

STRATA



AMERICAN FRIENDS

OF THE **ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT FOUNDATION**



Humboldtians and guests at the AvH “Sustainable Futures” Colloquium in San Francisco at the end of February.

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OUR MISSION -

To become a leading source in the United States for the promotion of national and international networking, exchange, and creative collaboration among scientists, scholars, artists, and other professionals, consistent with the goals of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation of Germany.

OUR VISION -

To mobilize the intellectual curiosity, creativity, experience, and passion of Humboldtians to shape research, higher education, and professional development in the United States and beyond.



CHANGE. AND OPPORTUNITY.

Christian Hänel

In early November, a social media post from American Friends of AvH garnered significantly more attention than usual, appearing after two pivotal political events unfolded simultaneously in the United States and Germany. The US Presidential Election of 2024 delivered what may be the most consequential comeback story in recent political history. At the same time, Germany's three-party coalition government collapsed. Both of these events will undoubtedly shape the future of transatlantic relations.

The message of our post was brief and not revolutionary:

With the big changes happening in both the US and in Germany, come big opportunities. And huge challenges, yes. But let's focus our resources, our creativity, and our transatlantic commitment on the opportunities to tackle those challenges successfully!

The fact that this statement struck a chord like no other post fills me with optimism. We were amazed to hear from so many individuals on both sides of the Atlantic—many of whom had not previously been in direct contact with us—expressing a genuine enthusiasm to collaborate. This overwhelming response highlights the dynamic and thriving nature of transatlantic relations.

The global challenges we face are well known: public health crises, research security threats, dilemmas surrounding AI governance, obstacles to sustainable development, and more. At the forefront of tackling these challenges are many Humboldtians, like Humboldt Professors Ariel Stern, who is working to enhance disease prevention and treatment, and Holger Hoos, whose research in machine learning is paving the way for innovation. Or Humboldtian and AFAvH board member

Dale Medearis, whose work fosters sub-national, practice-oriented collaboration in building sustainable cities in Northern Virginia and Baden-Württemberg.

In these uncertain, challenging times, where do the opportunities lie? Both in the United States and in Germany, traditional methods and systems are being critically examined. Public policy, business practices, and societal structures are all under scrutiny. Existing frameworks and regulations are being questioned, sometimes aggressively. It is undeniable: significant changes are on the horizon, and these changes will require us to step out of our comfort zone. We must learn to communicate beyond traditional boundaries of science and academia because the need for cross-sectoral, cross-disciplinary, and cross-geographical engagement has never been greater. The response to our post demonstrates that there is a deep well of creative energy from academia, business, and civil society, all eager to address these challenges and seize these opportunities together. This presents a unique opportunity to leverage our collective resources and scale our impact.

Let us harness the strength, reach, and innovation of the Humboldt network to drive meaningful change for the benefit of our societies. In this, our 25th anniversary year, American Friends of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation is fully committed to this mission. We create platforms for changemakers, connect brilliant minds with influential voices, and navigate across disciplines and industries. We are able to do all of this because of you, dear Humboldtians. We are very grateful for your support—your engagement and your donations ensure that our work makes a real impact.

Herzlichen Dank!

HUMBOLDTIAN DONOR STORIES | IMPACT MAKERS

A CONVERSATION WITH PROFESSOR DANIEL FALLON

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT FOUNDATION



American Friends of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AFAvH) is grateful to individuals who demonstrate their commitment to the Humboldt experience and ethos through their major and planned gifts, and through their involvement in the US Humboldt alumni network. As we mark our 25th anniversary, we recently engaged one of our founding board members, Professor Daniel Fallon, who reflected on the experiences that inspired his dedication to the organization and its mission to strengthen US-German ties.

In a world increasingly interconnected by global challenges and political uncertainty, the role of transatlantic scholarly and scientific collaboration has never been more crucial. Few individuals embody this spirit of cross-cultural partnership better than Professor Daniel Fallon, a distinguished academic and advocate for international exchange.

Professor Fallon is a former leader at the Carnegie Corporation of New York, an academic who has served many premier higher-educational institutions, and a key figure in the German higher education reform movement who has dedicated much of his career to fostering collaboration between the United States and Germany.

In an interview with Jessica Hamilton, Vice President of Advancement, Professor Fallon shared how a pivotal year as an undergraduate in Germany set him on this path. Immersed in the language and culture, he gained a deep understanding of postwar German society and its challenges. This transformative experience influenced his later work in higher education reform in Germany, including helping to establish the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation's (AvH) German Chancellor Fellowship and setting up the American Friends of Alexander von Humboldt Foundation's Washington office.

When asked to elaborate on his enduring support for AFAvH, Fallon explained that, during his tenure at the Carnegie Corporation of New York, he developed a practice of ranking his philanthropic commitments, and American Friends of AvH consistently stood out as a cause worthy of his time and resources. "Its mission—to foster transatlantic collaboration and empower global

scientific exchange—is essential," Professor Fallon remarked, emphasizing the potential for meaningful impact.

