

Graduation Ceremony 2023

June 29th, 2023 | Congratulations by the President

Dear Graduates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 2023 graduation ceremony of the University of Potsdam.

Dear graduates, a world of opportunities is now open to you. Use the knowledge and skills you have acquired to pursue your goals and realize your dreams. Be open to new perspectives, because life often holds surprises. Stay curious and inquisitive, and maintain your passion for what is important to you.

We universities are committed to the common good. We take responsibility for ensuring that the public funds invested in us are put to good use. And we must always make it clear that these tax dollars represent an investment in a future in which you, dear graduates, and the generations to come, can lead happy and fulfilling lives - just as many of those who came before you were able to do.

Now many of you will say: Sure, that goes without saying! But that is not true. Many of those who are in charge today do not have such rosy memories of their time at our universities. They studied at times when overcrowded lecture halls, inadequate teaching methods and poor supervision were the order of the day. In many of these respects, we universities have clearly improved, not to mention our international visibility and research strength, and I hope, dear graduates, that you have noticed this. We want to continue along this path - because it serves the common good.

In this context, cutting-edge research at universities must also be further strengthened. In Mainz, we have seen with BioNTech what can become of university research and its intelligent funding, which was provided there by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Many universities - including the University of Potsdam - are currently preparing intensively for the next round of the Excellence Strategy, which will promote precisely this kind of cutting-edge research, which in turn forms the breeding ground for flourishing start-up ecosystems and for transfer to society.

As far as teaching is concerned, digitization and AI tools such as ChatGPT bring with them all kinds of challenges - which, however, must be perceived not as threats but as opportunities. With a high-quality, tuition-free (!) teaching program, Germany is highly attractive as a place to study, and this will help attract even more highly qualified young people from all over the world to Germany, hopefully including people who are interested in teaching. Even if we universities are not to blame for the shortage of teachers, we will certainly not shirk our responsibility here, but will make our contribution as places of teacher training and - very importantly - *ongoing* teacher training.

For all of this, we need digital administrative structures and sustainable, functional buildings. University construction takes far too long with the current structures - here we also need to think about the building authority of universities and about public-private partnerships. In my

view, a digital pact for universities and a new law to promote university construction are overdue - agreements that place equal responsibility on the federal and state governments.

I recently attended a conference on governance and abuse of power. Numerous participants reported bitter experiences of discrimination. Here, we university administrations are called upon to create and strengthen structures that prevent and, if necessary, swiftly punish the abuse of power. As far as equality is concerned, we have been able to increase the proportion of women professors in Potsdam from 24 percent to over 40 percent in the last 10 years, and we are even at around 50 percent for junior professorships and W2 professorships. In principle, it must be a matter of course to anchor equality in the central and decentralized governance structures, also in symbiotic connection with the topic of diversity.

Some of my colleagues may loudly beat the drum for their university or type of university, but they occasionally lose sight of the big picture. The same goes for various representatives of the unions, employers' associations, teacher education, postdocs ... I could continue this list for a long time. Of course, I understand that they have their own well-being and that of their respective clientele in mind. But the decisive factor must ultimately be the functionality and productivity of the system as a whole. Because the clientele of all of us who are employed in the public sector is already hidden in the term: It is the *public*, i.e. the common good, of this and future generations.

I would also like to pass this on to you, dear graduates. Even if the majority of you will not be working in the public sector, you should - we should - all feel committed to the common good. Because without a functioning, democratically organized community, without functioning schools, universities, public authorities, cultural institutions and businesses, it is all for nothing. Only a functioning community, one to which we must all make our contribution, guarantees that people will be able to realize their potential and their dream of happiness in life.

You, dear graduates, can be proud of having earned your bachelor's, master's or even doctoral degrees at our university. For this, I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart. Now you are entering a new phase of life. An exciting future lies ahead of you. I wish you health, success, and all the best for the rest of your life. May your professional and personal dreams come true.