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# Outstanding Research Is Fundamentally Interdisciplinary and Experimental

## Inga Külmoja

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**Seven new national Centers of Excellence for Research selected for EU funding in Estonia for the 2007–2013 period highlight outstanding research fields. The University of Tartu heads four of the seven centers, and is a partner in an additional two.**

The total amount of funds assigned to the seven centers, evaluated by an international scientific committee from twenty-four applications, is 34 million euros. UT is leading Centers of Excellence in: Frontiers in Biodiversity Research (4 mln EUR), Translational Research of Neuroimmunological Diseases (5 mln EUR), Chemical Biology (6 mln EUR) and Cultural Theory (5 mln EUR).

All four centers are fundamentally interdisciplinary. Biodiversity research relies on synergy between ecology and molecular biology – disciplines that have long been considered to have little in common.



The Center for Translational Research was launched on 24 September.  
SILLE ANNUK / SCANPIX

Translational research not only unites neuroscience and immunology, but also fosters cooperation between researchers involved in fundamental research and those working in clinical medicine.

Chemical biologists apply chemical methods to study different biological systems, such as infectious diseases.

And finally, the Center for Cultural Theory is a marriage of semiotics, archaeology, ethnology, folklore studies, sociology, human geography and religion studies.

Interdisciplinary research at the centers aims to provide practical solutions to vital tasks – how to efficiently manage and protect nature, how to gain better insight into cultural phenomena, how to get infectious diseases under control and how to translate scientific discoveries into medical help.

University of Tartu is also an active partner in the Centers of Excellence in Genomics (5 mln EUR) and Computer Science (4 mln EUR). The funding comes from the EU Regional Development Fund with additional state funding and university self-financing.

## What will be the most important achievements of your Center of Excellence by the year 2013?



**Martin Zobel,**  
Professor of Plant Ecology



**Valter Lang,**  
Professor of Archeology



**Eero Vasar,**  
Professor of Physiology



**Tanel Tenson,**  
Professor in the Technology of Antimicrobial Compounds

First, we expect to contribute to the general explanation of biodiversity patterns of the Earth. In particular, we expect to show how different evolutionary histories have resulted in differences in biodiversity between regions and components. Second, we expect to do the same on a national scale, disentangling the biodiversity pattern in Estonia. Third, we will include the human dimension and explain which are the main human-driven threats and how to prevent them.

### Frontiers in Biodiversity Research

Five research groups in this center are working on issues such as: How do evolutionary history and human impact influence the biological diversity of ecosystems? Why is one ecosystem hundreds of times richer in species than another one? Why are differences rather big even in a small area such as Estonia? How will climate change influence plants, animals, ecosystems, agriculture and forestry? Answers to these questions will provide recommendations for efficient nature management and protection.

Firstly, we plan to elaborate a complex methodology for research of culture systems and processes from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Secondly, we aim to devise interdisciplinary interpretation models for the cultural dynamics operating within various cultural groups and societal levels in different multicultural societies and regions (primarily Estonia), both in the past and present.

### Cultural Theory

Eight research groups in diverse fields of cultural studies are working together to achieve a new level of interpretation and expertise.

The aim is to further develop semiotic methodology for studying culture and apply semiotics to analysis of diverse cultural phenomena and data. Researchers are also focusing on comparative and interdisciplinary studies of unique materials from the Estonian history of culture.

Our Center of Excellence aims to introduce a new way of thinking based on translational medicine to Estonia. On the one hand, it is about faster translation of the results of basic research into clinical practice. On the other hand, it means a more patient-oriented approach to medical research. To put these principles into practice, we need to create better conditions for cooperation between researchers working in fundamental research and those engaged in clinical medicine.

### Translational Research of Neuroimmunological Diseases

Neuroimmunology studies interactions between the immune system and nervous system. Six research groups are trying to answer the following questions: What contributes to disorders in immune and nervous systems? What is the role of genes and environment in these types of diseases? How to diagnose and prevent neuroimmunological diseases? The ultimate goal is to reduce the burden of such diseases by translating achievements of basic research into clinical practice.

We expect that by 2013 we will have stimulated contact between scientists working in the fields of organic chemistry, biology and medicine.

This would be the basis for the development of the discipline of chemical biology. More specifically, we expect to have validated several essential enzymes in bacteria and viruses that could be targeted by chemicals. And we expect to have new chemical tools for studying fundamental issues of virology and microbiology.