Reflecting on the broader context of US-Germany relations, Fallon highlighted the pivotal roles of leaders, like former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, in fostering connections that endure today. He also stressed the value of scientific diplomacy in a changing global landscape, describing it as "building trust, shared values, and establishing empirical truths across cultures through science."

The interview concluded by discussing the lasting impact of AvH fellowships, which foster not only rigorous scientific collaboration but also lifelong personal connections. Fallon noted, "These fellowships build a culture rooted in empirical wisdom, creating lifelong relationships that transcend borders."

As American Friends celebrates 25 years, Professor Fallon's reflections underscore the power of science and education to build a more interconnected world. American Friends of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation owes a great debt of gratitude to his leadership and contributions to reaching our 25th year. We celebrate him and the steadfast support we have received from all the generous donors who make our work possible.

"Science diplomacy involves building shared values through cross-cultural scientific collaborations. It's about creating a community of scientists who understand each other's goals and foster trust. These relationships often extend beyond professional boundaries, becoming lifelong connections."

FEATURED SCHOLAR

An Interview with Liu Xiaoming



LIU Xiaoming is an associate professor of geochemistry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on geochemistry of the critical zones, the evolution of the earth's surface, and environmental geochemistry. She received her PhD in geochemistry from the University of Maryland in 2013.

She was awarded the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation's Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Research Award in 2023 and spent her fellowship year at the German Research Center for Geosciences in Potsdam.

AFAvH: Tell us about your background and your experience as a Bessel Research Award recipient.

LIU: In 2023, I received the Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Research Award, which allowed me to do two research stays in Germany. I spent the first few months at the German Research Center for Geosciences (GFZ) and a few months at the Freie Universität Berlin (FUB). At GFZ, I had access to the HELGES isotope facility, advancing my work on weathering processes and CO₂ fluxes. Overall, the collaborative environment with Earth and planetary scientists, data modelers, and paleoclimatologists was instrumental in broadening my research. The experience not only enhanced my scientific work, but also opened future research opportunities, especially in developing solutions for CO₂ removal—a critical component in achieving climate goals.

AFAvH: Tell us about the research you conducted while on your fellowship and the impact it had on your career path.

LIU: During my fellowship at GFZ and FUB, I focused on isotope geochemistry, examining critical zone processes. This work not only expanded my research capabilities but also reshaped my view of

leadership. Exposure to European research management broadened my understanding of interdisciplinary collaboration and boosted my confidence in leading projects. It shifted my US-centered perspective on science and opened new potential career paths, especially in Europe.

AFAvH: You recently joined American Friends of AvH as a "Humboldt Network Liaison" (HNL)—what are you most looking forward to in terms of engaging the US Humboldt alumni network? What do you hope to accomplish as an HNL?

LIU: During my Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Research Award experience, my feminist perspective was truly awakened, particularly in the context of women in science. I became acutely aware of the gender disparities in leadership roles and developed a passion for promoting more women into these positions. This experience deepened my commitment to not only advance scientific research, but also to create pathways for women to rise into leadership roles more quickly.

As a Humboldt Network Liaison, I'm especially interested in advocating for mentorship programs and leadership training specifically aimed at empowering women in STEM. I

believe that the quickest way to shift the balance is to ensure more visibility and support for women, starting with leadership development at the early career stage. My goal is to use this platform to build a strong support network that helps women scientists step into leadership roles and drive meaningful change in our field.

AFAvH: What do you see as the most important issues in transatlantic research collaboration in your field?

LIU: One of the key issues in transatlantic research collaboration in Earth Science is limited funding and resources, which can make large-scale, international projects challenging. However, there's a significant opportunity to collaborate on nature-based solutions for CO₂ removal. By combining expertise across the United States and Europe, we can leverage our Earth science knowledge to tackle climate change. Joint efforts, such as in enhanced rock weathering and other geochemical CO₂ sequestration strategies, can drive innovation and scale solutions more effectively. Collaborations can help bridge the funding gap and amplify the impact of our research.🌐

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONNECTIONS ARE A GREAT ASSET

An interview with AvH Secretary General ad interim Dr. Thomas Hesse

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AFAvH: November 2024 saw historic political developments on both sides of the Atlantic. How did you perceive these events?

HESSE: The first week of November was truly remarkable. First, on Tuesday and Wednesday, I followed reports on the outcome of the US elections. Then, Wednesday night, Germany's coalition government collapsed. This was not completely unexpected, but the timing was surprising. Federal elections in Germany will be held on February 23, if the political process goes forward as planned. So, while we can expect many policy initiatives from the second Trump administration very soon, we will not have a new government in Germany until much later. This is not an ideal situation for transatlantic relations.

AFAvH: How will this situation affect the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and transatlantic cooperation?

