



Integration camp in Zakopane in 2018

COLLEGIUM INVISIBLE

INVISIBLE – YET IMPORTANT

The mission of Collegium Invisibile is to foster master–student relationships that allow talented students to learn directly from outstanding scholars and to become tutors for future generations. Our history demonstrates that this approach works.

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This year marks the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Polish Collegium Invisibile, an elite scientific association whose primary mission is to support talented students through intergenerational scientific cooperation. Every year, approximately 20 students from Polish universities

become members of the Collegium. Candidates are selected through a two-stage recruitment process, which includes a written application and an interview.

Once admitted, students work under the guidance of prominent, experienced scholars and also take on the role of tutors to secondary school students. Master–student relationships are established between individuals from different locations, schools, and universities, creating a network of academic connections independent of the existing institutional framework. Contacts between tutors and their pupils are highly individualized, leaving no room for the stagnation of outdated teaching methods.



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The Olympic Village
in Kraków in 2018



COLLEGIUM INVISIBLE

Over the past three decades, hundreds of talented students have passed through the Collegium, and the value of this institution is demonstrated above all by the fact that many alumni now play an important role in Polish science.

Excerpts from the History of the Collegium

The idea of invisible collegia originated in Hungary, where the first institution of this type was established. The Polish Collegium was founded in 1995 as the third such institution, after the Hungarian and Romanian examples. The founding organization was the Tadeusz Kotarbiński and Ludwig von Mises *Wiedza i Działanie* Foundation, financially supported by the Open Society Institute, the Stefan Batory Foundation, the Educational Enterprise Foundation, the Open Society Foundations and the Higher Education Support Program (ESP). The initiator of the Polish Collegium and its first director was Wojciech Gasparski, professor of praxeology and student of Tadeusz Kotarbiński.

The Latin name *Collegium* was intended to evoke the idea of British invisible colleges – informal gatherings of science enthusiasts in the 17th century. The “invisibility” of the institution was reflected, among other things, in the fact that it had no permanent headquarters and no regular classes were held. Students of the Collegium, recruited from talented

candidates across Poland, worked individually under the guidance of tutors – outstanding scholars whom they could choose from the faculty of any university. This structure provided a unique opportunity to break down geographical and institutional barriers in establishing master–student relationships.

After its first few years of operation, the Polish Collegium underwent a form of transformation: it became independent from its founding institution and, in 1999, reconstituted as an independent association. A term-based board, elected by and from among the Collegium members, became its supreme authority. A Scientific Council was also established, headed by the incumbent rector of the University of Warsaw. The first chairman of the board was Dariusz Jemielniak, now Vice President of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Editor-in-Chief of *Academia* and author of an article in this issue, see p. 90 – editor’s note). Rector Piotr Węgleński was appointed the inaugural chairperson of the Scientific Council, while Jacek Jadacki became its first secretary (since 2005, an honorary member of the Collegium).

Subsequent changes in the functioning of the Collegium were no longer revolutionary in nature but primarily aimed at adapting the institution to the evolving dynamics of the academic environment and broader cultural context. Universities were increasingly breaking down barriers between disciplines, and the rise of interfaculty programs, emerging at an increasing number of institutions, became a form of competition for the Collegium. Geographic barriers became irrelevant due to the advent of the Internet and enhanced student mobility. As a result, the Collegium expanded a structure known as the “pyramid of knowledge.” On one hand, doctoral students began to be admitted to the Collegium; on the other, its graduates became increasingly involved in tutoring and teaching talented secondary school students. A key role in this was played by the partnership with the Polish Association for Gifted Youth (formerly the Polish Children’s Fund – see more on pages 16–19 – editor’s note). Since then, gifted secondary school students have been placed under the individual supervision of Collegium students, who also organized summer camps for younger peers.

The next steps in the development of the Collegium’s structure included the inclusion of natural and medical sciences among its fields of study – originally, only students from the humanities, social sciences, and economics were eligible for membership – and the establishment of new academic partnerships. Currently, in addition to the University of Warsaw, these partnerships include, among others, the Jagiellonian University and Nicolaus Copernicus University. The establishment of a partnership with the Polish Young Academy at the Polish Academy of Sciences has also proven beneficial.