### Chemical Biology

Chemical biology studies biological systems through application of different chemical tools to influence or manipulate the systems. The researchers have come together to study extremely problematic and fast-spreading infectious diseases like HIV or tuberculosis, characterized by resistance to medicine. One group of scientists in Tallinn is synthesizing chemical compounds, whereas the other group in Tartu is testing their impact on infections. The overall objective is to find effective remedies against infectious diseases.

## How Science Is Made

UT History Museum recently displayed the best photos submitted to the Estonian Science Photography Contest. These forty photos open a window into the nature and practice of science.

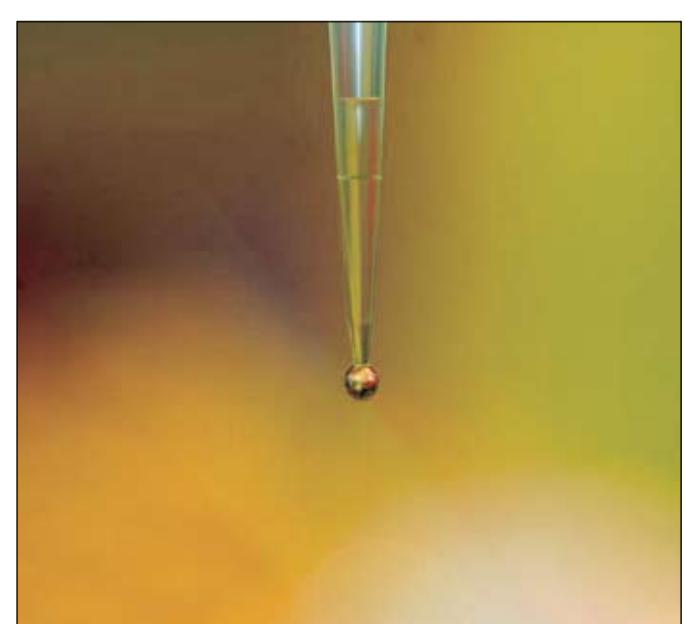
According to Tiit Kändler, one of the initiators of the competition, the aim of the organizers was to show that science does not necessarily mean only highly specific articles in research journals. "Nor is science merely about the new technologies that result from it – mobile phones, GPS or the Internet. Science is a human activity full of excitement and dynamism, joy and sorrow, discovery and loss," says Kändler.



Tough guys, long drills.  
TIMO PALO



Identifying moss species on the Röka protected area.  
NELE INGERPUU



A drop.  
HANNES LUIDALEPP

## The University Forging the Future

**Virve-Anneli Vihman**  
Head, International  
Relations Office

How can the University of Tartu best answer the needs of society, provide an attractive environment for working and studying, and achieve top quality in national and international education and research?

These questions and others will fuel the discussion on 7 November, when the University Development Conference will bring together high-level outside experts and university members in a meeting of the minds.

Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves will open the conference. The morning session will consist of presentations from various vantage points, including UT Rector Alar Karis, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, Vice-President of the Estonian Academy of Sciences Jüri Engelbrecht, UT Professor of Fine Arts painter Jüri Arrak, and others.

The afternoon session comprises a panel discussion on the theme "What Kind of University Does Estonian Society Need?"

UT's Strategic Plan will be revised after the conference and submitted to the University Council for adoption in December of this year.

## Academica: 12th German-Estonian Academic Week

**Lea Kivi**  
Senior Specialist for Researcher Mobility

From 2 to 6 November 2008, The German-Estonian Academic Week, *Academica*, will be held at the University of Tartu for the twelfth time since 1997.

Since 2007, each German-Estonian Academic Week has focused on one of the University of Tartu's partner universities in Germany. Last year's *Academica* was organized in cooperation with the University of Konstanz; this year, the University of Göttingen has been invited as the guest university.

*Academica XII* will be inaugurated on Monday, 3 November at 10:15 at the University Assembly Hall with a public lecture by Professor Kurt von Figura, Rector of the University of Göttingen, on "Competition and Cooperation as the Motivating Forces in the Development of Higher Educational Institutions".

The public lecture will be followed by a discussion on "Classical Universities in Today's Changing World", chaired by UT Professor of Practical Theology, Tõnu Lehtsaar.

The official languages of *Academica* are German and Estonian. Simultaneous translation will be available throughout the event.

The German-Estonian Academic Week has been organized at the University of Tartu since 1997. The aim of *Academica* has been to provide an opportunity for German and Estonian scientists to meet and make personal contacts.

