

Call for Proposals

“European Platform for Life Sciences, Mind Sciences, and the Humanities”

I. General objective

Recent developments in the cognitive neurosciences, particularly the combination of imaging technologies like fMRI or MEG with methods of experimental psychology, have broadened the thematic scope of experimental and theoretical neuroscience research tremendously. Originally related either to the field of basic neuroscience or focused on the study of neurological or psychiatric problems, the field is now expanding to research questions which have been traditionally the focus of disciplines like philosophy, psychology, and the social, historical and theological sciences - leading to potentially new fields of research like “neurophilosophy”, “neuroeconomics”, or “social neuroscience”. This development has not only been met with great interest and fascination, but has also provoked profound scepticism, as is evidenced in an ongoing and sometimes heated debate about the interpretation of certain experiments and their eventually far-reaching consequences – not only for science, but also for society and the idea of man at large.

Despite many points of mutual interest, the discussions between life sciences, mind sciences, and the humanities have often been dominated by a sense of competition and superiority, aiming to secure the position of one's own discipline as the one giving the “final answers”, rather than looking for synergies and new perspectives resulting from the interdisciplinary exchange. Even though there are promising examples for productive interactions across the related disciplines, it remains a major challenge to find a common language and to develop a productive atmosphere for cooperation.

II. Scope of the initiative

In order to give fresh impetus to this exciting and dynamic field, the Volkswagen Foundation aims to further the **development of a European platform** as a source for new ideas, approaches and interactions at the crossroads of the life sciences, mind sciences, and the humanities. This initiative is directed specifically at **highly talented young scholars from all related disciplines**. The Foundation intends to grant this selected group of academics the opportunity to break new ground and to support them in creating networks with scholars from other research communities which would not be easily accessible otherwise.

The initial activity will be the organization of a workshop with a maximum of 40 participants. The main goal of this workshop will be to identify new key topics related to the ongoing interdisciplinary dispute. Therefore, the focus will not be on research topics within a given discipline, but on questions at the interface between disciplines, which usually find no place in specialized disciplinary research programs. To structure the meeting, the following themes will be the starting point for discussion:

- a. Representational and dynamic approaches to consciousness
- b. The phenomenal self and the epistemic subject: Can the “first-person perspective” be reductively explained?
- c. Does cognitive neuroscience challenge our conceptions of agency, free will, and personal responsibility?
- d. The relevance of social cognitive neuroscience to political philosophy
- e. Can there be a cognitive neuroscience of cultural differences? How do culture and education shape cognitive and neural structures – how is culture shaped by our evolved cognitive and neural architecture?
- f. The emergence of neurotechnology: The example of “neuropsychotherapy”. Will cognitive-affective neuroscience provide a new foundation for the explanation and treatment of psychopathological disorders?
- g. Neuroethics and neuroanthropology

Furthermore, the workshop should help to establish several smaller teams, which will pursue and further develop the topics in a working phase of up to two years. During that time period the Foundation will support the activities of these teams as well as the interaction between all scholars. Upon application funding can be granted e.g. for team meetings, retreats including the invitation of leading scientists, “twin”-travel to conferences for at least two scholars with a different scientific background, publications etc. In addition, the Foundation will be open to new ideas and suggestions, including applications for pilot research projects resulting from the work of these teams and for obtaining individual interdisciplinary qualifications.

III. Call for proposals

The Foundation invites applications from young European scholars of all related disciplines, who wish to attend the workshop and are dedicated to contribute to the development of the European platform.

“European Platform for Life Sciences, Mind Sciences, and the Humanities”

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Prof. Thomas Goschke, Dresden (Life Sciences)
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Date: 11 – 13 October 2006

Place: Döllnsee/Schorfheide

Target Group: Ph.D. students and postdoctoral fellows

Application: Abstracts are to be submitted before June 1, 2006 to
VolkswagenStiftung
Dr. Henrike Hartmann
Kastanienallee 35
30519 Hannover

Contact: hartmann@volkswagenstiftung.de (life sciences)
szoelloesi@volkswagenstiftung.de (humanities)

The abstract should be written in English and should not be longer than three pages containing:

- Title of contribution
- Name, address of applicant and institution
- CV, list of publications
- Short description of own research focus
- Outline for a proposed project which can, but does not have to be related to one of the above mentioned topics
- Statement about the motivation to participate in this activity

Abstracts have to be submitted both in paper and electronically.

Selection: Applications will undergo peer review. Acceptance will be based on qualification of the applicant as well as originality and potential of the proposed project.

Funding: Travel expenses and accommodation will be fully reimbursed to the invited participants by the Volkswagen Foundation.