics, Scandinavian Studies,  
Romance Literature, English and American Studies, Slavic Studies,  
Classical Philology*

Faculty of Arts III  
*Social Sciences, Archaeology, Cultural History and Theory,  
Art and Visual History, Musicology and Media Studies, Asian/  
African Studies, Gender Studies*

Faculty of Arts IV  
*Sport Sciences, Rehabilitation Studies, Education Studies,  
Quality Management in Education*

Faculty of Theology

Faculty of Economics and Business Administration

Charité - Universitätsmedizin Berlin

## **Central Institute**

Centre for British Studies

## **Central Units**

Language Center

University Library

Computer and Media Service

Sport and Recreation

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