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Berlin University Alliance



BERLIN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE

DUZ SPECIAL
MAGAZINE FOR
SCIENCE AND
SOCIETY

Research Excellence
Knowledge Transfer
European Science Hub

CONTENTS

3 “WE WANT BERLIN TO BECOME EUROPE’S LEADING SCIENCE AND RESEARCH HUB”

Interview with Geraldine Rauch

| Interviewer: VERONIKA RENKES

5 ADDRESSING GRAND CHALLENGES BY WORKING TOGETHER AS ONE

The Grand Challenges

| Author: JENNIFER GASCHLER

6 GLOBAL APPROACH – EXCELLENT RESEARCH

**Global Collaboration:
Inclusive and Diverse**

| Author: JENNIFER GASCHLER

7 PROMOTING RESEARCH TALENT

BUA Talent Promotion

| Author: JENNIFER GASCHLER

8 FROM DIVERSITY TO OPEN SCIENCE

Knowledge Transfer

| by CHRISTINE AHREND, JENS AMBRASAT, FELIX HAMBITZER, ANNE NEUMANN and KATHRIN ZIPPEL

9 “LEADERSHIP AND PASSION”

Interview with Alexandra-Gwyn Paetz

| Interviewer: JENNIFER GASCHLER

10 THE BERLIN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE

**Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin,
Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-
Universität zu Berlin, Technische
Universität Berlin**

11 WHY WE BELIEVE IN THE BUA ...

Statements

| by ROBIN CELIKATES, MANFRED HAUSWIRTH,
NIELS PINKWART and GERTRAUD STADLER

12 BUA GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

PUBLISHER’S INFORMATION

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Prof. Dr. Geraldine Rauch

Mathematician Geraldine Rauch has been president of TU Berlin since 1 April 2022. On 1 November 2022, she also assumed the role of spokesperson for the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) with a tenure of two years. The BUA Board of Directors comprises the presidents of Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin.

“WE WANT BERLIN TO BECOME EUROPE’S LEADING SCIENCE AND RESEARCH HUB”

AS THE FIRST ALLIANCE OF THREE BERLIN UNIVERSITIES AND CHARITÉ – UNIVERSITÄTSMEDIZIN BERLIN, THE BERLIN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE (BUA) ACHIEVED MULTIPLE SUCCESSES IN THE COMPETITIVE ROUNDS OF THE GERMAN EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE RUN BY THE GERMAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND THE GERMAN LÄNDER (STATES). IN AN INTERVIEW, BUA SPOKESPERSON GERALDINE RAUCH DESCRIBES THE ALLIANCE AND ITS POTENTIAL. | Interviewer: VERONIKA RENKES

Professor Rauch, what sets the Berlin Excellence Alliance apart from other university alliances? What are the benefits in establishing the BUA Alliance in Berlin?

We have overcome our historically-grown differences and rather than acting solely in our own interests, we stand as an alliance – working together as one. Our aim is to build a lasting partnership and make Berlin Europe’s leading science and research hub. Through our collaboration efforts, we will make a valuable, long-term contribution to solving the biggest social challenges of our times. Ours is a unique endeavour, serving as a model for replication in Germany. The Alliance members each have a different research focus and different cooperation partners. It is this combination, this mix, that makes us unique and sets us apart from the rest. BUA collaboration makes us more efficient and effective, provides an additional source of support and ensures us greater impact and wider reach. United we are much stronger than when working alone.

“BUA COLLABORATION MAKES US MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE, PROVIDES AN ADDITIONAL SOURCE OF SUPPORT, AND ENSURES US GREATER IMPACT AND A WIDER REACH”

Berlin is home to a plurality of science disciplines and science stakeholders. It’s also characterised by the differing histories of the four BUA partners. Plus, the city is shaped by multiple non-university research institutions, a vast and successful start-up community, myriad political institutions and organisations which enable multifaceted, inspiring platforms for debate – not to mention its highly diverse population.

To what extent does the Alliance’s reach extend beyond Berlin’s borders and impact Germany’s science landscape as a whole?

