

## Introducing our Members

**Dr. Johannes Widmer is a GA alumnus. He earned his PhD in Dresden and subsequently worked for two years as a postdoc at the Institute of Applied Photophysics at TU Dresden. He has been working as an engineer for process integration in the solar film production at Heliatek GmbH, Dresden since summer 2016. We were especially interested in his experience of starting his career in a company.**

### What was the motivation behind you choosing to pursue a non-university career after your postdoc?

The decision to aim for a career in a company crystallized increasingly during my doctoral studies. One reason was that I was not interested in a long period of being a "scientific journeyman" after my doctoral thesis. In my current position, I did initially receive a shorter contract than the one I had at TU Dresden, but in the long run, I will have better career prospects than at the university.

As a postdoc, I was very lucky in that my supervising professor indicated to me at an early stage that he was ready to support my career decision no matter what direction it was going to take. Generally, I received a great deal of support from TU Dresden with starting my career outside the university.

### What prompted you to participate in the GA Future Career Program - Fit for non-university career paths? Were your expectations met?

The broad range of topics of the modules appealed to me. Overall, the program helped me a lot in my professional orientation. It was particularly important for me to be able to reflect on my own position within the protected framework of the program. The coaches gave us a great deal of support. We partici-



pants also worked well as a group and were able to give each other a lot of feedback. These conversations ended up helping me in my subsequent job interview.

### What were the biggest challenges and the most important experiences involved in starting a career in a company?

Actually, one of the biggest challenges in the application process was to interpret the job advertisements correctly. The ad for my current job did not really appeal to me at first; only when it was explained to me what was hidden behind the "job ad lingo," did it become clear to me that this position was very well suited to my profile and to my expectations.

### And what were the first 100 days like?

During the first two months, I shared the position with the woman who held it before, so I was able to grow into the tasks slowly during this period of learning the ropes, and I had ample time to observe the various processes. At the beginning, the company also gave me the opportunity to meet many other employees, and thus to learn about my new field of work from my colleagues' point of view. Overall, I feel that I've really "arrived" in my new job.

## Save the date

31 March 2017  
**New deadline for our GA funding programs**  
Don't miss it! The next application deadline for our funding programs has been brought forward to **31 March 2017**.

20 to 22 June 2017  
**Welcome Week**  
A doctorate starts with many questions – we have the answers. In summer 2017, for the first time, we will invite doctoral candidates who are in the initial phase of their doctorate to an orientation week, featuring workshops, many useful tips and information and an exciting supporting program. Get to know the GA, the services available at TU Dresden, and also doctoral candidates from all disciplines, and start networking. We look forward to meeting you!

20 June 2017  
**GA Summer Party & Mortarboard Competition**  
Once again, we are on the lookout for the most creative doctorate mortarboard. The winner will be announced at our summer party. Contributions to this contest are now being accepted. Simply send an e-mail with a photo of your masterpiece to: [graduieretenakademie@tu-dresden.de](mailto:graduieretenakademie@tu-dresden.de) We are eagerly awaiting your contributions.

**Publishing Details | Contact:**  
Editing: Graduate Academy  
Contributors: Angela Böhm, Barbara Könzööl, Claudia Markert, Katharina Ulbrich  
Design: Claudia Markert  
Copy deadline: 21. Dezember 2016  
[www.tu-dresden.de/graduieretenakademie](http://www.tu-dresden.de/graduieretenakademie)  
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**The GA is funded by Germany's Federal and State Excellence Initiative.**



Dear readers and members,

at the GA, we can look back on an eventful year. We have implemented many new concepts and formats. We have moved into our new rooms and filled them with life. The positive feedback we receive on a regular basis is a source of great pleasure for us, serving as it does as confirmation of our day-to-day work but also as an incentive and motivation. Yes, there is still a lot to do in order to attain a lasting improvement in the conditions for junior researchers at our University. Next on the agenda for the GA: To implement „Promovendus“, the software for doctoral candidates, and to extend our advisory and coaching services. In addition, we are planning an orientation event that will last several days and give new doctoral candidates the chance to get to know each other.

