PhD Position in STS at the MCTS, TU Munich

Deadline: July 25, 2018

The Professorship of Science & Technology Policy (Prof. Dr. Ruth Müller), based at the Munich Center for Technology in Society (MCTS), Technical University of Munich, announces an open position for a doctoral researcher in Science & Technology Studies (STS) (TV-L E13, 65%, 3 years, fixed term) as part of the DFG project “Situating Environmental Epigenetics.” The position should start on October 1st 2018.

About us
The research group “Science & Technology Policy” at MCTS explores the interactions between science, society and policy, with a distinct focus on the social studies of the life sciences. The group is based at the MCTS, an interdisciplinary research center in Science and Technology Studies (STS), and is affiliated with the School of Life Sciences and the School of Management at TUM.

About the research project
Situating Environmental Epigenetics: A Comparative, Actor-Centered Study of Environmental Epigenetics as an Emergent Research Approach in Three Research Fields. (DFG-funded)
Epigenetics explores changes in gene expression that do not result from gene mutation, but from chemical modifications on the DNA. In recent years, such epigenetic modifications have been found to respond to numerous stimuli from the environment – such as toxins, nutrition, trauma or stress – giving rise to the field of ‘environmental epigenetics’. By proposing mechanisms for how such factors can alter gene expression, environmental epigenetics offers important novel perspectives for understanding body, health and illness as ‘biosocial’. However, it is yet unclear what the specific impact of such perspectives might be in different research areas within the life sciences and how approaches from environmental epigenetics might affect understandings of body, health and illness differently in different fields.
In this project we thus take a comparative approach and study how approaches from environmental epigenetics are adopted and adapted in three research fields of great relevance for public health: nutritional epidemiology, environmental toxicology, and the pathophysiology of mood & anxiety. To this end, we will use qualitative social science research methods such as interviews, ethnographic observation and document analysis. By taking this comparative approach we give room to the possibility that environmental epigenetics might constitute different “epistemic things” (Rheinberger, 1997) in different research contexts with different social and political implications. This approach builds on insights from Science & Technology Studies that emphasize the situated character of knowledge production (Haraway, 1988; Knorr-Cetina, 1999) and the need for context-sensitive research approaches (Jasanoff, 2004). Beyond contributing to social science debates the project will also promote constructive interdisciplinary dialogue between social and life sciences.

Your tasks as a doctoral researcher
As a doctoral researcher, you will work as part of a project team that consists of the project leader, Prof. Dr. Ruth Müller, and the other project researchers, Dr. Michael Penkler and Georgia Samaras, MA. Your work will specifically focus on the area of environmental toxicology and thus complement the expertise of the other project researchers. Your tasks will include empirical research and data analysis, preparation
of results for publication, presentation of results at international academic meetings, contributions to the teaching portfolio of the group and support for organizing project-related academic events. You will develop an innovative research question for your PhD thesis as part of the project and in collaboration with the project leader. You will regularly meet with your supervisor to discuss and support the progress of your thesis. Beyond the project, you will be part of the Science & Technology Policy research group at the MCTS and the lively STS research community at MCTS more generally. You will actively participate in the academic life of the group and the center, which both regularly host international guest researchers and academic events. As a PhD student at TU Munich, you will be enrolled in the TUM Graduate School, which provides a structured PhD program and offers a rich program of courses in academic and transferable skills.

Who can apply?
Applicants should hold a Master’s degree in the social sciences, humanities, or the life sciences. Familiarity with STS concepts and experience with qualitative social science research methods is highly desirable. You should be interested in working across the disciplines and in engaging with other knowledge cultures. You should further be capable of and interested in working both as part of a team and independently. Fluency in English is essential for the academic life at the center and for the research project. The project further requires a willingness to travel internationally for fieldwork. We are looking for inspired and inspiring new talents who want to work in and contribute to an exciting, interdisciplinary STS research environment.

Application documents
Your complete application documents must include your CV, your Master’s degree certificate, a letter of motivation (max. 2 pages), 1-2 writing samples (e.g. thesis chapters), and names and contact details of 2 references, including a brief statement explaining your relationship to each of the named references.

Interested?
Please send your complete application as a single pdf document to applications.stp@mcts.tum.de. We will accept and review all applications received up until and including Wednesday, July 25, 2018.
We are committed to raising the number of women and gender-non-binary individuals in research and teaching, who are especially encouraged to apply. Applicants with disabilities are treated with preference given comparable qualification.
If you have questions about the application procedure, please contact applications.stp@mcts.tum.de.
If you have content-related questions, please contact ruth.mueller@tum.de.

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