In the kingdom of the senses
by Martin Thurau

Architecture on a nanometer scale: Chemist Dirk Trauner designs molecular switching elements that enable nerve-cell activity to be remotely controlled by light. For the complete article, see www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2012/02_01.pdf

Dirk Trauner is interested in reconfiguring the functions of molecular machines in useful ways, by “adorning them with a little extra chemistry,” as he says.

For a new best buddy, check this box here
by Elizabeth Willoughby

Meant to be a source of convenience for foreign students and a fast track to the ins and outs of the University and life in Munich, it turns out that LMU’s Buddy Program is providing something much deeper and more valuable – enduring friendships.

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Wendelstein meets West Texas
by Clemens Grosse

The new telescope at LMU’s Observatory on Mount Wendelstein was officially inaugurated on 21 May 2012. The instrument will be used to carry out long-term monitoring projects, but will also lend a helping hand to giant telescopes, such as the 10-m Hobby-Eberly in West Texas.

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Wheelchair, assistant, good to go
by Elizabeth Willoughby

Despite a rare congenital disorder, Verena Eder can communicate with voice, pen and keyboard and get around with her electric wheelchair. For everything else, she needs assistance. Naturally, she has managed to live in Brazil and Spain, balance family in Passau and attend LMU in Munich.

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Academics

LMU Munich has again taken the top spot in the German Excellence Initiative, in an impressive repeat of its winning performance in the very first round of the competition in 2006. In this latest round, the results of which were announced in mid-June, all of the nine proposals submitted by LMU – for four Graduate Schools, four Clusters of Excellence and the Institutional Strategy – were approved for funding. In the following, LMU President Professor Huber assesses the significance of this positive outcome for the University’s standing – both nationally and internationally.

**insightLMU:** Professor Huber, nine out of nine LMU submissions to this final phase of the Excellence Initiative were successful. Were you expecting such a clean sweep?

**HUBER:** Of course, one always hopes for the best, but that we would actually get all projects approved in this very demanding competition was certainly not the assumption we started from. The result is nothing short of sensational, and it is in many ways a measure of LMU’s strength in depth and the wide spectrum of expertise among its faculty. But it is also the consequence of unstinting work over the past several years. The University very deliberately embarked on an exacting program of selective profile building – a process that was not always easy. Our terrific performance in the Excellence Initiative is a resounding demonstration of the quality of this selection process.

**insightLMU:** You have often expressed the view that the Excellence initiative has markedly changed the university landscape in Germany. To what extent has it changed LMU?

**HUBER:** It has catalyzed an important change in perception, and reinstated the concept of competition within the university system in Germany, which has long favored a more egalitarian approach. This in turn has led to a process of differentiation, with each university having to carve out its individual niche and establish a specific profile for itself. That we must hold our own in this competitive environment, and that the challenge itself opens new perspectives and opportunities, is something that we at LMU have absorbed into our thinking – and responded to very successfully.

**insightLMU:** Has LMU already been able to benefit internationally from its showing in the Excellence Initiative?

**HUBER:** Yes, definitely. LMU is already seen as a very attractive location for research, and we have been able to draw a large number of outstandingly talented foreign researchers to Munich. In the most highly regarded national and international rankings, we are almost always rated as the best university in Germany. In the next five years, we plan to intensify this internationalization of our research community by removing existing impediments to international recruitment. Our special tenure-track procedure, which we have been using for ten years now with great success, is a good example of what can be done.

**insightLMU:** It appears that this was the last round of the Excellence Initiative. What will happen when the new funding period ends in 2017 is unclear. How will the LMU projects fare after 2017?

**HUBER:** I expect that by then the universities will no longer be funded solely by the States, and that the Federal Government will play a key role in providing targeted funding for third-level institutions – something that is not permitted under the present constitutional framework. This issue is the subject of political debate in Germany at the moment. And we will certainly contribute our own ideas for the design of a concept for active participation by the Federal Government in this area in the coming years.

Translation: Paul Hardy

For more information on the Excellence Initiative and the projects funded at LMU Munich, see: [www.lmu.de/excellent](http://www.lmu.de/excellent)
For a new best buddy, check this box here
by Elizabeth Willoughby

Meant to be a source of convenience for foreign students and a fast track to the ins and outs of the University and life in Munich, it turns out that LMU’s Buddy Program is providing something much deeper and more valuable – enduring friendships.