More information about the event can be found at: [www.academica.ut.ee](http://www.academica.ut.ee).

# Donating a Sample of Blood Is an Investment in the Future

**Inga Külmoja**  
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**The Estonian Gene Project (EGP), a research venture of the University of Tartu, has set the ambitious goal of collecting DNA samples from 100,000 people within the next few years.**

As of October 2008, 25 per cent of the target has been achieved and EGP is now by far the largest database of health, genealogical and genome data in Estonia. According to Professor Andres Metspalu, Director of EGP, Estonia ranks among the leading European countries in the field of genetic research.

### First 1,000 gene maps completed

A person's genetic data is stored on the gene map. As of October 2008, the first thousand of these maps have been completed by random choice.

"However, at the moment this map does not contain enough data to be of any practical help for a donor," concedes Metspalu.

He compares the existing gene map with a crossword puzzle in which the squares are mostly empty.

A large part of the gene markers that have been discovered recently explain only a small number of illnesses and their genetic risks – science simply does not develop that quickly.



*A person's genetic data is stored on the gene map. The first thousand of these have been completed by now and the second thousand is under preparation.*

ANDRES PUTING

"One fine day, though, I imagine one could go to the family physician, who will turn on the computer, enter the person's code and the computer would list the patient's major health risks and protective markers that are written in his/her genes," the professor confidently foretells.

### Genetic data in future medicine

The gene map as it exists today is an immensely long Excel worksheet with 370,000 rows. 99.5% of human genes are identical from one individ-

ual to another. However, on average every thousandth nucleotide is different. These nucleotides serve as "mileposts" or markers, which help us to determine the location of a certain gene in the genome.

"The research which aims to identify whether one or another gene variation can be linked to a certain illness still continues," explains Metspalu.

There are also other types of genetic variation – for example, in the case of many cancers gene arrangements are much more important

### Director of the EGP, Andres Metspalu – Why become a gene donor?

By becoming a gene donor you make an investment in the future. Projects like this help to improve medical assistance, develop new diagnostic tests and understanding of why some people develop certain diseases and others don't, as well as provide answers as to why some people live to an old age whereas others die young.

When we finally understand these things, we will also be able to better control

and treat these diseases.

And what might be of greatest importance – those who give their blood samples make an investment in their own future.

DNA will be extracted from blood and stored in liquid nitrogen at 186°C. Blood cells taken from donors maintain their ability to grow. New cells can be grown from these and perhaps in the future, when science has advanced far enough, it might be possible to use them for treating today's gene donors.

### ESTONIAN GENOME PROJECT

- Founded by the government of Estonia in 2001
- Joined UT in 2007
- 25,000 gene donors in the database
- Forecasted to reach 100,000 donors in 3 years

### Genetic map of the European populations

The more than 25,000 blood samples collected already make it possible to conduct various background studies. For example, comparing the genetic data of Estonians with other European nations has revealed that Latvi-

ans, Lithuanians, Poles and some Russians are genetically much more similar to Estonians than the Finns with whom Estonians share a similar language.

Sources: Interviews with Prof. A. Metspalu in Postimees newspaper and other media.

## Science Communication Is About Translation

**Inspired by the recent science communication conference held in Tartu, three experts from UT gathered for a round-table discussion hosted by Mart Zirnask, a UT student and journalist with the weekly *Eesti Ekspress*. The discussion, which lasted several hours, began with sports:**

**Lauristin:** Every night we see athletes interviewed on TV. A sportsman tells us how he wanted to achieve seventh place, but instead finished seventeenth. Then he explains how he made an effort and trained hard, and how he feels afterwards. However, things that matter to Estonia are also taking place in science. Why then don't we discuss these questions as passionately as we discuss athletics?

**Metspalu:** Well, journalists know how

to present athletics in a way that touches people. Athletes are "of the people" in Estonia, whereas scientists are viewed as boring, marginalized blokes in worn-out clothes.

(The professor is in full swing.) In Estonia science remains distant from the common man. He picks up a pen and thinks that the pen is some god-given thing! It does not occur to him that several people have defended doctoral theses in order for it to be produced...

**Sild:** Indeed, in sports there is always a discernible story – a prologue, culmination and sequel. In science, however, things happen quietly, which is considered difficult to bring to the man on the street. You have to make a splash! For example, young researchers at CERN have written a rap that explains the working

principle of the large hadron collider, its different parts and mechanisms...