So, there is a lot to do. We are very much looking forward to it.

Yours, 

## Quo vadis, Doctorate?

**This is the question experts from all over Germany asked themselves at this year's UniWiND/GUAT conference in Dresden as they considered current studies and statistics showing that a doctorate offers the best opportunities on the non-university labor market, too.**

From 22 to 23 September at TU Dresden, more than 230 representatives involved in promoting young researchers at German universities and research institutions discussed the diversity of career paths available after completing a doctorate. They were there at the invitation of the German University Association of Advanced Graduate Training (GUAT - "UniWiND" in German).

The academic career leading all the way up to a professorship is still often considered the ideal course, but in reality only a small minority of the estimated 200,000 doctoral candidates

in Germany will take this path. At the GUAT annual conference, opportunities and risks as well as the associated challenges of an academic career were discussed with as much intensity as embarking on a career in the non-university labor market. Among PhD candidates and postdocs, there is a great need for orientation with regard to the world of work „out there.“ The graduate institutions of German universities have recognized this need and are increasingly offering services for career orientation for young academics.

Numerous examples of best practice presented at the conference demonstrated options for providing sustained support. In this context, our GA Future Career Program: Business - Fit for non-university career paths also attracted a great deal of interest and positive feedback. You can read about the experiences of a participant from the first round of the GA Future Career Program on page 4 of this newsletter.

Prof. Enrico Schleiff, GUAT executive board member, Vice-President of the Goethe University Frankfurt and now also a member of the Advisory Board of our Graduate Academy, chaired this year's GUAT annual conference. On page 2, he reflects on his very own personal impressions of the conference's core topics.

At this point, it only remains for us to say: Whatever path you choose to take – or have already chosen – we will be very happy to support you.



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## Three Questions to: Prof. Enrico Schleiff

Enrico Schleiff studied physics in Prague and Mainz, gained his doctorate in Montreal, Canada and wrote his habilitation in cell biology at LMU Munich. Since 2007, he has been Professor of Molecular Cell Biology of Plants at the Goethe University Frankfurt, and, as Vice-President since 2012, he has been responsible for academic infrastructure. In his role as Deputy Chairperson of the German University Association of Advanced Graduate Training (GUAT - "UniWiND" in German), we asked him to take a look back at the GUAT annual conference.

### In September, this year's GUAT conference took place at TU Dresden. In your view, what were the main outcomes of the conference?

An essential point was that (finally) there seems to be a departure from the tendency to turn the doctorate and postdoctoral phases into something akin to school. The young colleagues in this career phase are guarantors of our scientific system (and they should also be appreciated as such). What can arguably be termed a return to this understanding is accompanied by a discussion about the significance of promoting autonomy and individuality, as well as the creation of space for, among other things, autonomous further education. I consider this to be a very important development, as the graduate SCHOOLS in particular harbor the risk of preferring general structures to individual support.

For me, a second important aspect was the discussion about the pessimistic attitude towards university careers being further exacerbated by using words such as "bottleneck", "generation Y career", "quitter" and "drop-out". I am also of the opinion that we should talk more about "a multitude of alternative career paths" or "a plurality of career options", because there are so many attractive opportunities for graduates, people with doctorates and postdocs. Today's world of work in particular offers a variety of options, so feeling pessimistic while doing your PhD is actually not justified. However, there is still one task facing many universities: An understanding must be developed and communicated that the career reality for many of our doctoral candidates is not at the university but in one of the many non-university fields.

It was precisely with this diversity in mind that the conference identified the need for the "supervising" professors and the institutions offering doctoral degrees to focus their attention on providing support for preparing transitions. Additionally, transparency about possible career paths and their requirements is needed at universities and non-university research institutes.