HESSE: The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation funds people-to-people relationships—in all fields of research and with a global perspective. On this level, relationships are strong, and I am confident that they will remain so regardless of who runs the government in our respective countries. Since its founding in 1953, the Foundation has granted more than 6,500 fellowships and prizes to

researchers from the United States. And it is very common for German researchers to have US institutions on their CVs. The personal ties between our countries are a great asset, and I wish to stress that the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation will continue to invest in these relationships.

AFAvH: What is your message to researchers in the United States and the US Humboldt Network?

HESSE: I foresee a high degree of reliability and continuity in our transatlantic activities. The programs of the Foundation continue to explicitly invite researchers from the United States who wish to collaborate with German colleagues, be it as a postdoc or at the height of their careers. All alumni may apply for funding to return to Germany for a research stay and may host German postdocs and experienced researchers at their US institutions with funding from the Foundation. I encourage researchers on both sides of the Atlantic to make use of these opportunities and tell their colleagues about them.

AFAvH: What role can American Friends of AvH play in supporting the Foundation's goal of fostering transatlantic research?

HESSE: There are more than 5,400 Humboldtians in the United States, many in leading positions at universities, research organizations, and other institutions across the country. American Friends of AvH actively engages with US-based Humboldtians and the US research community, organizing events, supporting networking opportunities, reaching out to new groups, and maintaining a strong sense of community. This work is extremely important and greatly valued by the Foundation. Humboldtians share the common experience of transatlantic collaboration; they are ambassadors, multipliers, and critical catalysts of transatlantic exchange. Our societies need such lay mediators and everyday science diplomats. As

our key partner in the United States, American Friends of AvH helps us to sustain and leverage these ties, ensuring mutual benefits for both the German and American research communities. This is a very important role, and we look forward to continuing our close cooperation.

AFAvH: Looking to 2025: What are your priorities?

HESSE: One clear priority is the Foundation's budget. More than 95 percent of the funding for our programs and activities comes from the German federal government. We need to make sure that international research cooperation remains an important item on the political agenda and that its benefits for society are understood and valued. The Foundation's strategy for 2024–2028 makes this case. My message is clear: We need to invest in excellent research to find solutions to the challenges of our times, and we need international research collaboration, including international mobility of researchers, to advance knowledge in all fields. Communicating this need for science and research, and for international cooperation, is a task we share on both sides of the Atlantic.

AFAvH: How can we work together?

HESSE: We face many common challenges. There is a fear of inflation and economic decline in both countries; populism is here to stay as a global phenomenon; we have to contend with misinformation and disinformation, waning of trust in institutions, questioning of trust in science. And there are the challenges of wars, climate change, migration, global health, and the AI revolution, to name just a few. I firmly believe that research communities need to address these issues and see great potential for transatlantic dialogues around these issues. We need to work together to help our societies, especially in difficult times. It is important that we learn from each other and support each other. 🌐

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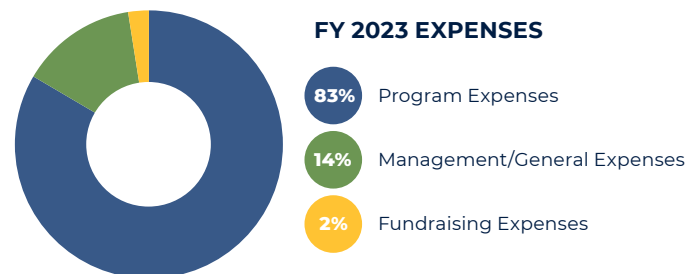
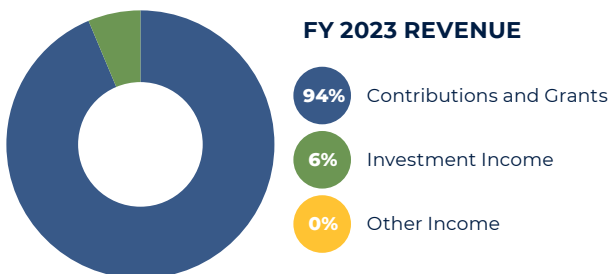
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*Denotes individuals who made multiple contributions in 2023

COMING UP IN 2025

American Friends of AvH will attend the following meetings in 2025.

Southeast German Studies Consortium Workshop

Fayetteville, AR | February 27–28, 2025

European Career Fair

Boston, MA | March 1, 2025

American Physical Society Meeting

Anaheim, CA | March 16–21, 2025

EU Open House Day at the German Embassy

Washington, DC | May 10, 2025

American Chemical Society Meeting

Washington, DC | August 17–21, 2025

American Friends of AvH is planning on hosting an alumni reception during the event—stay tuned for details

GAIN Annual Conference

Boston, MA | August 29–31, 2025

Society for Neuroscience Meeting

San Diego, CA | November 15–19, 2025