

Max Planck Institute for Molecular Genetics  
Student Association  
Attn.: Mr. Jochen Jäger  
Innestr. 73

14195 Berlin

*Your letter from December 20, 2002*

18. Februar 2003

Dear Ms. Dlugaszewska, Ms. Geißenhöner, and Mr. Jäger,

Thank you for your letter from December 20, 2002. I am very interested in hearing suggestions and concerns about opportunities within the Max Planck Society as seen from the viewpoint of Ph.D. students. I am happy that you have availed yourselves to represent the interests of the Ph.D. students and to improve the communication among them and with other scientists at the Institute.

The Max Planck Society is endeavored to offer junior scientists and researchers at its institutes the best possible conditions in order to give them excellent training and lay the foundation for a successful career in science and research.

By establishing the International Max Planck Research Schools (IMPRS), my predecessor, Mr. Markl, established an effective system to improve the education of Ph.D. students. This ought to thoroughly fulfill the requirements you listed for optimal support.

Together with the universities, German and foreign students have the possibility to prepare themselves for their Ph.D. degree at selected locations offering excellent academic and research conditions. In addition to offering better training and research supervision, the IMPRS aim to make German science more international by establishing networks, by having the locations profit from cooperative efforts between Max Planck Institutes and universities, and by achieving scientific synergies by networking the dissertation topics. The goal is to

have foreign students account for at least half of the student body at the Research Schools.

At the moment, there are 19 Research Schools with a total of 400 students, 65% of them being foreigners.

The Max Planck Society is striving to set up more Research Schools. Indeed, 8 more have already been approved. Due to the strained budgetary situation, however, the training will only be able to start in 2004. There are also considerations to initiate a further round of applications. A decision will be made in the next few months as to whether or not this will come to pass.

I am aware that only a limited number of Ph.D. students will initially be able to take part. On the other hand, it really is up to each and every institute to ensure good research supervision and support for junior scientists in the scope of its autonomous planning. The institute has to arrange supervision and support according to the local requirements and possibilities. This is where you, as representatives of the Ph.D. student body, can support the interests of your colleagues and work towards improving the situation together with the institute's management.

I have enclosed a circular on this issue. In addition, I would like to add that your letter encourages me to mention the topics in upcoming discussions with Scientific Members of the Max Planck Society and to reiterate the responsibility they have for junior scientists. I will ask them to see to it that Ph.D. candidates receive an optimal education at the institute and in conjunction with the universities.

Both the universities and the Max Planck Society agree that the time lapse between submitting the Ph.D. work and defending is often too long. All of the involved parties are unhappy with the situation and are making an effort to improve this. At the same time, one cannot forget that only a small group of individuals evaluates the dissertations. The process of conferring Ph.D. degrees nevertheless has to remain solely in the hands of the universities. The Max Planck Society has no intentions whatsoever of questioning this.

With respect to funding duration, it is usual for Ph.D. candidates to receive funding up until the day of their oral exam provided the time frame does not exceed three years. After the three-year period, the funding is depleted irrelevant of the stage the student is at. The candidate can receive funding for a longer period of time in exceptional cases.

The Bund-Länder Commission sets the stipulations for the MPS regarding the funding possibilities available for foreign and German Ph.D. candidates such as grants or Ph.D. contracts. We are obliged to abide by these stipulations and have no say in the matter.

I would like to thank you for your suggestions and wish you all the best for your scientific endeavors and particularly for your Ph.D. exam.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Gruss". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

Peter Gruss