Other cities planning similar alliances ask us for guidance regarding how we have structured the BUA. We are perceived both as a successful model for replication and – in our capacity as a tried and tested university alliance – as a valuable cooperation partner among internationally renowned universities abroad.

Partnerships with the universities of Oxford, Melbourne and Singapore are already established and working well.

What are the BUA's main goals and objectives, and which of your projects reflect them best?

Our main focus is placed on creating added value in our joint research efforts and our strategic planning. Added to this comes the substantive focus on the greatest challenges of our times – the Grand Challenges on which our member universities conduct joint transdisciplinary research and develop much-needed solutions. Two Grand Challenges we are already addressing are Social Cohesion and Global Health. We are currently in the exploration phase to name the Next Grand Challenge – number three. As part of this process, we're asking for input from civil society, including from students. We want them to tell us about the future issues they believe are important. This could almost be described as a new and revolutionary process. While researchers naturally want to decide their research topics for themselves, at the end of the day we researchers live and work as members of society and also on behalf of the society in which we live and work. This calls for research based on mutual dialogue and exchange – something we label knowledge exchange. We want civil society representatives to highlight the issues that are important to them. Ultimately, it's about establishing a process of mutual give and take – one that everyone can and should be actively involved in and shape. That process begins with the joint quest to identify the research topic to be addressed.

“IT'S WRONG TO ALLOW JUST THE OLDER GENERATION TO DICTATE BOTH THE RESEARCH DONE AND THE KNOWLEDGE CREATED FOR THE FUTURE. WHEN IT COMES TO KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE, WE MUST INCLUDE FUTURE GENERATIONS AND KEEP PATTERNS OF GENERATIONAL TRANSITION IN MIND.”

With the “Your topic for Berlin's top-level research” initiative, the BUA is seeking to identify the Next Grand Challenge for the Clusters of Excellence belonging to the Alliance. The initiative especially targets young people in Berlin. What was the reasoning behind this approach?

The Grand Challenges are topics that will shape our world in the coming decades whether we like it or not. This is especially the case for the future generations – our students and also our schoolchildren. That's why it's wrong to allow just the older generation to dictate both the research done and the knowledge created for the future. When it comes to knowledge exchange, we must include future generations in knowledge exchange and keep patterns of generational transition in mind. This is

why we're seeking dialogue and exchange with future generations today.

To achieve your goals, the BUA members cooperate with one another and also with non-university research institutions, regional and super-regional enterprise, and policymakers. Why is this important?

As scholars and scientists in various disciplines, we can create the conditions needed to reduce carbon emissions, ensure resources are sustainably managed and used, and develop resilience at both urban-rural level and for Germany overall. These

“WITHOUT BASIC RESEARCH, CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH CANNOT TAKE PLACE. EQUALLY, TRANSFERRING RESEARCH RESULTS TO SOCIETY IS PRECEDED BY A PROCESS OF TRIAL AND ERROR.”

problems cannot be solved by science and research alone. Policymakers are also called upon to create the legal conditions needed to enable urban development, mobility innovation and action to mitigate climate change. Added to this comes implementation by industry and business, and social acceptance of the measures that are planned. What we need is a common understanding in order to address and overcome the Grand Challenges we face. The BUA actively brings together actors and partners from science and research, government and administration, private enterprise and civil society to discuss the topics we need to address. These are the groups that must also thrash out the kinds of structures and research projects needed to enable implementation of appropriate measures and plans.

Science and research is a highly competitive, competition-driven field. You call for a new culture of collaboration – both within the science and research system and between science and society. How can this be achieved?

Unfortunately, our system is heavily geared to producing rapid and ideally excellent results, which essentially relies on acquiring third-party funding and publication of research findings. As researchers, we must constantly prove that the research we conduct is cutting-edge. But unless we conduct basic research, cutting-edge research cannot take place. Equally, transferring research results to society is preceded by a process of trial and error. When addressing major challenges such as climate change, decades-long research in a variety of disciplines is needed. If we only concentrate on where to obtain the next lot of researching funding and where we stand in the excellence stakes, we will never solve the diverse issues we are attempting to address. As the Berlin University Alliance (BUA), our joint and common mandate is to overcome this situation and take a collaborative approach in tackling the future challenges faced.

