TAKING THE MEASURE OF THE GHI

The GHI undertakes a variety of activities in trying to fulfill its multi-faceted mission. Accordingly, there is no one measure of how well it is doing its job. One of the institute’s functions, for example, is to support the work of promising younger scholars and to facilitate their move up the academic career ladder. Recent placement figures suggest the GHI has been quite successful in that function. During the five-year period from 2007 to the end of 2011, eleven GHI research fellows (including two deputy directors) left the GHI. Six moved on directly to professorships; two took junior faculty positions; and three went to other research institutions. Research is at the very heart of the GHI’s mission, and perhaps the clearest measure of research productivity is publication. As of early 2012, a total of 113 titles had been published in the GHI’s four current book series. Another eleven were in press, six under contact, and three under review. Those numbers will quickly change – between three and five completed book manuscripts are expected to be submitted for possible inclusion in the GHI’s book series in the course of 2012 – and therein lies the challenge of trying to take measure of the GHI. The GHI is an active, dynamic institution. Circulation of the Bulletin, which doubled over the past decade and recently passed the 7,000-mark, has been growing by about 300 readers annually. With each conference, the GHI gains new cooperation partners and expands its list of contacts. As the research fellows and recipients of doctoral and postdoctoral fellowships (43 awarded in 2011) complete their projects, the list of GHI-supported dissertations, Habilitationsschriften, and monographs will continue to grow. Most any measure of the GHI’s activities or any measure of its performance will be quickly outdated.

One simple measure suggests the GHI has been consistently successful over the years in one of its most important functions. The GHI is a forum for international scholarly dialogue, and the great majority of the programs it runs and events it organizes are intended to bring together researchers from Europe, North America, and beyond. Conferences, symposia, and workshops (284 from 1987 to 2011; 9 scheduled for 2012) stand at the center of the GHI’s calendar of activities. Three conferences, held at ten-year intervals from one to the next, stand as typical examples. The 1992 conference “On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861–1871” gathered 40 scholars from 35 institutions in 6 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, New Zealand, and the U.S.). The institutions represented included 2 major research institutes not affiliated with universities and a museum.
The conference “Landscapes and Roads in North America and Europe” in 2002 counted 18 participants from 15 institutions in 5 countries (Germany, Great Britain, Italy, New Zealand, and the U.S.). The participants included a public historian employed by a U.S. government agency and the director of an acclaimed research center and library. The conference “Living on the Margins: ‘Illegality,’ Statelessness, and the Politics of Removal in Twentieth-Century Europe and the United States” brought 24 participants from 23 institutions in 6 countries (Austria, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, and the U.S.) to Washington in early 2012. Time and again over the past 25 years, as this sample suggests, the GHI has made it possible for scholars from around the world to engage in discussion and lay the foundations for collaboration.

Collaboration stands atop the GHI’s agenda. Almost all of the conferences the GHI sponsors are organized by GHI research fellows in collaboration with colleagues at other institutions. Institutional partners frequently join with the GHI in funding conferences, workshops, and other programs. The GHI has not only hosted thousands of scholars and graduate students but has also sponsored conferences and events at institutions stretching from the outskirts of Washington to the interior of China. The map above shows the locations of American universities and research institutes that have hosted programs co-sponsored by the GHI. Adding more dots to the map will be one of the GHI’s priorities in the years ahead.