

**Speech by President Prof. Dr. Jutta Günther
at the New Year's Reception of unifreunde e.V. on January 30, 2023¹**

Dear Mayor,

Dear Senator Moosdorf,

Dear Councillor of State,

Dear Mr. Hoedemaker,

Dear Mr. Bell,

Dear Friends of the University,

Dear Colleagues,

Dear Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am excited to speak to you as President of the University of Bremen for this New Year's Reception. My first visit to unifreunde's New Year's Reception was in January 2015 – I had recently been appointed as a university professor and was very proud to be welcomed in such a magnificent setting. I would never have imagined at the time that I would one day stand here as the person welcoming the new appointees.

I have been in the leadership of the University of Bremen since the beginning of September, together with the Director of Finance and Administration, Frauke Meyer, and the new vice presidents. These are Michal Kuchera, Vice President for Research and Transfer; Maren Petersen, Vice President for Teaching and Studies; and Mandy Boehnke, Vice President for International Affairs, Academic Qualification, and Diversity.

We are pleased to stand at the head of this university with its lively history. It has been and remains a place for generating and transferring knowledge, a place

of independent teaching,

independent research,

and independent minds,

This was the motto of our 50-year anniversary celebration.

Knowledge, ladies and gentlemen, is the stuff of which progress is made.

Saying this immediately draws our thoughts to all the many challenges and unsolved problems of our times, which cannot be solved without technical and cultural progress.

The University of Bremen shared a whole lot of new knowledge this past year across its wide range of disciplines. Naming each area this evening would be impossible, but I do wish to name a few examples of the diversity of our research.

The Center for Industrial Mathematics made significant discoveries in the area of field cultivation that enable autonomous agricultural vehicles to improve both the efficiency as well as the sustainability of field cultivation.

Researchers from the Institute for Environmental Physics made significant developments to their climate forecasts thanks to research flights conducted over Canada together with DLR and other research partners, which were able to collect data on methane emission sources that had never

been available before.

The Synthetic Biology research group, together with academic partners from Bochum, Bonn, and Hamburg, was able to develop new sensors to better analyze serotonin dynamics in the brain. This is foundational research, which will improve mental health care in the future.

The Center of Labor and Politics analyzed ideologies and behavioral patterns regarding societal cohesion together with Bremen's citizens as part of the federally funded citizen science project GINGER.

The Institute for Public Health and Nursing Research provided research results about what makes a city dementia-friendly so that those affected can receive better support in their living environments.

A research project in linguistics showed that digital humor differs according to age and gender – across cultural boundaries. A researcher analyzed and prepared 1,000 memes with a group of international researchers for this project.

This example shows that our university has both ambitious researchers as well as amazing students.

I would therefore like to report on two highlights of student activities from this past year.

Students of cultural sciences took a look at the fundamental reasons for hate crimes and everyday racism and conducted a survey-based study together

with Bremen's police and the Council for Integration.

And our student Hadya Sleman received the DAAD Prize for outstanding achievements of international students studying at German universities for her excellent academic successes AND her social engagement in refugee aid.

If knowledge is the stuff of which progress is made, how do we use this to benefit society? Is it enough for us researchers to focus on the pure transfer of new knowledge? Is it sufficient for us lecturers to just relay specialist knowledge and prepare our students for their exams?

I think there is more to it! Our societal responsibility as a university encompasses more than releasing well-trained graduates into the labor markets and providing technical solutions, algorithms, or knowledge about social and cultural phenomena for politics and business. Our task as a university also involves considering the practical applications of research from the outset and advocating a responsible approach. Once knowledge has been transferred from research into practice, it can be passed on from one hand to another and quickly change its area of application.

Research into pathogens can lead to the development of immunizations, but also to the development of biological warfare. Demographic data can be used to develop means to support socially disadvantaged citizens, but can also be used to specifically discriminate against certain social groups.

Algorithms can utilize app users' individualized preferences for product

information and marketing purposes, but can also generate political filter bubbles that make people susceptible to manipulation.