ADDRESSING GRAND CHALLENGES BY WORKING TOGETHER AS ONE

GLOBALISATION CALLS FOR INNOVATIVE, TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES AND SOLUTIONS. THIS IS WHY THE BERLIN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE (BUA) WORKS WITH A WIDE RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS TO THRASH OUT, PLAN AND SUBSEQUENTLY IMPLEMENT THE KINDS OF PROCESSES THAT ARE NEEDED. ONE CHALLENGE INVOLVED IN FOSTERING SOCIAL COHESION INVOLVES THE ISSUES OF EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD, CONDITIONS IN FOOD PRODUCTION AND FOOD AS A CULTURAL MARKER OF SOCIAL IDENTITY. AND IN ALL OF THIS, THE NOTION OF SOCIAL COHESION ALSO MEANS SHAPING THE FUTURE TOGETHER, AS FITTINGLY ILLUSTRATED IN THE PROJECTS OUTLINED BELOW.

| Author: JENNIFER GASCHLER

HOW FOOD FOSTERS SOCIAL COHESION

Prof. Peter H. Feindt, Professor of Agricultural and Food Policy at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, in conjunction with Prof. Martina Schäfer from Technische Universität Berlin and Dr. Klaus Jacob from Freie Universität Berlin, co-leads the research project on “Social cohesion, food and health: inclusive food system transitions.” (<https://www.ifst-berlin.de/>). As part of the project, a total of eleven working groups conduct systematic analysis of the inextricable links between social cohesion and the transformation of the agricultural and food systems, and with a view to greater sustainability, improved climate action and enhanced food-related health.

The BUA researchers come from a variety of different disciplines: political, social and food science, economics, veterinary medicine, human medicine, biology and food technology. In a first step, the project team developed a conceptual framework to integrate the vastly different research traditions into a single, interdisciplinary approach. Within this framework, six case studies were conducted. These looked at issues such as humane animal husbandry systems in the Berlin-Brandenburg region, social innovations for healthy, sustainable school meals, the creation of regional supply chains by means of consumer investment and the social impacts of the commercialisation of native vegetable varieties in Kenya. As Feindt reports, his research team tackled a specific research question: “What are the links between social cohesion and the transformation towards more sustainable and more healthy diets?”

For example, at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, one of the most important longitudinal studies on healthy diets and food is being conducted under the leadership of Prof. Knut Mai. The research team look at whether patients with pre-existing conditions can avoid secondary illnesses by making changes to their diets. Under the auspices of the Berlin University Alliance, the BUA research project on “Social cohesion, food and health” is able to build on that study. Using a questionnaire, the team explored whether people who perceive a great sense of social cohesion are more successful in changing their eating habits. “Our practice partners stem from a wide range of professional fields,” says project manager Feindt. “We believe this will enable

us to tackle the major challenges of our time in collaboration with members of the science and research community and with societal stakeholders overall.”

HOW PARTICIPATION WITH THE NEXT GENERATION CAN SUCCEED

The word participation is used to describe a complex process of integrating myriad different stakeholders into a plan or scheme. The differing scientific methodologies used are also applied in the Next Grand Challenge initiative (<https://www.bua-calling.de>). The initiative is currently in the research topic identification phase. Dr. Audrey-Catherine Podann, Head of the Office of Science and Society at Technische Universität Berlin and Advisor for Strategic Projects, explains why the BUA has decided to design this project phase jointly with the people of Berlin: “We want to look at differing perspectives to pinpoint the issues of scientific and societal relevance and explore new paths to knowledge creation.”

The process is divided into four phases: The first involved a public ideas competition. The BUA team travelled around Berlin and actively recruited Berlin’s youth – visiting schools, community centres and recreation clubs. Young participants then attended workshops over three weekends and also an ideas camp, where they worked with youth educators and BUA scientists to further develop their ideas. During that same period, the BUA invited researchers and students to provide input to the research topic identification process and to determining the research focus to be applied by the research team. On this basis, a range of topics looked at from different perspectives were collected and identified. These included climate change and specific topics concerning shaping lifestyles in the future – the future being 2030, when many participants will have reached the age of 25 or 30. The BUA will now group the topics into categories which the schoolchildren, students, scientists and civil society stakeholders will discuss in a forum they will attend in February 2023. The outcome from the forum will be used to identify the Next Grand Challenge research topic, conduct relevant research and develop much-needed approaches and solutions.