**Lauristin:** Well, that is what I call translating!



**Marju Lauristin,**  
UT Professor of Social Communication

We need to translate science into attractive language, which elicits an emotional response.

Let us again use the example of athletics. Sport can be followed easily since it is compressed into a single moment. At the same time, in science discoveries can also happen within seconds – but you won't allow cameras to record it!

**Metspalu:** Exactly! Fifteen years ago we brought cameramen to our laboratories in Tartu with the aim of popu-

larizing gene technology. But how did our researchers react? They said: I don't want to, I don't have time for this, I communicate through my publications...

**Zirnask:** Why? What were they afraid of?

**Metspalu:** They feared for their reputation! The researcher is afraid that when addressing a wider audience his speech may appear too unscientific and his colleagues will not take him seriously anymore.

For hundreds of years scientists have communicated with their audience mainly through their publications. They have been trained to do science, not to talk or write about it.

**Lauristin:** But this is something we cannot expect from them,

just as a world-class composer or a writer need not be a good critic. Society as a whole is becoming more professionalized and so has science communication...

**Metspalu:** Nowadays it places entirely new demands on researchers! Scientific discoveries affect our everyday lives much

faster than in the past. Researchers, therefore, need to understand that communicating with the public is in their own best interest.

**Lauristin:** Contemporary science communication is a professional activity. We need mediators who are specifically trained for this task.

**Zirnask:** Who could rise to this challenge? Social scientists?

**Lauristin:** Well, now we've come to the conclusion that natural and hard scientists are helpless without the assistance of social scientists!

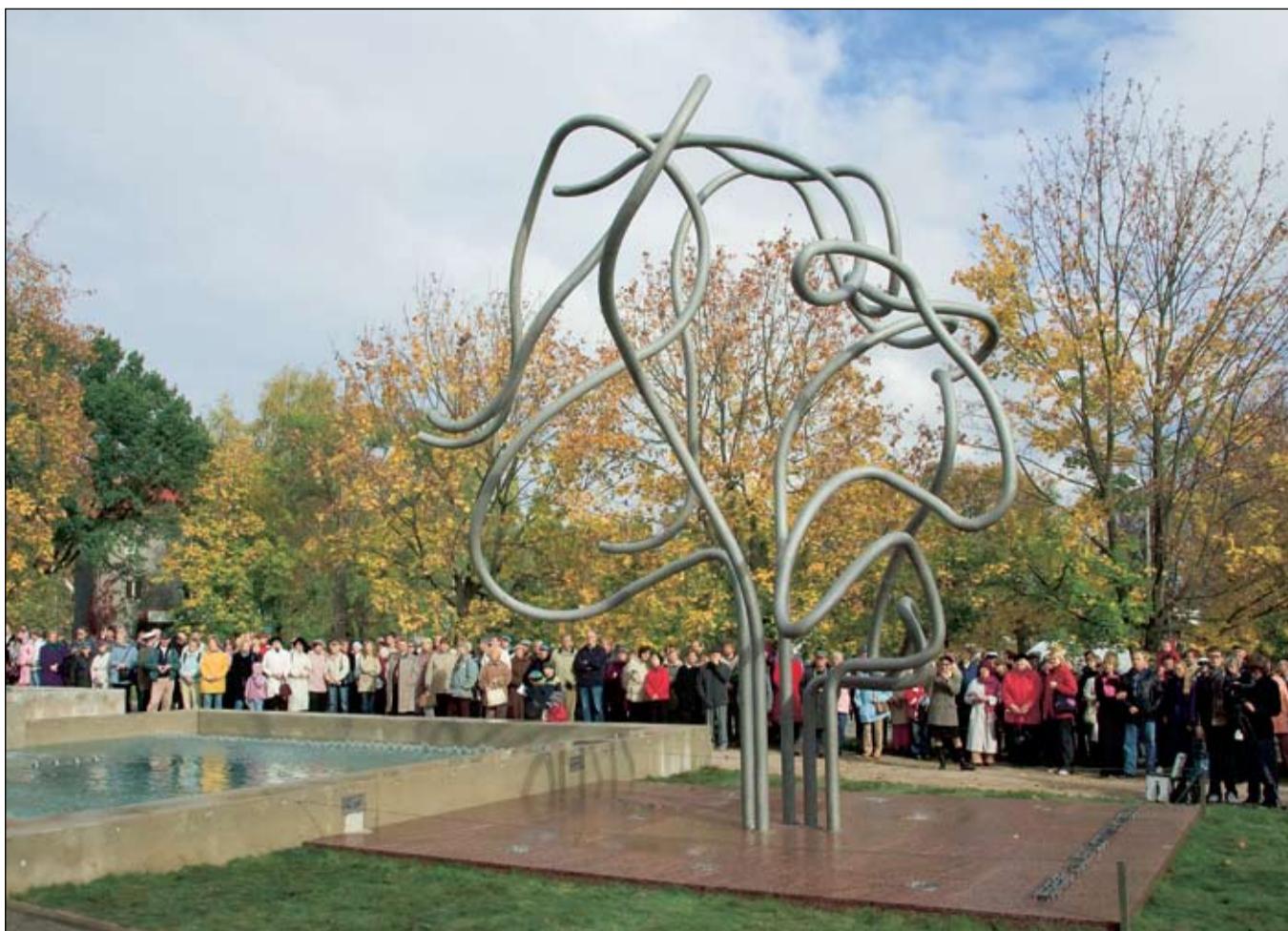
(Long triumphant laughter.)