Today, the Collegium has several hundred members, operates as a non-profit organization, and has been recognized as a charitable institution since 2009. As a result, anyone can support its activities by donating 1.5% of their income tax.

Collegium Invisibile Programs

A central element of Collegium Invisibile's activities since its inception has been scientific tutoring. This program is based on the master-student relationship between renowned researchers in Poland and abroad and Collegium Invisibile students. As part of this program, a Collegium student establishes contact with a selected researcher in the field of interest and develops an individual research project under their supervision. The form of the tutorial varies depending on the specific requirements of each field. The work culminates in an annual essay or research report, which the student presents during one of the Collegium's science camps. To date, over 500 tutorials have been conducted within Collegium Invisibile, during which students have worked under the supervision of more than 250 prominent Polish and international scientists.

For many years, Collegium Invisibile has also been developing the First Tutor program, which enables gifted secondary school students – scholarship holders of the Polish Association for Gifted Youth – to engage in individual research activities under the supervision of Collegium student-tutors. The outcome of the program is scientific work, presented – similarly to essays and research reports in the scientific tutorial – during the annual summer camps. To date, 250 secondary school students have benefited from this initiative, with 170 Collegium student-tutors providing support and guidance.

A special type of a science camp for winners and finalists of secondary school knowledge competitions is the so-called Olympic Village. This initiative stems from the tradition of Summer Schools organized by the Collegium since 1999, with the first edition of the Olympic Village held in 2008 in Białowieża. In addition to classes conducted by Collegium members, the Olympic Villages program also features guest lectures and cultural events. Classes are held in small seminar groups, aimed not only at transferring knowledge but also at fostering critical thinking skills and developing research competences.

To date, more than 200 winners and finalists of secondary school knowledge competitions have participated in 10 editions of this program. This year's Olympic Village took place at Wawel Castle, where participants had the opportunity to explore, among other things, lesser-known areas of the castle and learn about the history and culture of Kraków in an unconventional way.

A similar form of support for young science enthusiasts is the Summer School, organized and run by Collegium student-members for the beneficiaries of the Polish Association for Gifted Youth. Courses and workshops conducted by Collegium members are held at the Poznań Bishops' Palace in Ciążeń, owned by the Adam Mickiewicz University. To date, 20 Summer Schools have been organized, involving approximately 150 Collegium Invisibile members and several hundred high school students. Twice a year, in spring and autumn, camps are also organized for the Collegium Invisibile students themselves. These camps combine scientific and social dimensions, providing opportunities to present and discuss research findings as well as to foster personal relationships among Collegium members.

An important initiative of Collegium Invisibile is the so-called Invisible Colloquia – expert debates addressing key social issues of the modern world. Prominent scholars from around the globe are invited to participate in these events. To date, 19 debates have been held across six editions of this program. They are complemented by the Young Scientist Workshop, a training program for Collegium students focused

Collegium Invisibile has developed a structure known as the pyramid of knowledge.

on conducting research, applying for grants, and preparing public presentations. The latest initiative of Collegium is the "(In)Visible" podcast – a series of conversations led by Collegium members popularizing science, available on various podcast platforms.

Future Perspectives

The ongoing activities of the Polish Collegium Invisibile challenge the stereotypes of ephemeral enthusiasm. Unlike other institutions of its kind in Europe, the Collegium has not only sustained its efforts but continues to enrich them. This success is the result of the convergence of two positive tendencies: on one hand, the energetic drive of young people toward knowledge that transcends narrow specialization, and on the other, the sense of responsibility among many members of the Polish academic community for shaping the direction of social life. As long as these trends persist, the Collegium has a promising future, and the impact of this "invisible" institution will continue to grow. ■

Further reading:

Website of Collegium Invisibile:
<https://www.ci.edu.pl/>

Podcast "(Nie)widzialny"
((In)visible podcast):
<https://www.ci.edu.pl/podcast-niewidzialny/>