

Interdisciplinary Annual PhD Meeting 2013

The Interdisciplinary Annual PhD Meeting 2013 aims to enhance the interaction within the PhD student community of the DRS-Plant Sciences program, bringing together all research groups involved. In a relaxed atmosphere with snacks and coffee, we will get to know our counterparts and their common troubles and successes through problem-solving group initiative.

This year the meeting will be held on the **23rd of April 2013** in the big auditorium of the Pflaphy building, Königin-Luise-Str. 12-16. The program will be as follow:

14:00 - We will start by introducing the 67 PhD candidates.

Then two activities will be proposed:

14:30 - The first activity will be an icebreaking

This activity will consist of grouping PhD candidates irrespective of research group affiliation and focusing on common tasks performed either in the office, lab, greenhouse or field (e.g. who is working with Arabidopsis? Who works with SPSS? Who had troubles with greenhouse pests? etc). This will be our icebreaking activity to get to know our counterparts' similar troubles and success stories. We expect the output to be profitable for everybody. Within the freshly formed group, you will be given some time to ask your counterparts puzzling question or simply debate the unifying point. Then we move on to rearrange groups based on other unifying points.

15:15 - The second activity will consists of an ecological experiment with all of us.

Ecology seeks to explain species coexistence and its functional consequences. If closely related species share a fundamental niche (niche conservatism), competitive exclusion will cause communities to be made up of species that are phylogenetically overdispersed, or more distantly related to each other than would be expected by chance. Each PhD candidates will be named after a plant species. Each research group, in which the PhD candidates are affiliated, will be considered a phylogenetic conserved functional group (plant family). Therefore, you will have the same ecological function in the 'plant ecosystem' as your PhD colleagues from the same research group. After assembling 'plant communities' (groups of PhD candidates) with different levels of functional diversity, a series of questions/challenges related with plant sciences will be given to the 'communities'. The experiment will be repeated in time to allow the PhD candidates to integrate different 'communities' with different functional levels and to produce replication. The number of correct answers/achievements given by a 'community' per trial will be a measure of its productive function. We will then use this experimental 'PhD candidate ecosystem' to test the hypothesis that functional similarity among closely related species (phylogenetic conservatism) can promote coexistence among unrelated species, because of reduced competition, and enhance ecosystem productivity due to the functional complementarity among those dissimilar species.

16:00 – Our two Ombudspersons, Prof Achazi and Prof Schuster

After the activities, our two Ombudspersons, Prof Achazi and Prof Schuster, will join the meeting and talk about their function at the DRS-Plant Sciences program. You will get to know in which circumstances during the course of your PhD they might be able help.

16:15 - The meeting will be followed by an open-end barbecue in the vicinities of the Pflaphy building. Hopefully April will be generous with good weather.

Join us with your important presence in making the Interdisciplinary Annual PhD Meeting 2013 a profitable experience for all PhD candidates.