



LMU-UCB Research in the Humanities
Call for Applications: 2025 Young Scholars Conference
“Revisiting Empathy: Political Affect in an Age of Cruelty”
October 1-3, 2025

Description

Empathy denotes multiple concepts and practices in which we come to terms with intersubjectivity and alterity. Early on, the economist and philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment, Adam Smith, defined what he then called “sympathy” as ‘imaginative perspective-taking’: “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation”; Smith wrote in 1759 (Smith 2002, 11). As social scientists claim today, it should increasingly be considered as a basis for political and social action. In *The Empathic Civilization*, Jeremy Rifkin (2009) suggested that Americans should exchange their myth of the ‘American Dream’ for a new self-image and become an ‘empathic civilization’. Evolutionary anthropologists like Michael Tomasello (2009) even argue that empathy, the capability to ‘think in the mind of another’, to anticipate the reactions of another human being and to interact with their views, is a central factor in cognitive development and the process of evolution from primates to humans.

As these examples illustrate, empathy also enables the crossing of disciplinary boundaries and provides a productive encounter between a variety of fields. Beyond popular science, empathy has been, for example, postulated either as the foundation of human morality, the natural basis of social understanding, a mode of historical observation, or a central element of artistic creation. A large number of approaches therefore take the existence of empathy for granted or assume that empathy is a quasi-natural characteristic or capability of all human beings. Yet, the origins, functions, and developmental pathways of empathy often remain largely unspecified. Notably, the strong emphasis on the unique role of empathy and its natural basis seems, at first sight, to contradict observations that the concept of empathy is rather recent and that empathy has seen a steep increase in popularity in the past two centuries (Frevort 2021). This suggests that empathy may be less of an essential ingredient of human nature as popular voices assume.

The joint workshop will focus on the functions, definitions and practices of empathy in the humanities. Its comparative focus integrates a historical perspective to also reveal how empathic practices developed and changed in the course of the past centuries.

We invite short (20 min) papers from all fields across the humanities.

Our workshop will take place at UC Berkeley and is designed to foster the dialogue between our partner institutions and to provide early career researchers with the opportunity to actively participate in an international network.

Successful applications will receive funding for travel and accommodation, see details below.

Eligibility

Eligibility for participation and funding in this program component follows the general guidelines for doctoral candidates and postdocs in the LMU-UCB Research in the Humanities program, please refer to <https://www.lmu.de/de/die-lmu/internationales-netzwerk/lmu-ucb-research-in-the-humanities/>.

Funding

- Accommodation costs in Berkeley (Limits apply)
- Travel expenses up to 1,100 euros (flight costs, transfer to/from the airport)

In general, travel costs will be reimbursed by LMU in accordance with the Bavarian Travel Expenses Act (Bayerisches Reisekostengesetz).

Application Requirements

- Short conference paper proposal (2 pages) responding to the above call. The proposed paper may relate to the candidate's (post)doctoral research
- Curriculum Vitae
- Name of First Supervisor at LMU
- Signed declaration of consent (please fill out and upload [the following document \(PDF, 204KB\)](#))

LMU Academic Coordinator for this Program Component:

Prof. Dr. Claudia Olk, LMU

Application deadline

- Application deadline: March 31, 2025

Submission of applications

Applications must be submitted via the designated application form in the online portal:
<https://lmu.moveon4.de/form/64194c74fbc62b33ea3ebdda/eng>

Reporting and contact

Successful applicants are expected to fill out an online survey within two months after the funding period. The respective link will be provided accordingly.

For further information on the program, please refer to the [LMU website](#) or the [contact person in the team International networks](#).