GLOBAL APPROACH – EXCELLENT RESEARCH

IN ITS RESEARCH WORK, THE BERLIN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE ADOPTS A GLOBAL APPROACH. THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS OF BUA PARTNERS FORM THE BASIS FOR FUTURE-FOCUSED RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN SCIENCE COLLABORATIONS WHERE THOSE INVOLVED ARE SEEN AS EQUAL PARTNERS. IN MATTERS CONCERNING THE GRAND CHALLENGES, THE GLOBAL SOUTH PLAYS A DECISIVE ROLE. THE BERLIN CENTER FOR GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT (BCGE) BRINGS TOGETHER GLOBAL ACTORS FROM A WIDE RANGE OF DISCIPLINES TO ARRIVE AT SUITABLE SOLUTIONS SUCH AS THOSE OUTLINED BELOW.

| Author: JENNIFER GASCHLER

HOW BERLIN SHAPES COLLABORATION WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH

“Internationalisation is becoming increasingly complex,” stresses historian Dr. Romain Faure, “while science and technology have emerged as an arena in which geopolitical confrontation occurs.” Working with the BCGE, the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) aims to support all BUA partners in navigating their international cooperation projects and in fostering additional cross-border and cross-continent collaboration. The BCGE assists by using reflective components such as discussion rounds and also training on topics including bilateral cooperation as equal partners and the application of science diplomacy. As the BCGE coordinator emphasises, it is hugely important to work with and alongside the Global South and not adopt a top-down approach by making decisions over its head – innovation transfer should not be seen as a one-way street running from the North to the South. In this context, Faure recalls a panel discussion with John Amuafi, a scientist from Ghana who conducts research into the opportunities and risks of science diplomacy, which he says left him highly impressed.



The Urban Mind App



HOW URBAN DEVELOPMENT IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH

The Grand Challenge research project on “Exploring and Designing Urban Density. Neurourbanism as a Novel Approach in Global Health” also looks at things from an international perspective. The interdisciplinary project team led by Prof. Mazda Adli and Dr. Joerg Fingerhut draws up what it calls a “city map of emotions”. “Using smartphones, we collect citizen science data. Users log into an app three times a day to describe their feelings, thereby enabling GPS data to be stored,” says Adli, head of “Affective Diseases” research at the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin.

The team retrieves additional information from an existing genetics database which they then break down geographically. The reasoning behind the project is that people who live in cities are at greater risk of developing mental illness. “In my research group, we work on the assumption that urban density coupled with isolation are among the drivers of social stress,” Mazda Adli explains. His researchers are thus looking at the kinds of measures that could be applied to counter such stress. In doing so, they analyse urban development interventions such as youth clubs, green areas and sports fields. Practice partners in Berlin include broadcasting company Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg, the Futurium House of the Futures, the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development, Building and Housing, and the German Center for Integration and Migration Research (deZIM). Focus is placed on young adults and people with migration backgrounds. After a pilot phase conducted in Berlin, the project will be expanded to take in cities around the world, among them Ibadan and Abeokuta in Nigeria, Beirut in Lebanon, Santiago de Chile in Chile and Melbourne in Australia. The aim, says Prof. Mazda Adli, is to develop a neurourbanistic theory. The researchers in this new field are looking for answers to the question of: “What should the city of tomorrow look like if it is to consider the human psyche? This is a pressing 21st century problem as cities become denser, megacities shoot up out of the ground, and proximity, anonymity and loneliness mutually overlap.