LMU’s International Office (IO) set up a Buddy Program where local students help international exchange students get settled into LMU more easily than if left to their own devices. By checking the “buddy” box in their application for admission, each applicant gets paired up with a mentor who makes contact via e-mail soon after to allow for any pre-arrival concerns to be addressed.

Every semester offers the opportunity for LMU students to apply to be mentors. They are required to take a 2.5-hour introductory course outlining the program, and can participate in the IO’s intercultural training course. Mentor-mentee matches are made during the semester break and then contact data is provided to the matches. Each mentor is obligated to e-mail his/her mentee and offer assistance, meet the mentee at the beginning of the semester at least once, and provide support with everyday practicalities.

Bonds develop quickly

The Buddy Program team in the IO offers further support in the form of introductory events and activities throughout the semester. As well, a Facebook group for members of the program has been created. Launched in 2006 with 79 mentors and mentees participating, last winter saw nearly 500 students enroll in LMU’s Buddy Program.

Neza Zitko, an exchange student from Slovenia, found her mentor invaluable from day one. Lost in Munich upon arrival, her stress level was high by the time she found the University. But that disappeared as soon as she met Franzi, her new buddy. Franzi not only took her to lunch to relax, but helped Neza enroll at LMU, find the archaeology department where her courses would be, and even assisted in her search for a flat. “From my mentor I got everything I expected,” says Neza, “like advice about accommodation and help getting along at the University, but more importantly, I have a new friend. I think she is the kind of person who simply likes to be there for other people. I’d be happy if she visited me back home so I can show her the country I come from.”

Swedish student Nikola Latinovic also has high praises for his mentor. Besides the obligatory help, his mentor had a lucky surprise. “I really did not expect him to be fluent in Swedish,” says Nikola. “He had spent his ERASMUS semester in Sweden, so we had a lot to talk about, switching from Swedish to German all the time. He has invited me to events and soccer every week in the English Garden. Also my flat mates have benefitted from my having a buddy, since they don’t have mentors themselves. Thanks to the program I have had a lot of fun getting to know many people from Munich. It would have been a lot harder without my mentor.”

Alexander Greie, a mentor for the LMU Buddy Program for the third time, says he mentors not only to make things easier for incoming students, but to ensure that Munich makes a permanent imprint on them: “I want my mentee to have an unforgettable time in Munich.”

Whether in German or in English, within the first days, Alex likes to give his buddy an overview of the city, get him familiar with the public transit system, and show him the key hotspots. He also tries to arrange a trip to the Alps because, he says, most visitors have never seen them before. “This spring I showed my mentee the most important places in Munich and introduced him to Bavarian cuisine specialties, such as Leberkässemmel and Weißwurst. We have been clubbing and have had quiet beers together. He’s met my German friends and introduced us to other exchange students. This has become an international gathering that I really appreciate.”

Alex feels the Buddy Program is an important benefit to him personally since he learns as much about mentees’ countries and cultures as they learn about Bavaria. “I invited my mentee and his friends to a house party. They showed up in Lederhosen and Dirndls. That was so funny. I think they like Munich very much.”

For more information, see: www.en.lmu.de/students/int_student_guide/clubs_socialevents/buddy_program
Wendelstein meets West Texas
by Clemens Grosse

The new telescope at LMU’s Observatory on Mount Wendelstein has recently been officially inaugurated. The instrument will be used to carry out long term monitoring projects, but will also lend a helping hand to giant telescopes, like the 10-m Hobby-Eberly in West Texas, and it will figure prominently in the education of students.

It was a rather stressful day for the helicopter pilot. The precise placement of weighty steel elements on a building at the top of an 1800-m high mountain is no picnic at the best of times. But then the pre-assembled ring destined to support the dome got caught as it was being steered onto the already fixed structure designed to anchor it. Needless to say, more than the usual measure of delicate control was necessary to unravel the tangle. Work on Germany’s airiest high-tech construction site in 2011 continued to pose challenges up to the very end.