**Andres Metspalu,**  
Director of the Estonian Genome Project and UT Professor of Biotechnology



**Tiiu Sild,**  
Director of the AHHAA Science Centre



The profile of the world – famous semiotician Juri Lotman greets passers-by next to the UT Library.

ANDRES TENNUS

## UT Set to Launch Two New "Cool Curricula" in Autumn 2009

**Inga Külmoja**  
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**Semiotics and Software Engineering are two new international master's programs to be introduced next academic year.**

Both programs have received a national quality award from the Estonian Ministry of Education and Archimedes Foundation.

Requirements of the "Cool Curricula" contest included English as the study language, openness to students from all around the world, and free participation in the Estonian language and culture courses.

### Tartu Is a Unique Place to Study Semiotics

Although the English-taught master's program in Semiotics will be opened at UT in 2009, first applicants have already expressed interest. The reason is obvious – the University of Tartu is one of the key semiotic centers in the academic world today, and the master's program in English is one of the first in Europe.

To apply, one does not need to know particularly much about semiotics, as a bachelor's degree in the same field is not a requirement. Semiotics is a general methodology of humanities and life sci-

ences, thus students of different backgrounds can acquire a theoretical base for application of semiotic ideas to a wide variety of disciplines.

Semiotics is the study of signs, sign systems and processes, which make the world meaningful. Practical applications of semiotics include translation and advertising, design and architecture, communication strategies and much more.

"There are several dozens of companies offering semiotic analysis and expertise in England, reaching out to both the European and American market. Also in Estonia the demand for semiotic analysis is higher than the existing capacity," shares the program manager, Professor Kalle Kull.

The tradition of excellence in semiotic theory in Tartu was established by Juri Lotman in the 1960s. Lotman was the founder of Semiotics of Culture and the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School, as well as the oldest journal of semiotics, *Sign Systems Studies*.

Program website: [www.ut.ee/semiotics](http://www.ut.ee/semiotics).

### Managing IT Teams Around the Globe

Software Engineering is a new international master's

program jointly developed by two leading Estonian universities – University of Tartu and Tallinn University of Technology.

In-depth knowledge and experience in the field that the program provides is crucial for ensuring international career prospects. Dynamic e-stonia with its successful IT innovations and ambitious IT ventures offers an exciting study environment for this program.

Nowadays, a master's degree is hardly needed to get an IT-related job in Estonia.

A quick look at the list of job offers reveals that IT specialists are among the most wanted, so many IT students are employed before they finish their studies. So why study for a master's degree?

According to the program manager, Professor Marlon Dumas, IT graduates should consider that getting a first job is just the start of an IT career.

The exciting part often starts several years later, when moving from entry-level technical jobs to positions that involve managing large teams and talking to customers and users. But this move requires qualifications and expertise beyond what a bachelor's degree provides.

He continues by pointing out that highly specialized

software engineers are in high demand all across Europe. A recent report from the Confederation of British Industry indicates that six out of ten employers in the UK are having difficulties recruiting graduates for technical positions, particularly in IT.

"There used to be a time when IT systems could be developed by a few people sitting in a small office. Now, it is typical for IT projects to involve teams of dozens, if not hundreds of specialists.