PROMOTING RESEARCH TALENT

THE ALLIANCE PARTNERS SEE THE BUA AS BERLIN'S TALENT INCUBATOR FOR CAREER PATHS IN SCIENCE. AND AS THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMMES SHOW, THEY ARE DEVELOPING JOINT STRUCTURES AND EXPANDING NETWORKS ACROSS EUROPE.

| Author: JENNIFER GASCHLER

HOW A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP ENABLES RESEARCH AND TEACHING EXCELLENCE

The Berlin University Alliance (BUA) promotes research collaboration that crosses both institutional and international borders. In 2017, the University of Oxford and the BUA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding which gave rise to an active, vibrant partnership. This makes the BUA the only all-university partner institution of Oxford University. "Berlin and Oxford thus form a strong axis for research and teaching. One that has global presence and reach," says Prof. Çiğdem İşsever, academic director of the Oxford-Berlin Research Partnership since January 2021. A professor of experimental high-energy physics at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HU), she describes the aim of the Berlin-Oxford collaboration thus: "We connect researchers across a wide range of programmes, enabling them to conduct research into scientific and social issues affecting people around the world." The Oxford-Berlin partnership programme takes in wide-ranging activities involving fields such as STEM, social sciences, the humanities and medicine. This includes the exchange of both early-career and established researchers between the two locations, the provision of support in joint projects and third-party funding applications, workshops, symposia and lateral teaching events. As Çiğdem İşsever explains, academic research is based on free knowledge exchange: "Without this level of exchange research development would simply stagnate." Her own career path testifies to that statement. After completing her studies in Germany, she was appointed as a Departmental Lecturer at Oxford University, where she is now a visiting scholar. The HU professor is also head of the particle physics group at DESY, a research centre of the Helmholtz Association located in Zeuthen on the outskirts of Berlin.

But apart from promoting exchange with renowned universities both in Europe and worldwide, the BUA also gives priority to promoting the research talents living in Berlin who have already

found a place among the Alliance partners. Promotion in this sense goes way beyond providing access to excellent teaching.

HOW JOINT QUALITY STANDARDS PROVIDE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AND PATHS

Promoting researchers not just in their scientific work but also in their personal development is a guiding principle of the BUA's Promoting Talent programme – promoting talent being one of the five key goals and objectives adopted by the Alliance. The BUA partners form an integrated research and career development landscape. "We want it to be accessible, inclusive and diverse," says Prof. Christoph Schneider, Vice President for Research at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and member of the BUA Executive Board. "With upwards of 200,000 students in all kinds of disciplines and more than 50 non-university research institutions, Berlin harbours vast potential for scientists wanting to further their careers."

The main objective of the Promoting Talent programme is to put quality standards in place and provide cross-sectoral opportunities for scientists in all career phases – from the doctoral entry phase to professorship. The programme portfolio thus comprises a training and qualification component for doctoral students and a Leadership Academy where experienced researchers can develop their leadership abilities and skills. "We want to play a role in shaping the transitional phases between the different career steps. And we especially want to enable researchers to develop and acquire the skills they need to be able to move up in their chosen careers," says Prof. Dr. Søren Salomo, Chair of Technology and Innovation Management at Technische Universität Berlin and spokesperson for the Promoting Talent steering committee. And as Dr. Daniel May, Managing Director of the Berlin Leadership Academy, explains, this sees the BUA institutions consolidating their expertise: "While our workshops are mainly designed to communicate good leadership ethics and skills, the idea behind the Berlin Leadership Academy is to bring participants from all four BUA institutions together under one roof." May believes this approach will give rise to a growing network that not only fosters a common understanding of leadership within the Berlin University Alliance, but also serves as a source of inspiration to explore new research ideas.



FROM DIVERSITY TO OPEN SCIENCE

Solving global challenges calls for an innovative knowledge transfer approach that is in keeping with the times. To foster exchange between top-level research and civil society where the two sides are seen as equal partners, the BUA develops and tests innovative strategies for use in multilateral knowledge exchange. Here are just two examples of how this is done.

HOW CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH AND SOCIETY INTERACT

In its “Fostering Knowledge Exchange” programme (<https://www.berlin-university-alliance.de/commitments/knowledge-exchange/index.html>), the BUA creates a network for multidirectional research and knowledge exchange, with Berlin as the hub. This forms the BUA's key interface with society, government and administration, industry and business, culture and excellent research conducted at regional, national and international level for the benefit of all. In this way, the BUA assumes responsibility for the transdisciplinarity of major research topics and works with stakeholders at all levels to develop sustainable solutions. This joint approach can only work when all involved are both seen and treated as equal partners, and with unwavering commitment from participants and decision-makers alike. To be successful, knowledge exchange calls for openness towards other stakeholders, such as the BUA transfer offices, thereby enabling new paths to be explored.