### What advice do you have for junior researchers when it comes to planning their careers?

Enjoy the freedom to do research, because this experience strengthens you for everything you tackle and strive for afterwards. When beginning your doctorate, you should become aware – perhaps by talking to a mentor or coach – where you can still see potential for development, and focus on working towards this. In the middle of the PhD, that is after about two years, you should think honestly about what

you are aiming for after the doctorate. This would be the time for you to start focusing on continuing education in fields that would be of benefit to you as regards your goal. And please, do not hide your skills under a bushel all the time; each of us has his or her strengths and weaknesses. You just need to deal honestly with the latter while continuing to foster the former.

### You completed your doctorate at McGill University in Montreal, Canada and are now, as a supervisor, an important advisor for your doctoral students. So, in your opinion, does the task of a supervisor include, in addition to academically guiding the dissertation, career advice that "points the way", and what experience do you personally have of this?

Yes, I earned my PhD at McGill, that is, within the North American system, and I experienced a very collegial system there. Gordon (C. Shore) was more of a mentor and colleague than a supervisor. It is this that I am trying to pass on to my doctoral candidates and postdocs today. What I am not doing is to point people in a certain direction career-wise, because every colleague in the doctoral or postdoctoral phase has to recognize for themselves which path it would be best to take. I understand my role as being more that of an honest mirror.

Also, I'm certainly not very good at giving advice when it comes to non-university careers, since I have no personal experience here. In such a case, I am merely a mediator. You would have to ask my PhD students and postdocs to find out whether I am a successful one.



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## GA's New Advisory Service: Personal Coaching

**The Graduate Academy's advisory services are being extended: Along with giving advice regarding doctorates, funding opportunities, writing and dealing with conflict, personal coaching will also soon be available.**

Coaching is a form of professional advice for providing support in finding solutions and reaching goals in processes of development and change during your career. Originally targeted at managers and business executives, this form of advice and guidance is also increasingly well received in the field of higher education.

The Graduate Academy has already collaborated with external coaches on a number of occasions and offered coaching services to its members within the context of the Career Day, the SASTIP program and several career workshops.

In order to establish professional coaching as a permanent support service and an integral part of the Graduate Academy advisory services portfolio, Dr. Katharina Ulbrich and Corina Bejan, advisors at the Graduate Academy, are currently completing a course of training to become systemic coaches/systemic consultants. From

now on, they will be offering individual coaching sessions for members of the Graduate Academy. Matters relating to coaching include, among other things, the following areas:

- Work organization and time management
- Dealing with crises and conflicts
- Career orientation and strategies
- Decision-making processes: Science – should I stay or should I go?
- Reconciling work and family life

So, if you are a member of the Graduate Academy and would like to address a professional matter in a series of up to five individual coaching sessions (of 90 minutes each), please send an e-mail with a short description of your situation to:

[graduertenakademie@tu-dresden.de](mailto:graduertenakademie@tu-dresden.de)



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## Writing Group for Doctoral Candidates

Sooner or later, doing a doctorate means having to write. However, you do not have to wait until writing the final version of your dissertation. Writing can be used, practiced and employed systematically from the outset of the PhD process: To identify and clearly define the topic, to structure and organize the content, to write rough drafts and eventually, to write the final version of your doctoral thesis.

The Graduate Academy writing group offers doctoral candidates the opportunity to meet regularly over the course of one semester and discuss ideas with other doctoral candidates, reflect on their own writing, learn writing techniques, give and receive feedback on texts, and in this way motivate each other to write from the very beginning. The writing group will be supervised, guided and supported by a qualified writing coach of the Graduate Academy. Are you interested?

Contact: Dr. Katharina Ulbrich  
[katharina.ulbrich@tu-dresden.de](mailto:katharina.ulbrich@tu-dresden.de)

## Taking a Look Back: First GA Writing Retreat

From 6 to 11 September 2016, twenty PhD candidates and postdocs took part in the Graduate Academy's first writing retreat in the St. Marienthal monastery. The writing retreat was a complete success from the perspective of both the participants and the Graduate Academy staff.

Everyone agreed that such a retreat should be offered again next year, so the next GA writing retreat will take place from **10 to 15 September 2017** in the St. Marienthal monastery.