In addition, because of outsourcing trends, these teams are distributed all across the globe. Managing such large and distributed teams of developers is not an easy task. It requires proven methods and in-depth knowledge of many technologies," explains Professor Dumas.

Why choose Estonia for a Master's of Software Engineering? Estonia is well known for its technology-driven innovation. It is a pioneer in electronic identity, electronic voting, and vigorous in adopting mobile technology, online banking and electronic government services. Estonians are also proud of having invented Skype.

Program website: [www.ut.ee/studentoffice/studies/ma/english](http://www.ut.ee/studentoffice/studies/ma/english).

## From a Ferry to a Conference with ESN

**The Tartu crew of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) had a busy time organizing two major events this autumn: an international ESN Northern European Platform conference and a large-scale adventure called SeaBattle. Marge Taivere, a board member of ESN Tartu kindly answered UT's questions.**

**What is the focus of the ESN Northern European Platform conference?**

It is the second most important annual meeting of the Erasmus network to be held in Tartu on 13–16 November. We expect up to seventy participants. The purpose of the conference is to exchange experience and ideas internationally.

The topics include student mobility, Nordic media and youth cooperation, ESN activities and much more. In addition, different field trips and side events are planned: a university reception, dinner at Gunpowder Cellar, fire show at Leigo, and Eurodinner, in which all participants offer their national food.

**How big is the team that is organizing the conference in Tartu?**

Right now our organizing committee has five members. One week before the event we will train about ten volunteers to help us.

**What has been the most challenging thing in this organizing work?**

Finding sponsors and making the budget fit the needs of both ESN people and our partners.

**Everybody is talking about SeaBattle – what is it about?**

We have rented a ferry in cooperation with the Finnish and Swedish ESN sections and will take 1,600 exchange students to all three capitals for a very small fee. Fifty exchange students from Tartu will have a great possibility to visit Helsinki and Stockholm on the first weekend of November.

**What will be happening on the ferry?**

For every twenty-four exchange students there will be one ESN person responsible for group activities. We will also have some common events like a treasure hunt, ESN karaoke, ESN info and a lot of other exciting stuff.

**1,600 people are a big crowd – how will you manage the excursions?**

Well, that's a trick, but not a hard one – in every capital there is a crew of ESN people and volunteers, who will be waiting for the shipload to arrive. On the ferry we will give out information sheets about where to meet group leaders who will show the groups around the city.

**How did you select the fifty lucky ones to go on a trip from Tartu?**

Well, a lot of students were willing to go, so we decided to sell the tickets on a "first come-first served" basis. There was a queue behind our door three hours before the registration began. All tickets were sold out already on 22 September.

*More info: [www.esn.ee](http://www.esn.ee), [www.nep2008.eu](http://www.nep2008.eu).*



Marge Taivere (in the center) with friends at the International Food Fest.

PERSONAL ARCHIVE

## New International Students Share Their First Impressions of the University, Tartu and Estonia

**About 250 new international students started their autumn semester at UT; 176 of them are exchange students coming mostly from Germany, Italy and France, but also from Poland, Turkey, Finland, Russia and other countries.**

Most of the degree students come from Finland and Russia. More far-away countries are represented by students

from Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and others.

UT asked new international students to share their first impressions of the university, Tartu and Estonia. What was the biggest surprise, myths about Estonia that did not prove true, good and bad points about the university, and more. Here are some of their answers:

### The biggest surprise

"The city is in the middle of a park, or the park is completely included in the city! Tartu is such a green city – it's amazing and very agreeable!"

"The campus and the town of Tartu are very beautiful. It is unlike anything in the USA."

"Car drivers are very polite with foot passengers."

### Myth: Estonian people are cold

"I've heard that Estonians tend to be cold or indifferent. But I've met quite a lot of friendly people here or on the way here."

"They [Estonian people] seem to be very friendly and open actually."

"I thought everyone would be blond and have blue eyes."

### Good and bad points

"Extremely well organized orientation days and really helpful staff."

"I enjoy the lessons, because they are more interactive than in my homeland. <...> I don't like that assistants don't speak English in the language department."

"Personal contact with the lecturers is possible here!"

### Food

"I tried pelmeni (dumplings) the first day I came here, because our tutor told us that this is a typical food for students. I just LOVE them."

