

New Year's Reception 2022



Welcome Address

Minister Dr. Manja Schüle (Ministry of Science, Research and Culture)

Dear President Günther,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nobody likes clichéd phrases. But sometimes they can become very meaningful, for example in times of crisis. There is one in English, for example, popular for invitations: "Your presence is present enough". The play on words also works in German.

Indeed, we need to recognize on a daily basis: Every shared moment is a gift. For two years now, we could no longer take it for granted. This New Year's reception of the University of Potsdam also takes place in a hybrid format. Screens and streams, for example, have proven to be a blessing: It's hard to imagine how things would have turned out without virtual alternatives.

I would like to talk about both: Your deep commitment during the pandemic and the promise of digitalization in research and academia.

Before that, as befits a new year, a brief look back – but one that says a lot about the character of this university. Let's consider the Am Neuen Palais campus: breathtaking and magnificent, on the picturesque edge of Sanssouci Park. What did we open there last August, in the presence of the Federal President and the Minister President? A European Center for Jewish Scholarship. The School of Jewish Theology is now under the same roof as the two rabbinical seminaries, the Abraham Geiger College and the Zacharias Frankel College – a modern building with a synagogue. An impressive illustration of how this university preserves space and creates space. The University of Potsdam is a place as rich in tradition as it is in boldness. These are not qualities that come together as a matter of course.

Brandenburg's largest university stands for uncompromisingly good teaching and research, for free international debate, critical dialogue, and cosmopolitan tolerance. So it is only logical that it also awards the Voltaire Prize for Tolerance, International Understanding and Respect for Difference in 2022.

And the University of Potsdam stands for progress: Even in supposed times of stagnation, incredible changes have happened here. With an impressive amount of creativity and flexibility, you have ensured that studying has always been possible in recent months, thanks to innovative teaching formats – even when there was no vaccine and we all stayed at home. And whenever it was conscientiously feasible, you made face-to-face teaching possible, as is currently the case. I have a faint idea of what this management demands of you, and I have great respect for your achievement. And you, dear students, also impress me: how you, against all odds, continue to pursue your studies, your future.

What will move the University of Potsdam in 2022? Well, first and foremost *your* work, dear audience, dear guests.

The University of Potsdam is a model university. We can quantify that; the keyword is rankings. Let's take just two examples, so as not to curb your impetus with too much praise: The worldwide THE ranking, compared 475 'young' universities (i.e. under 50 years of age) from 68 countries. The University of Potsdam came in at an impressive 30th place.

Let's delete the zero: Then we get the result of the start-up ranking of the Donors' Association for the Promotion of Sciences and Humanities in Germany: 3rd place for Potsdam nationwide, and even 1st place in the Berlin/Brandenburg metropolitan region. Why? Because many innovative minds come together here who are not only developing new ideas; they also have the courage to actually *tackle* them. As a student of political science, I experienced it here myself: the many working groups, flaming debates, focused research.

This year, we need all of that more than ever. It's good to know that the University of Potsdam is at our disposal – be it on issues of climate change, social participation, or globalization. With this in mind, I would like to say: Keep it up! But as Minister of Science, I also know that this is only possible with good framework conditions.

For the state government, it is also clear that digitalization is not an end in itself. It has already changed all our lives profoundly – and that is just the beginning. Together with the higher education institutions, we in the Ministry of Science have developed a joint digitalization agenda that affects all areas of academia. It's about education and training in an increasingly digital world – keyword 'digital literacy', but also about the gigantic potential of digital tools, for example through algorithms or the exchange of knowledge via open access. As far as Brandenburg's digitalization is concerned, it is higher education institutions that are making decisive progress.

The University of Potsdam is moving forward. Once again: model university, young, East German and, yes, quite sensational. Therefore, we all wish that it positions itself accordingly and that the ideas for possible future "clusters of excellence" are advanced successfully. Excellence has nothing to do with age or geographical location, but solely with outstanding performance.

We are currently witnessing how important empirically supported research is. Studies are like fog lights. The results they reveal allow us to have some foresight in the darkness of crises through which we might otherwise only stumble haphazardly. Crises in which, without these headlights, we might plunge blindly into the abyss. Forgive me for the dramatic imagery, but it does not seem like an exaggeration. COVID-19, climate change, geopolitical crises – how could we reasonably assess these challenges without reliable facts? We can't.

The pandemic has given a push to many things: Indeed, it clearly shows where cracks run through society. But cracks are not insurmountable trenches. A large majority of scientists and civil society players oppose hostile currents. Because sometimes even presence is not present enough. It is also necessary to act. Just like the University of Potsdam.

For this, I thank you from the bottom of my heart and wish us all a successful, happy, and good year 2022!