

## First-Semester Welcome 2020

### President's Speech

"Yes, thank you very much, Ms. Engel. And thank you to the musicians as well for playing one of my favorites, "Sunny", right at the beginning. I am very happy that we were still able to have a welcome event for first-semester students under these unusual circumstances. I believe these things are very important. I am very thankful to you, dear first-semester students, dear students, for joining us in this format. This way, we can send you off to a good start despite the circumstances. I would also like to thank the contributors sitting in front of me now and the contributors joining us online. I see a lot of ladies and gentlemen from the AStA in the room. We also have the former mayor of the city of Potsdam here, who will talk to you later and the current mayor Mike Schubert will be one of the guests to join us online. Thank you all for giving this unusual format a chance.

So, welcome to the winter semester 2020/2021. You know that the coronavirus situation is unpleasant, but the University of Potsdam has nevertheless made the decision not to go with a purely digital semester.

In our view, it is of the utmost importance for you, dear first-semester students, that we can meet and get to know you in person, that you familiarize yourself with our campuses. But it is also important for higher semesters, of course, to stay in touch. Spending half a year sitting on your sofa, that really can't be the solution. That there is still a lot of interest in studying in general and a lot of interest in studying in Potsdam, in particular, that is what our once again impressive figures show this year. I want to present to you, dear first-semester students and dear guests, the latest figures on this first semester. For this winter semester, approximately 5,250 students enrolled for the first semester of a degree program, of which 3,100 were enrolled for their very first semester in higher education. This means that approximately 60% of first-semester students come to the University of Potsdam directly from high school, from abroad, or following their vocational training or a voluntary year of social service. And of course we want you, despite the circumstances, to be able to experience this academic life that we want to offer you here, in terms of content but also socially, as much as possible, even under the difficult conditions that we are all facing.

I think you have made a good choice. There have been many positive developments at the University of Potsdam these last few years. Of course, that's what a President has to say, but I am also purposefully saying this with regard to the many colleagues, employees and, by now, 22,000 students who make crucial contributions to our academic life. 22,000 students is a new record. To be completely honest, we have 21,806 students today, but in our experience, more will slowly but steadily join us due to late enrollment etc. so that, this year, we will most likely pass the threshold of 22,000 students for the first time. Growth isn't everything, but I think it shows that the University of Potsdam is on the right track and is in high demand when it comes to the number of applications, because each and every one of you who was admitted, dear first-semester students, has won a tough competition with, on average, 6 applications per available spot at a university, even in this COVID year.

A few more figures: We are very happy with the share of women in Potsdam, with 57% of female students, which is also very high if you compare it to other federal states. The proportion of students from abroad has also developed the way we intended, that is to say, upwards. We have about 10% of students from abroad, which was not an easy thing in COVID times, since we didn't know how international students and prospective students would react to the difficult situation.

As a matter of fact, there was a small decline here compared to last year, but overall, we were able to continue our international quality. The Russian Federation has the largest share, by the way, followed by Turkey with 171 students, then India, France, Italy and China.

A few more remarks for our students, since it is surely interesting to know where you all come from. If you were sitting here in front of me, I could ask you in person, but that is not possible unfortunately. But we looked at that and it's interesting that about 31% (1,005) of our new students

come from Brandenburg, in this case  $\frac{1}{4}$  from Potsdam, which shows that as the largest university in Brandenburg, we are of course also there for local young people, but not only for them. Of course, we also want to get motivated young people from all over the world to Potsdam, so they can study here and maybe even stay here after they are done studying. About 30% of our students come to Potsdam from Berlin. About 15% come from outside Germany, 11% from the western and 8.7% from the eastern states of Germany. Where do our students live? That's another interesting figure. Berlin is surely still an attractive place to live for students, even though it is not as low-priced as it used to be a couple of years ago. Nevertheless, it looks like this will be another year where about half our students live in Berlin, 37% in Brandenburg, above all in Potsdam and 12% are a bit more scattered about.

Dear students, what subjects are you studying? As you know, we have seven faculties at this university. The larger faculties also have the largest share of first-semester students.

898 first-semester students study at the Faculty of Science, 769 at the Faculty of Arts, 519 at the Faculty of Human Sciences, including subjects like Psychology, Cognitive Sciences, and many teacher-training programs. 472 are at the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, 355 at the Law Faculty and 104 at the Digital Engineering Faculty, which we operate together with the Hasso Plattner Institute. There are no enrollments yet, as planned, in the Faculty of Health Sciences, which is still being set up, but will soon enroll its own students. I only want to say a few words about Potsdam itself. It is a beautiful city. I'm not just saying this because the former mayor is sitting right in front of me. It is a city that has also seen a lot of wonderful developments in the last few years. It offers a lot of entertainment in the best sense of the word, the nature here is beautiful. But I am sure that many of you have researched this wonderful location. You'll soon see, you'll like it here. I say that as someone from Stuttgart, and I have to admit that Potsdam has a lot to offer also compared to southern Germany.

The University, founded in 1991, is on the right track, like I said. I don't want to go into detail, but we are on an intensive growth course, not just in terms of quantity, as already indicated by the number of students, but also in terms of quality with new degree programs being added. The important teacher-training programs are also still being expanded. We are also putting a focus on subjects where we are well-positioned internationally and are cooperating closely in all these fields with our neighbors, non-university research institutions like the Fraunhofer Institutes, the Max Planck Institutes or the Leibniz Institutes. That will not mean much to you at the moment, dear first-semester students, but in the course of your studies you will see how rewarding this environment can be. How wonderful it is, that Potsdam is a city of science.

Many of you, dear first-semester students, will surely take up student jobs at these institutes and may even work long-term in this science scene in Potsdam, which is closely linked to Berlin, of course.

There are once again many new degree programs this year, such as "Data Science", "Digital Health", and in its second year, "Embodied Cognition". We always keep our finger on the pulse of the time to see which topics are of societal relevance so that we can set up the respective degree programs. We are also on the right track when it comes to digitalization. Digitalization and internationalization are global societal trends that we also have to commit to as a university. So as you can see, there is a broad spectrum of focuses in terms of content and in terms of the environment of your studies. Today, we are on Am Neuen Palais campus, which was built as a castle by Frederick the Great about 250 years ago and which we get to use as an academic campus. But our other locations Rehbrücke, Golm, Griebnitzsee, are wonderful, too. No matter where you are enrolled, you will come to know and appreciate this campus in the next few years.

I hope you will be off to a good start here at the University of Potsdam and of course, in the wider Berlin - Potsdam area. I am sure you will feel right at home here, even though, due to the pandemic, the first few weeks and months will not go as we would all like them to go. But we are doing our best and I am sure that it will work out. I will get to know many of you in the years to come.

That is something I am looking forward to. Thank you very much."