

Awards and Honors (1/2026)

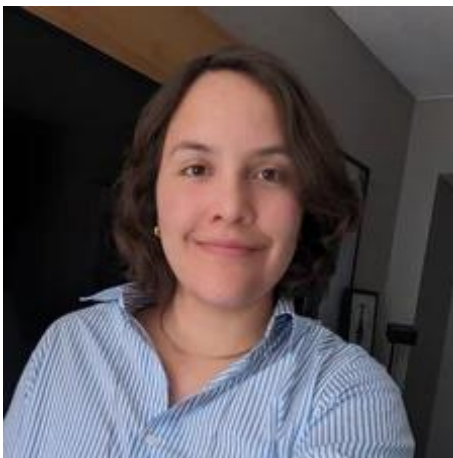


Prof. Dr. Florian J. Schweigert was honored with the PTE Award for Internationalization by the University of Pécs in Hungary.

With this award, the university recognizes Schweigert's contributions to internationalization in connection with the establishment of the EDUC program. Schweigert served as president of EDUC, the European Digital UniverCity, from 2019 to 2024. The alliance brings together eight

universities in seven European countries and creates an international education and research space for students, faculty, researchers, and staff. The focus is on digitalization, inclusion, mobility, and European cooperation, with the University of Potsdam serving as EDUC's coordinating institution.

Florian Schweigert holds the Chair of Physiology and Pathophysiology of Nutrition and serves as Vice President for International Affairs, Alumni, and Fundraising at the University of Potsdam. His research focuses on human and animal metabolism and the function of fat-soluble vitamins. (Photo: Csontos Szabolcs)



Sara M. Vallejo-Bernal was awarded the 2025 Outstanding Student and PhD Candidate Presentation (OSPP) Award.

This award from the European Geosciences Union honors exceptional posters by students and doctoral candidates on their research projects. Vallejo-Bernal was recognized for her poster presentation titled "Atmospheric Rivers as Interacting Elements of the Earth System: A Complexity Science Perspective." In it, she visualized her research on how atmospheric rivers—thousands of kilometers long bands of highly saturated water vapor in the troposphere—contribute to

heavy rainfall events and landslides.

Sara M. Vallejo-Bernal earned her Ph.D. in 2025 from the Institute of Geosciences at the University of Potsdam and is currently a visiting researcher at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Earth System Science and Remote Sensing at the University of Leipzig. (Photo: Private)



Valeriya Denisova was awarded the 2025 Better World Award.

The prize is presented annually by the Universitätsgesellschaft Potsdam e. V. and Land Brandenburg Lotto GmbH and comes with a cash prize of 3,333 euros. The Better World Award honors young researchers whose work contributes to the advancement of the community. In her master's thesis, Denisova demonstrated that "Ulva compressa," a type of seaweed

found in the North Sea, can be cultivated in a saline groundwater spring in Brandenburg. In doing so, she has contributed to the production of alternative protein sources inland, a process that also sequesters carbon dioxide and requires very little land and no freshwater.

Valeriya Denisova, who was born in Yekaterinburg, studied nutritional science at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the University of Potsdam. Her master's thesis was written as part of the BMBF-funded "food4future" project, which is coordinated by the Leibniz Institute for Vegetable and Ornamental Crops (IGZ) e.V. (Photo: Sigrid Reede)



Prof. Dr. Thorsten Wagener received the John Dalton Medal by the European Geosciences Union (EGU).

The medal is named after the English naturalist and pioneer of modern chemistry, John Dalton, and is awarded for outstanding research in the field of hydrology. The EGU is honoring Wagener for his groundbreaking contributions to the analysis of hydrological systems and the process-based evaluation of hydrological models.

Thorsten Wagener studied civil engineering at the University of Siegen and Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands. After holding positions at the University of

Arizona (USA), Pennsylvania State University (USA), and the University of Bristol (United Kingdom), he has been the Alexander von Humboldt Professor for the Analysis of Hydrological Systems at the Institute of Environmental Sciences and Geography at the University of Potsdam since 2021. (Photo: Sandra Cava)



Prof. Dr. Jiska Classen has been awarded the Heinz Maier-Leibnitz Prize by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

The prize, which comes with a cash award of 200,000 euros, is presented in recognition of outstanding achievements by early-career researchers and is intended to encourage the recipients to continue pursuing their research careers.

Classen's research focuses on security and data protection in mobile and wireless applications such as iOS, Android, and IoT devices. Together with her team, she specifically

identifies vulnerabilities in widely used systems and helps to better secure them while optimizing the balance between usability and data protection. Classen has been a professor at the Digital Engineering Faculty of the HPI and the University of Potsdam since 2025.

(Photo: HPI/Nicole Krüger)



Prof. Dr. Axel Bronstert was awarded the 2026 German Hydrology Prize by the German Hydrological Society (DHG).

The DHG's German Hydrology Prize honors individuals who have had a significant impact on hydrology in Germany through their long-standing commitment to hydrological research and teaching, as well as through outstanding research achievements. For more than 20 years, Bronstert has been researching the effects of climate change and human interventions on the water cycle and how these are linked to hydrological extremes.

Axel Bronstert earned his Ph.D. in 1994 from the Technical University of Karlsruhe and subsequently spent research periods in Japan, Thailand, and Australia. He began working at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in 1995 and served as a lecturer at the Technical University of Berlin and the Free University of Berlin before being appointed professor of hydrology and climatology at the University of Potsdam in 2000. (Photo: Tobias Hopfgarten)



Dr. Haci Cevik was awarded the 2026 "Voltaire Prize for Tolerance, International Understanding, and Respect for Diversity."