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Christine Ahrend, member of the BUA Fostering Knowledge Exchange Steering Committee and Head of the Chair of Integrated Transport Planning at Technische Universität Berlin

HOW DIVERSITY AND SOCIETY ARE INTERTWINED

It was no coincidence that, six years ago, the first two large-scale demonstrations held in protest against the Trump administration were largely sparked by scientists and women. When gender studies and critical “race” theories are attacked in a discriminatory way, it is not only the foundations of evidence-based diversity and gender research that are at stake, it is an attack on the freedom of science itself. This calls for notions of intersectionality to be pursued – the only way that diversity and gender measures can be truly inclusive. In the US, the concept of implied or unconscious bias and distortion has become a major vehicle in both diversity and gender policy – the logical conclusion being that evaluation processes can be designed more fairly and made more just in their implementation. Research has shown that this can be achieved through the application of research excellence criteria that is both standardised and transparent.

Prof. Kathrin Zippel, Ph.D., Einstein Professor of Sociology with a focus on gender studies, gave her inaugural lecture at DiGeNet on

the cross-cutting topic of diversity and gender equality. Zippel, who recently relocated from Northeastern University in Boston to Freie Universität Berlin, has also been involved in shaping and experiencing developments around diversity and gender in the US.

HOW RESEARCH CULTURE IS SHIFTING IN BERLIN

The Berlin Science Survey (BSS) takes the form of a trend study on cultural change in Berlin's research landscape. At regular intervals, researchers' experiences and impressions are surveyed, exploring issues such as research practices and research cultures. The topics looked at include research integrity, cooperation partnerships, knowledge transfer, approaches to open science, diversity and early career-based talent promotion. The BSS also takes in research policy and organisational measures. Its core focus explores the opportunities available to researchers with their differing subject-based cultures – not least in an effort to assess the effects of science policy management and control. The results of the BSS survey show that science policy management and control must give greater consideration to differing research contexts and varied subject-based cultures. If they fail to do so, undesirable outcomes will ensue, possibly to the detriment of the motivation of the scientists conducting research and the quality of their research and results.

Dr. Jens Ambrasat, Head of the Berlin Science Survey at the Robert K. Merton Center, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

HOW STUDENTS IN BERLIN CREATE AN OPEN SCIENCE PLATFORM FOR THEIR RESEARCH WORK

Berlin Exchange Medicine (BEM) is Germany's first open science journal for student research in medical science. Active country-wide and with its own open science think tank, BEM offers students a platform on which to publish their research results and receive feedback in the form of open peer review. Students can themselves become peer reviewers, thereby gaining valuable experience in research practice at an early stage. The aim is to provide a platform for student research, opinion and initiative, enabling students to experience science in an interprofessional arena and reflect on research practices currently in use.

Felix Hambitzer and Anne Neumann, Board members, Berlin Exchange Medicine e.V.



Alexandra-Gwyn Paetz

A business economist, Alexandra-Gwyn Paetz has been managing director of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) since June 2022. Her previous positions include Head of Strategic Development and Communications at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). Her current task is primarily to lead BUA's strategic and structural development in the direction of a platform for excellent research.

“LEADERSHIP AND PASSION”

ALEXANDRA-GWYN PAETZ, BUA MANAGING DIRECTOR, WANTS TO MAKE BERLIN AN INTEGRATED SCIENCE AREA FOR EXCELLENT RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONALLY-RECOGNISED STANDING. IN AN INTERVIEW, SHE DESCRIBES A TYPICAL DAY AT WORK.

| Interviewer: Jennifer Gaschler

Alexandra, why do you prefer to stand rather than sit at work?