"Dumplings. They are very cheap, but I won't try them again :)"

*Read the full story: [www.ut.ee/429952](http://www.ut.ee/429952).*

## Scholarships for 2009–10

### Master's programs:

- Semiotics
- Software Engineering
- Applied Measurement Science

### Summer programs:

- Social Sciences
- Estonian Language

### PhD studies:

- No tuition fee, students can apply for a monthly allowance.

## International Studies

*UT offers a broad array of study programs for international students on all levels, including degree, semester and summer studies. Further information: [www.ut.ee/studentoffice](http://www.ut.ee/studentoffice) or [studyinfo@ut.ee](mailto:studyinfo@ut.ee).*

### MASTER'S PROGRAMS

- Semiotics (NEW in 2009!)
- Software Engineering (NEW in 2009!)
- Financial and Actuarial Mathematics
- Applied Measurement Science
- EU - Russian Studies
- Baltic Studies
- Languages and Literature

### INTERNATIONAL JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMS

- Erasmus-Mundus: Security and Mobile Computing (NordSecMob)
- Erasmus-Mundus: International Master's in Economy, State and Society (IMESS)
- European Master's Program in Human Rights and Democratisation

### MEDICINE

English-language instruction is available for the first two years of the 6-year program.

### SEMESTER PROGRAMS

- Baltic Studies: Politics and Society History and Culture Business and Administration
- Prometheus: European Union Studies Eastern European Studies
- Law Studies: Creation of the Rule of Law Society in Post-Communist Europe
- Russian Language, Literature and Culture

### INTERNATIONAL SUMMER UNIVERSITY

- Local Knowledge and Open Borders: Creativity and Heritage (NEW in 2009!)
- After Empire: The Collapse of Communism and Beyond
- European Integration and Russian Foreign Policy
- Procedures in European International Courts
- Spa Tourism
- Estonian Language for English speakers
- Estonian Language for Finnish speakers
- Practical Spoken Russian

### PhD STUDIES

Doctoral programs are offered by all UT faculties. A full-time doctoral program lasts for 4 years. Further information: [www.ut.ee/124402](http://www.ut.ee/124402)

# Eurocampus – Celebrating Diversity in Tartu

**Krista Vogelberg**  
Professor of English,  
Eurocampus Tartu coordinator

**Daria Bahtina**  
Eurocampus Tartu tutor

Looking through the glass door of one of the most beautiful rooms in Babel (where the UT Institute of Germanic, Romance and Slavonic Languages and Literatures resides), you will see a small group of students listening attentively to a professor – or questioning his or her arguments, analyzing reading materials, and speaking about their own experiences in the light of new knowledge.

They come from different backgrounds and share their perspectives during lively seminar discussions. They are in Tartu to study Intercultural Communication within the framework of Eurocampus 2008.

The Eurocampus of EMICC – European Master in Intercultural Communication, organized by partner universities from nine European countries, is a unique phenomenon: every year, students from the nine universities spend an entire semester on the campus of one of these universities while professors from the same nine universities fly in to teach their area of expertise.

The carefully structured interdisciplinary program in-

cludes communication, intercultural management, training, lingua franca, identity, anthropology and other topics.

The students earn a special certificate showing that they have enhanced their professional competence needed in careers with significant intercultural contact.

The ECTS credits acquired during the Eurocampus semester are also incorporated in the students' home universities' Master's programs.

The first Eurocampus was held in Jyväskylä in the autumn of 2002. Locations such as Cambridge, Lisbon, Lugano followed. The next year Eurocampus will be back in Lugano again.

### Tartu's intercultural environment

This year – befittingly, declared the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue – the University of Tartu has the honor of being the host.

How has the collective effort to live up to the high organizational standards of Eurocampus paid off so far?

This year's students eagerly share their first month's experiences and impressions. They start with the factors that brought them together.

Marion, from the Netherlands, explains her motivation for participation in this program with the advantage



UT has the honour of hosting the Eurocampus autumn semester. Prof. K. Vogelberg and tutor D. Bahtina have done their best to make it a memorable experience for students.

ALAR JANTSKE

of studying intercultural disciplines in the context of an intercultural environment.

Serena, from Italy, notes that her aim was to gain new experiences, whereas Ioana, from Romania, underlines the benefits of small group interaction: "We are small enough to function as a tight community where everyone is accepted the way they are".

The group nods and they finish each other's ideas as if in order to prove they have already reached a level of mutual understanding.

"We practice here the perfect combination of theory, what else was it, experience?" they finish each other's sentences. "Yes, experience and reflection upon it."

