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# Exchange Program for "Technical Writing" Envisioned

## U.S. Scholar Prof. Alred of the University of Wisconsin Visits Justus Liebig University English Department – Collaboration with Firm – "Reaction Overwhelming"

By Sascha Feuchert

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GIESSEN. In public discussions, scholars in the humanities are often reproached with being mere "specialists in the general" and therefore not of much use in a free market economy. "That's just not so," protests Prof. Gerald J. Alred, a visiting scholar who has been teaching in Justus Liebig University's English Department during the summer semester. "On the contrary, a broad liberal arts education is precisely what enables the graduate to work independently and solve problems creatively." At the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Alred is responsible for the Technical Writing program, which is very successfully preparing students in a field of the liberal arts and thus fitting them for professional careers in a free market economy.

In an Anzeiger interview, Prof. Alred used a classified advertisement to show that this situation is by no means peculiar to the United States: SAP (Walldorf), a steadily expanding German software enterprise with global operations, is looking for "Technical Editors" who, together with development teams are to create "online documentation and training support for applications software." This job description obviously calls for people with education in the humanities," says Prof. Alred.

Indeed, "ability to communicate and to work independently" is stressed as well as "ability to explain complicated relationships to the user in a way that is appealing and comprehensible." In addition to this, the job also requires skills such as "practical experience in the creation of documentation," "a general knowledge of business management," and "good oral and written English." Since the outlook for getting graduates with this sort of background is very good in Giessen, with its specialization in Modern Foreign Languages, contact was made with the enterprise to explore possible collaboration.

"The response has been overwhelming," according to Alred, "although it's not yet quite clear just what form such cooperation would take. Yet the firm's personnel commitment indicates that it is quite interested in working with us. The prospects are excellent." There have already been two meetings with representatives of SAP and a third meeting in the United States is being planned, because the faculty of the Giessen program and Prof. Alred envision an exchange program between the partner universities of Giessen and Milwaukee for the education of German technical writers. "Then Giessen students could come to us, to study technical writing in Milwaukee. On the one hand, this exchange would be important for the Germans because they would have gained experience in an American environment. On the other hand, our students would also benefit greatly, because they often lack international perspective."

"Cultural blending"

Professor Alred's research interest concerns precisely this sort of "cultural blending." "There simply are differences between American and German culture which are of particular importance in the business world. Firms like SAP, operating internationally, need people who not only know about such differences but can also successfully take them into account in their daily work. That's why these people must have a broad, general education – in fact, a liberal arts education," explained the U.S. scholar.

Those wishing to know more about Prof. Alred's work or about the field of technical writing can best do so by visiting his Internet home page at "<http://www.uwm.edu/people/alred/>" or reading the Handbook of Technical Writing (St. Martin's Press) which he coauthored with colleagues. At Giessen Univ, lecturer Kathryn Khairi-Taraki is the contact person for the planned project.

*Giessener Anzeiger*

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