

La Humboldt siamo (anche) noi!
Support Italian studies at Humboldt University!

Dear colleagues and friends,

in February of this year, shortly after a successful inspection by an external accreditation commission, we, the Department of Romance Literatures and Linguistics at Humboldt University, received the news that the university's budget deficit made it necessary to discontinue our two Italian professorships (in Linguistics and Literature, respectively) and to close our Italian studies programs, both for the three-year bachelor and a two-year master's degree program (*Master of Education*). We believe this is a step in the wrong direction that would not only greatly weaken our department as a whole, but would affect the entire university. Discontinuing the Italian studies programs would negatively impact the diversity of research and teaching in Berlin's unique university landscape, which attracts students and researchers from all over the world.

Cutting our professorships and discontinuing our Italian studies programs would mean that our **department** would lose nearly a third of its staff and one of the three pillars – Italian – on which our comparative approach to research and teaching Romance languages and literature is based. Italian studies has played a pivotal role in our department from the beginning, helping to make it not only one the first but also one of the most renowned Romance studies departments in Germany. Eliminating Italian studies would call into question the department's recent reorientation, its international network, its cultural studies profile, and ultimately its very existence.

The abolition of Italian studies would also have far-reaching consequences for the globally renowned **humanities profile of Humboldt University**. In numerous disciplines across the Humanities, like comparative literature, linguistics, art and music, history, archaeology and philosophy, research related to Italy is at the center of vibrant and internationally visible work. In terms of student numbers, our department would not only lose those who study Italian as their major subject, but also all those who currently combine Italian with another Romance language. At Humboldt University students have the possibility of studying numerous subjects in combination with Italian, with art history, history, and musicology being particularly in demand. Italian is also becoming increasingly popular in Berlin schools, making our Master of Education program central to the training of a new generation of Italian teachers; in this program Italian can even be combined with scientific subjects. All this would be lost.

For the diversity of Berlin's **unique university landscape**, which currently allows departments to enhance their own profiles in research and teaching by engaging in stimulating and productive competition with their colleagues at neighboring Universities, the planned cuts would be a significant setback. We see the **diversity and variety of humanities** and cultural studies at Berlin's universities threatened by the Berlin Senate's policy position of removing 'duplicate' locations. The existence of two departments of Romance studies in close proximity to each other at *Humboldt University* and *Freie University* respectively has fostered the development of **strong, complementary research and teaching profiles**. Regarding our Department, the accreditation commission was particularly impressed by the strong focus on **gender studies, media studies and language & knowledge**, highly current areas of study to which the Italian studies section has made an indispensable contribution.

Last, but not least, the discontinuation of the Italian Studies programs at this particular time would send **problematic political signals**: not only have the German Chancellor and the Italian

Prime Minister recently agreed to strengthen cultural cooperation between Germany and Italy, but Italy is also the **theme and guest country** of the **Frankfurt Book Fair in 2024**.

We feel Italian Studies is an essential part of our university. But to be clear, we are not suggesting that we simply ignore the budgetary issues of the institution: We want to meet the university board halfway and play our part in balancing the budget deficit, but not at the cost of wiping out the entire section. Hence, we are currently developing a model to preserve Italian studies. We will present this model to the university board later in June this year – and until then, we aim to gain as many supporters as possible.

We hereby would like to ask for your help in our efforts to keep Italian studies at Humboldt University. What can you do? Sign our protest letter on [change.org](https://chnng.it/bvxRmGtcTK) (<https://chnng.it/bvxRmGtcTK>)

Please come to our **Dies Italicus**, a day of support for our Italian Studies section, on **June 26**, with the slogan **“La Humboldt siamo (anche) noi: In support of Italian Studies at Humboldt University”**. The current program of this day and further information can be found here: <https://www.romanistik.hu-berlin.de/de/aktuelles/dies-italicus-am-xxx>

If you would like to show your support during this day by giving a short speech, especially if you are a colleague from Germany or abroad, a press representative, a board member of a cultural institute, museum, concert hall, or one of the professional and didactics associations, a writer or artist, a member of an academy, publisher, or business enterprise with a connection to Italy, please don't hesitate to contact us, ideally by 9 June 2024, by sending an email to Esther.Schomacher@hu-berlin.de.

Furthermore, you can express your support for our cause to in a **letter to the President of Humboldt University**, Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal. You are welcome to refer to the facts presented here in your letter.

Please send this letter by email to praesidentin@hu-berlin.de.

Your help, in whatever way it is expressed, will be crucial for us.

With thanks,
The Romance literatures and linguistics department of
Humboldt Universität zu Berlin