### "How do you say it, terviseks?"

The group also talks about the professional advantage of

Eurocampus over other exchange programs. Michel, from Czech Republic, favors the high standards: "It is sometimes the case that universities offer only a limited amount of courses in English, but here we are taught 15 subjects that vary in topics, but are perfectly applicable in our field".

In addition to these 15 courses, some students also took the challenge of studying Estonian or Russian in one semester. "How do you say it, terviseks?" – they practice a newly learned word.

### City of good thoughts

Their local tutor, Daria, an EMICC graduate herself, reflects on informal learning as an important complement to the process. "Tartu is intertwined with student culture and traditions, our partici-

pants already agree that this is a city of good thoughts!"

One can agree with the latter statement just by looking at the room where the seminars take place: originally a cafeteria, now a well-equipped class with a round table inviting communication, a sunlit terrace behind the glass wall, a homely atmosphere created by the "tea and coffee corner".

During longer breaks the students decide which café to go to for their lunch because the choice is really good: the University cafeteria, places offering international cuisine, cozy bars with a view on the statue of "Kissing Students".

There is still a lot for them to explore, also outside Estonia, but the important thing is that their intercultural dialogue has already begun and very successfully.

## A Good Tutor Can Draw Bones at the Doctor's and Make Students Feel at Home

**Merilyn Merisalu**  
[merilyn.merisalu@ut.ee](mailto:merilyn.merisalu@ut.ee)

**After years of tutoring UT international students, Karin Pärn and Signe Liiv confirm that they know how to help freshmen at Tartu.**

For Signe Liiv, being a volunteer is a fun challenge. It is an opportunity to practice foreign languages and meet people from various parts of the world. "Seeing how international students adjust here brings out the strong and weak points of living in Estonia, and the difficulty of learning our language – in a way it enables you to see yourself and Estonia as though in a mirror," says Signe.

While local students travel often between the campus and home, international students don't have this opportunity here. Part of a tutor's work is to make visiting students feel at home, which also includes helping to arrange accommodation for friends and relatives who come to visit them.

### Don't be too shy!

"At least during the first couple of weeks tutors need to be a little "pushy" in the good sense of the word and drag them along to see places," explains Karin. As an example, Signe mentions visiting the lookout on top of the Cathedral ruins on Toome Hill, which she says is very

popular with international students. "Once they get up there, they always go on about how we live in a forest!" she smiles.

Signe says that at the beginning many international students tend to be very shy about contacting their tutors. They feel uncomfortable phoning them unless they are in serious need of help. "But that's what we're here for, to help them!" Karin exclaims.

### At the doctor's office

Going to the doctor's office with a foreigner in Estonia can be a real headache.

It is not always the case that Estonian doctors speak English. If not, the tutor has to be there to translate the names of bones and illnesses, which he or she often doesn't know in Estonian. "Sometimes you just have to take a pencil and draw it on the paper in order to explain which bone and where exactly it is broken," Signe recalls.

Even if a tutor's life is not always peaches and cream, the girls don't complain. The job also involves a lot of fun and by no means is it a struggle of one against many. Signe and Karin are on such good terms that they sometimes go out with each other's protégées or spend time together.

Although by far the most common difficulty experienced by international stu-

dents is finding their way in the cryptic Study Information System, a large share of problems reported to tutors relates to day-to-day life.

### Wanna bake a cake?

"Many would love to bake something once in a while but unfortunately there is no oven in the dormitory.

This is where we come in – tutors who have an oven at home," shares Karin. "And a couch and a telly!" adds Signe. The ownership of these items allegedly makes a perfect tutor.

They are often asked where one could obtain second-hand bicycles, telephones or musical instruments.

Another frequently asked question concerns opportunities for pursuing one's hobbies in Tartu. Karin and Signe have managed to find sporting opportunities for students ranging from badminton players to capoeira enthusiasts.

"Sometimes girls also inquire where to meet guys here in Tartu because as a rule the majority of international students are female," Karin giggles. However, Signe thinks that this shouldn't be a problem anymore since the pool of international students this autumn includes quite a large number of boys.

Both Karin and Signe have maintained good contact with someone from almost all of their past groups.



Karin and Signe have many fun stories to tell about their tutorship.

MERILYN MERISALU



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[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org) Cert no. SW-COC-1529  
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## UNIVERSITAS TARTUENSIS

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU NEWSPAPER – INTERNATIONAL EDITION

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Published by: Ecoprint