Ah, have my colleagues been talking? Well, not only does the BUA office in Berlin-Mitte have height-adjustable desks, it also has glass office doors and people are naturally curious about the newest member of the team. That's an outcome from the pandemic. In online meetings, I prefer to stand as it ensures I adopt a better posture. And as those meetings generally happen back-to-back, I rarely get time to sit down in between.

The COVID-19 pandemic broke out just after you took on your role at the BUA. What effect did it have on operations?

Ensuring cohesion between the four academic institutions in a pandemic situation shaped by distance and working from home posed a tremendous challenge. In numerous online network meetings, we explored our identity as an alliance and brought the BUA team together in a virtual space. This year has been a fantastic year in terms of what we've achieved by adopting different event formats, both internally and externally. We came up with a whole portfolio of ideas, so rather than stopping us in our tracks, the pandemic simply forced us to rethink and alter our schedules.

The excellence proposal with which the BUA partners were successful in Germany's Excellence Initiative at the end of 2019 bore the title of "Crossing Boundaries toward an Integrated Research Environment". What conclusions have you come to after what are now three years with the BUA?

Naturally, the first step in making the vision of Berlin as an integrated research area a reality is to identify the historical boundaries between the various actors – be they the partners in the Alliance, academic disciplines, industry and business, civil society, or government and administration – and to explore those boundaries together to identify the ones we need to cross on the journey towards that shared vision. In this respect, I believe that the proposal for excellence charts the perfect course. But even so, I prefer to speak of “intersections” and to look at the scale of our own intersections and where they are located. I can cite many great examples, such as the online merger of the examination offices of the various BUA partners to form the BUA E-Assessment Alliance. These show that intersections

grow wherever we see a common need, enabling us to overcome challenges that could rarely be tackled by a single institution alone. Via the E-Assessment Alliance, in autumn we were able to conduct online checks to process university admissions for Ukrainian refugees.

How do you embed the BUA in Germany's capital, Berlin?

No other German research location has been able to attract as many clusters of excellence as Berlin – and no other German research location has created an excellence alliance. This isn't coincidental – the potential here in Berlin with upwards of 100,000 students and some 1,000 professors is immense. The success of the excellence initiative was and still is evident on a daily basis in the BUA's combined performance to which a wide range of actors contribute at Berlin City and also Berlin Senate level. For example, the Berlin Senate has created a public corporation to embed the BUA into a structural framework and thereby secure its future. In addition, we cooperate with research institutions, federal government, the worlds of culture and the arts, the start-up community, the technology transfer sector, organisations and associations, and many other stakeholders. During Berlin Science Week, we were able to showcase how our networking platform works and would welcome the opportunity to do this more often so we can further promote Berlin's international visibility as a research location.

How have you found working at BUA so far?

One thing I became immediately aware of in my very first meeting was that there are always at least five of us – a representative for each BUA member institution and an “independent” person who looks at things from a purely BUA perspective. This ensures that all standpoints are brought to the table, the challenge then being to manage the complexities involved in a practicable way. For the most part, collaboration rests on trust and mutual understanding, while concrete agreements are key. This means finding a common language and respecting the differing cultures involved, from medicine to engineering – all of which is driven by the fervent passion that goes into wanting to make Berlin a leading research hub.

THE BERLIN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE



CHARITÉ – UNIVERSITÄTS-MEDIZIN BERLIN

With around 100 clinics and institutes on four campuses and 3,099 beds, the Charité is one of the largest university hospitals in Europe and medical faculties in Germany. Research, teaching and patient care are closely interlinked. Charité educates upwards of 9,000 students in human medicine and dentistry as well as health sciences, nursing and applied midwifery. Its history dates back to 1710. In 2003 it became the joint medical faculty of Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Scientists and doctors work to advance future-focused trends in the field of medicine while meeting the strictest quality and sustainability standards. Charité focuses on the interplay between basic and near-to-patient research – both conducted in an interdisciplinary approach with national and international partners.

FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

Freie Universität Berlin is a young, highly dynamic, internationally-oriented top-level university. It was the only university in Berlin to receive an award in the Excellence Initiative run by the German federal and Länder (state) governments in 2007. This success was repeated in 2012, and in 2019 the university was awarded the distinction yet again – this time as part of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA). At Freie Universität, around 460 professors research and teach in a wide range of subjects covering both the humanities and social sciences, and the natural and life sciences. According to figures published by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Freie Universität is by far the most popular place in Germany for top researchers and students from abroad. One-fifth of the current 32,800 students and one-third of the approximately 3,650 doctoral candidates belong to this group.

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

Since its foundation, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HU) has provided a forum where culture, policymaking and civil society meet. Developing science and research in an interdisciplinary way and reflecting on both in the context of societal developments and trends is especially characteristic of HU. It is with confidence and pride that the city's oldest university lends this particular asset to the Berlin University Alliance (BUA). Projects on "Social Cohesion" and "Global Health" are just two of the BUA areas covered at the HU. While the HU's teaching and research programmes naturally include basic research subjects, its strengths lie, among many other areas, in ancient studies and philosophy, and also range from quantitative economics, theoretical biology and immunology, to materials, climate and sustainability research.

TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

Developing science and technology for the benefit of society is the focus at Technische Universität Berlin (TU Berlin). The range of services offered by its seven faculties represents a unique blend of natural and technical sciences with planning, economics, social sciences and the humanities. It makes it possible to consider and tackle pressing issues of the future as part of a holistic approach. As a member of the BUA, TU Berlin ranks among Germany's universities of excellence – it is the applicant university for the interdisciplinary clusters of excellence for "Unifying Systems in Catalysis", "Science of Intelligence" and "MATH+". Research proposals involving scientists from TU Berlin were also successful in the Grand Challenge Initiatives for the "Social Cohesion" research topic and the "Special Call: Pandemic Research". The President of TU Berlin has been the BUA spokesperson since November 2022.

WHY WE BELIEVE IN THE BUA ...



“In a society shaped by diversity and migration, science must find new ways of integrating the myriad, heterogeneous perspectives into what are still far too homogeneous environments in the university landscape. At the BUA, we play our part with research projects on issues such as transforming solidarities in which we seek solidarity-based answers to the crises of our time – and by promoting diversity and inclusion as part of our Diversity and Gender Equality Network.”

Prof. Dr. Robin Celikates, Professor of Social Philosophy and Anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin, and member of BUA’s interdisciplinary Transforming Solidarities research group

“When it comes to quality in research, the BUA helps me understand the very heterogeneous needs of – and also learn from – the various specialist disciplines. As a computer scientist working with Open Data/OpenX, understanding is both important and interesting, while learning helps me improve the quality of my own research. And in a positive way, it means I can avoid making the same mistakes while learning about new approaches to finding the solutions we seek.”

Prof. Dr. Manfred Hauswirth, Head of the Department of Open and Distributed Systems, Technische Universität Berlin, Member of the BUA Steering Committee for Advancing Search Quality and Value



“The BUA offers all four member institutions the chance to make teaching and studying future-proof. It gives students easier access to cross-discipline modules and programmes which take up BUA-related topics and can be counted towards their degrees. It’s also a testing ground for innovative learning formats which include students in research projects, thereby expanding their abilities and skills. For me, a key issue is digitalisation of teaching, which we can better drive when working together as one.”

Prof. Dr. Niels Pinkwart, Vice President for Teaching and Learning at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Spokesperson of the BUA Steering Committee for Teaching and Learning

“For me, the BUA is a great opportunity to create an internationally visible research area in Berlin. When talking to my international colleagues, they are rarely familiar with the individual universities here in Germany. But they can all relate to Berlin. In my research area, which covers health, gender and diversity, huge data gaps exist. More research on these issues is a truly joint task that we can tackle much better when working under the auspices of the BUA.”

Prof. Dr. Gertraud Stadler, Director of Gender-Sensitive Prevention Research in Medicine at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Member of the BUA Steering Committee for Diversity and Gender Equality



BUA Goals & Objectives

Fostering Knowledge Exchange

Promoting Talent

Advancing Research Quality and Value

Focusing on Grand Challenges

Diversity and Gender Equality

Teaching and Learning

Internationalization

Sharing Resources

Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin: Researching and teaching together in one of the world's leading science metropolises.