Sponsored by the Friede Springer Foundation and carrying a prize of 5,000 euros, the Voltaire Prize is awarded annually to researchers who advocate for academic freedom and the right to freedom of expression. Haci Cevik received the prize for his advocacy on behalf of the marginalized Kurdish and Syrian minorities in Turkey. The award also recognizes his courage in publicly addressing these issues in a politically repressive context such as

Turkey's.

Dr. Haci Cevik studied political science and migration studies in Turkey and has since focused on ethnic politics, Kurdish studies, diaspora formation, and the everyday dynamics of identity and belonging. Cevik earned his doctorate at the University of Potsdam and is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Humboldt University in Berlin. (Photo: Kevin Ryl)



Dr. Elisabeth Kaneza received the Federal Cross of Merit by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

The Federal Cross of Merit, the highest honor awarded by the Federal Republic of Germany for services to the common good, recognized Kaneza for her commitment to equality and anti-racism, as well as her resilience throughout her personal journey.

After completing her studies at Maastricht University and the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, she earned her doctorate from the Faculty of Law at the University of Potsdam, focusing on the rights of Black

people. In 2013, she founded the Kaneza Foundation for Dialogue and Empowerment e.V. with the goal of actively shaping social change and contributing to the promotion of human rights and diversity in Germany. (Photo: Tobias Hopfgarten)



Dr. Joseph Whittingham has received the Dissertation Award from the Berlin Physical Society (Physikalische Gesellschaft zu Berlin e.V.).

Whittingham was honored with the award for his doctoral dissertation, in which he addressed two fundamental questions in modern extragalactic astrophysics: the role of magnetic fields in the merger of disk galaxies and the physical processes leading to the formation of radio relics in the outer regions of galaxy clusters. Both topics are crucial for understanding the evolution of cosmic structures.

He completed his dissertation under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Christoph Pfrommer at the Leibniz Institute for Astrophysics Potsdam (AIP) and at the University of Potsdam. (Photo: AIP / Tilo Bergemann)



Prof. Dr. Isabelle Penning and **Carolin Hammer** have received the LeLa Award from the Federal Association of Student Laboratories.

With this award, the association recognized the work of the Teaching and Learning Laboratory for Inclusive Technical Education (LLiT), which was initiated by Isabelle Penning. The LLiT has created a workshop tailored to the needs of people with disabilities. It also serves as a place for research on how inclusion can be practically implemented in everyday classroom settings. The LeLa Prize is endowed with 40,000 euros and is awarded annually to the

best teaching and learning laboratories in Germany.

Isabelle Penning has been an assistant professor of didactics in economic and technical education in an inclusive context, with a focus on cognitive development (lower secondary

level), at the University of Potsdam since 2021. Carolin Hammer is a research assistant and lecturer at the LLiT. (Photo: Hermann Pentermann)



Professor Dr. Adam Bodnar, LL.M., was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Faculty of Law of the University of Potsdam.

With this honor, the Faculty of Law recognized both Bodnar's scholarly work in the fields of fundamental and human rights as well as Polish and comparative constitutional law, and his outstanding commitment to upholding and restoring the rule of law in Poland.

Adam Bodnar is a professor of law at SWPS University in Warsaw, where he teaches and conducts research on the rule of law, human rights, and constitutionalism. In 2023, he was elected to the Senate of the Republic of Poland and serves as a member of the Senate Committee on Emigration and Contacts with Poles Living Abroad, as well as the Senate Committee on the Rule of Law and Human Rights. (Photo: Ernst Kaczynski)



Professor Dr. Ralf Metzler was admitted as an elected foreign member to the Venice Academy of Sciences, the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti.

The Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti consists of a natural sciences section and a humanities section. The Institute's membership comprises regular, corresponding, and foreign members. The Institute regularly appoints new members, who are nominated by the Italian Minister of Culture.

Prof. Dr. Ralf Metzler studied physics at the University of Ulm, where he also earned his doctorate. Since 2011, he has been a professor of theoretical physics at the University of Potsdam. (Photo: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti)



Professor Dr. Sylvie Paycha was elected to the Leibniz Society.

The election was in recognition of her outstanding scholarly achievements across a broad spectrum of mathematical disciplines. Prof. Paycha has also made significant contributions to the international scientific community in a variety of ways, particularly through project development, securing external funding, and her involvement in international mathematical societies.

Sylvie Paycha earned her Ph.D. from Ruhr University Bochum and completed her habilitation at Louis Pasteur University in Strasbourg. She has been a professor of analysis at the University of Potsdam since 2011. (Photo: ZIM)



Dr. Johannes Gurke was honored with the Transfer Prize.

The Transfer Prize is awarded annually as part of the University of Potsdam's New Year's reception. With this award, the University of Potsdam and UP Transfer GmbH honor researchers who are committed to transferring knowledge and technologies into society.

Johannes Gurke studies photochemical processes—chemical reactions triggered by light—and how these can be applied in, for example, brain research, neurosurgery, and the development of new medications. He earned his Ph.D. from Humboldt University of Berlin, was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Cambridge, has been a research associate at the University of Potsdam since 2022, and currently heads the research group “Applied Photochemistry and 3D Bioelectronics.” (Foto: Kevin Ryl)