

The role of diaspora networks for academic mobility between the United States and Germany

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This paper explores the role of cultural networks in the internationalization of higher education and research. It specifically examines the extent to which German Americans and expatriates in the United States, who spent research stays in Germany from 1954 to 2000, contributed to the country's reintegration into the international scientific community after World War Two and the growing internationalization of research and teaching at its universities. Based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews and original survey data, the paper points out that participation in circular academic mobility from the United States to Germany has been strongly influenced by biographical connections to Central Europe and that US scientists and scholars with personal and cultural linkages have been more likely involved in constructing lasting transnational knowledge networks than those without such relations. By linking permanent migrations and transient academic mobilities, the paper exemplifies conditions under which culturally specific transnational networks can turn perceived brain drain effects into a virtuous cycle of mutually beneficial exchanges. These findings carry wider implications for recent debates in the geographies of knowledge, science, and higher education as they help to understand the role of academic diasporas, transnational heritage and cultural affinity for future developments in the production and circulation of knowledge.