It all depends on WHO applies new knowledge and technologies and WHAT their objectives and values are. However, this presupposes that knowledge is actually applied. Sometimes the knowledge necessary to solve societal problems is available, but it is not used.

The climate crisis is probably the best-known example of our time. For decades, researchers from all over the world have been warning about progressive global warming and the catastrophic consequences for humans, animals, and the environment. Although anthropogenic climate change is scientifically proven, and even though there are already many findings and technologies that could contribute to solving this problem, insufficient use is made of it. Or – even worse – the state of research is ignored, deliberately distorted, or denied.

In this case, scholars have the responsibility to continue sharing the existing knowledge with the public, repeatedly. At the university, we not only take on responsibility in research and science communication, but also in teaching.

Universities are not organizations where graduates are churned out on an assembly line and new knowledge is indiscriminately funneled in. The University of Bremen, ESPECIALLY the University of Bremen, is also a place of personal and scientific growth for young people.

Teaching young students not only scientific skills, theories, methods, and models, but also equipping them with the skills of good scientific practice from the outset is an urgent task that we take seriously. These include scientific integrity, the courage to learn from mistakes, the power of judgment, and the awareness that we will never know everything.

Democracy, human rights, and social justice are fundamental values that have always guided the University of Bremen. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all employees of the University of Bremen. Our collective success depends on each and every one of you!

I would also like to thank *unifreunde* very much for hosting the New Year's reception for the two universities and thus providing the means for us to welcome the newly appointed professors here in good tradition.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to the newly appointed members of the University of Bremen present today.

From the Faculty of Physics / Electrical Engineering:

Hartmut Bösch

Christoph Kulgemeyer

Meike List

From the Faculty of Mathematics / Computer Science:

Horst Hahn

Björn Niehaves

From the Faculty of Geosciences:

Ella Mara Schmidt

From the Faculty of Law

Pia Annika Lange

From the Faculty of Economics:

Benjamin Müller

From the Faculty of Social Sciences:

Thomas Kern

From the Faculty of Social / Cultural Anthropology and Cultural Studies:

Stephanie Geise

Tyler Zoanni

And from the Faculty of Educational Sciences:

Anna Moldenhauer

Frank Müller

Daniel Walter

I am pleased that you have chosen us, the University of Bremen. We are a university of short distances, of cooperation, a place where you can develop and contribute your ideas. Please use this both for your benefit AND that of the university.

Despite all the challenges in times of crisis, I look forward to the upcoming year with confidence. The University of Bremen is a strong community in a densely networked Bremen science system; it is regionally anchored and internationally networked.

In this context, we will courageously face the many challenges 2023 holds in store, and tackle new projects with commitment.

One of these is our participation in the Excellence Strategy. In addition to the existing MARUM Cluster of Excellence, three other initiatives will soon be submitted for review

in materials science,

in cognitive robotics,

and in the social sciences.

Our participation is thanks to the teams of researchers who have long been passionate about the necessary preparatory work, new ideas, and collaborations.

This year, after in-depth discussions, the university will also be preparing for a partial relocation to the city center. We plan to use the new location not only for courses, but also as a unique opportunity for the university and citizens to meet, as well as a venue for exhibitions and conferences. We look forward to

these opportunities and successful cooperation.

We are pleased to be advancing many research projects that contribute to the university's guiding principle – Sustainability, Climate Justice, and Climate Neutrality. One of these is the recently launched joint project BreGoS – *Bremen goes Sustainable*, the first research project in which the four state universities of Bremen are jointly involved. The focus is on real-laboratory-based activities for sustainability development at the universities. All status groups work together in the sub-projects, which is a novelty: Campus Goes Biodiverse performs studies on university green spaces and Campus Energy Laboratory performs measurements on university buildings. These are just two examples of how research, teaching, and university operations work hand in hand and produce new knowledge.

New knowledge – the stuff of which progress is made. We need this new knowledge for technical AND cultural progress. We need the knowledge in responsible hands. The University of Bremen is committed to this!

Thank you very much!