

Professor Frank Rögner: all things are difficult before they are easy!

Professor Frank RÖGENER from the Technical University of Applied Sciences of Köln (TH Köln; Germany) is a longtime friend of Polytechnic University. For many years, Professor RÖGENER has been lecturing at SPbPU on environmental engineering. The coronavirus pandemic has not become an obstacle to productive cooperation: the professor continues to work with students remotely and is also active in academic mobility. And Frank RÖGENER also appreciated the news digest [SPbPU International Review](#) and noted that, thanks to the electronic issue, he felt a connection to Polytechnic again. About this and more in our interview.



- Professor RÖGENER, how do you feel about the pandemic and global isolation?

- Despite the crisis, I don't feel bad. The current situation has shown that many of us have begun to think more about the things that really matter in life. In particular, I really miss seeing my relatives, friends, and colleagues from Russia in person. This is the unpleasant side of the situation. The lockdown is a litmus test for all of us in terms of personal and professional development.

- Are you working from home now?

- TH Köln started to work remotely quite early - in March 2020 we had to switch from classroom to remote teaching. In a short time, I and the other teachers had to learn a lot. Just a year ago, many of us didn't know how to use video conferencing platforms. In two semesters they have become firmly embedded in our lives, and now I think some of the students know how to use these tools much better than their professors. This is also the desired effect to the certain extend, young people should be able to use the current technology.

Professors now mostly work from home, but some lab work can be done at the university. To do this, it is important to follow a number of strict rules - for example, staff members have to register in the intranet prior to access to the buildings. Unlike before, TH Köln is now not an open space that invites the public to enter.

- Is it difficult to teach remotely?

- There are different aspects of remote teaching. Scientific work and teaching are the matters of the personal contact, where students, professors and society receive impact and learn from the interaction. Science in general lives through human interaction. And when we asked students what they miss most about during the remote teaching, they also talked about the lack of personal contact. Needless to say, we all lack it! When I give lectures, I only see photographs of the students and sometimes only their names or nicknames, so that is very unpleasant, it is just like talking to the wall. As the human beings, we also need the interaction, we need to see students' faces, if they understand us, what do they think, do they show emotions, and this specific feedback is certainly missing. In small educational groups where there are only three students, they turn their cameras on and this interaction is more effective.

- What about academic work? Is it still going on as well?

- Yes, of course! Mutual research activities continue. For example, in spring, a student from Polytechnic University, Liya SAGITOVA, worked in my lab as part of the Erasmus+ program. Liya finished the practical part of her master's thesis. She performed some experiments in water related field, it really helped her with her master's thesis. Thus, we continue joint activities between Germany and Russia and support Erasmus+ students not only in scientific, but also in life situations. For example, when Liya had some problems with returning home, my wife and I helped her to return home safely to Russia, so she was able to complete her studies over the summer.

And with another colleague from Russia, Maria ANDRIANOVA from the Higher School of Hydrotechnical and Energy Construction at SPbPU, we wrote a book about new technologies in drinking water and wastewater systems. The book was published at the end of November.

Thus, life goes on, and with it, scientific activity.

- We heard that you appreciated the new electronic news digest of Polytechnic - SPbPU International Review. How did you find out about it?

- I received an electronic journal from your German cooperation coordinator. I was surprised and thought “Wow, something from Polytech!” and again felt a connection between your university and me.

- Which sections did you like best?

- I saw that Polytech was participating in the Formula student competition, where students prepare self-driving cars. Actually, a couple of years ago students from my institute also took part in this competition. It is quite nice to see that this topic is interesting for people all over the world.

- In your professional opinion, what topics would you recommend we add to the booklet?

- I saw many different topics with respect to the existing international relations. Keep on writing about people who have a positive impact on the society; write about people who do not talk about problems, but who solve them.

- We know that you are a visiting professor at Polytechnic University. How long have you been teaching here?

- I started lecturing at SPbPU in 2004. Then there was a short break, but now I have been in contact with Polytechnic University for more than five years. So my relationship with your university is quite long, and also, since I speak a little Russian, I can also translate a little into Russian when some students don't understand the material completely.

Today I lecture to Master's degree students in environmental engineering with a focus on modern developments in the field of hydro science. I am a chemical engineer by background and have devoted myself to environmental protection. In my lectures, students consider issues related to water supply difficulties caused by, for example, the coronavirus crisis and climate change. Additionally, I have given lessons on “Team and Leadership” in international environment cooperation.

- At the beginning of our interview you spoke about academic mobility. This is an essential topic in the development of cooperation between Russia and Germany. Do you think there might be difficulties with academic mobility programs after the pandemic?

- Student and faculty exchange programs provide tremendous experience and excellent opportunities for international cooperation, and can lead to significant career advancement. Even before the coronavirus crisis, I tried my best to motivate German and Russian students to participate in such programs. In spite of everything, I am optimistic and confident that the desire to learn from each other will only grow.

- However, there is a possibility that many students will miss the chance to study in other countries after the pandemic. What advice would you give to those who might be afraid to travel?

- Of course, at the moment, participation in exchange programs is not available, because the borders between our countries are closed, and airlines are working intermittently. Thus, take the opportunity to learn foreign languages now, especially English. And soon after the pandemic: go for it! And I would like to say my main advice in Russian: as my wife's grandmother says, «глаза боятся, а руки делают!» – which means that all things are difficult before they are easy!

- Professor RÖGENER, thank you for the interesting interview! We wish you professional success and good luck!

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