Exclusive access – right next door

For the Observatory’s Director, LMU astronomer Professor Ralf Bender, and his colleagues, the fun is just beginning. Thanks to its 2-m mirror, with a focal length of 15 m, the new telescope will provide much more detailed views of the Universe than its predecessor could. “Not only can we take a closer look at galaxies and galaxy clusters,” says Bender, “but the new instrument makes the search for compact clumps of dark matter and the study of supermassive black holes much easier than before.”

One other important advantage is that unpredictable and transient events in the heavens, such as supernovae or so-called gamma-ray bursts, can be followed up more easily with a 2-m telescope. “Giant telescopes like those operated by the European Southern Observatory receive around a 1,000 requests for observing time every semester, and one only has a 1-in-3 chance of getting a few nights worth,” Bender explains. “We use these facilities, too, of course, but they are best for observations of faint objects. For regular monitoring or rapid transient follow-up, a 2-m telescope in one’s ‘backyard’ is just ideal.”

The new instrument will have a considerable effect on LMU’s status in the field of observational astronomy, because the 2-m telescope is capable of providing valuable support and follow-up data for research campaigns carried out by giant telescopes or specialized survey telescopes all over the world.

One example is a multi-color survey of stars, galaxies and galaxy clusters over three-quarters of the celestial sphere, which is currently underway at the University of Hawaii. The size of the survey area inevitably limits the exposure time. “One can see that there might be something interesting at a given position, but confirmation that it is a galaxy cluster, and especially the determination of its structure and its distance from us, require follow-up observations and longer exposures. And these we can now do with the 2-meter mirror on Wendelstein,” Bender explains.

A near record

A second project, in collaboration with the Hobby-Eberly telescope (HET) in West Texas, will begin at the end of the year. The 10-m HET will undertake a long-term spectroscopic analysis to define the properties of dark energy, while the Wendelstein telescope will provide optical images of the same regions of the sky.

Beginning in 2008, planning and construction work for the new telescope took approximately four years – significantly less than would normally be required for a project of this magnitude. Indeed, that the telescope is now ready for use is itself something of a record, especially when one takes the vagaries of the weather on such a site into account. High winds and snowfall – extending into late spring – are enough to ground any helicopter. At all events, Professor Bender and his team are delighted that they will now be able to take a much closer look at wonders of the Universe that were hidden from their old 80-cm telescope. And, by the way, whatever happened to it? “We sold it to amateur astronomers – by auction,” says Ralf Bender.

Translation: Paul Hardy
International Law

Christian Walter, Professor of Law at LMU Munich, explores the limits of state sovereignty. Do the provisions of international law provide a basis for the legitimate removal of despots like Bashar al-Assad?

For the complete article, see www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2012/02_02.pdf

Contemporary History

Bureaucrats as abettors of murder: LMU historian Christiane Kuller is studying the role of the fiscal authorities in the harassment of Jews during the Nazi era.

For the complete article, see www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2012/02_03.pdf

Political Science

IRA, Shining Path, PLO. How can societies make peace with terrorist organizations? Political scientist Alexander Spencer looks to history for lessons on how to resolve the current conflict in Afghanistan.

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Psychology

Deeply distressing experiences such as torture, abuse or armed conflict can result in long-lasting psychological damage. Psychologist Willi Butollo has developed a successful strategy for the treatment of such post-traumatic stress disorder.

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Humanitarian violations

by Hubert Filser

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Far more than just compliant cogs

by Martin Thurau

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Talking with al-Qaida?

by Hanno Charisius

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Fractured lives, broken biographies

by Hubert Filser

Deeply distressing experiences such as torture, abuse or armed conflict can result in long-lasting psychological damage. Psychologist Willi Butollo has developed a successful strategy for the treatment of such post-traumatic stress disorder.

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At age 23, Ms Eder looks back on the past two decades as a grand adventure. Born with Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita, a disorder where any number of a body’s major joints can be malformed causing a limited range of movement, Verena’s journeys began at the age of two heading to Seattle, Washington for surgeries by specialists and for annual checkups. Over the years, America’s west coast has become Verena’s second home, but she was never content with so few as only two. “I wasn’t unlucky at all. I did what I wanted to do.”

With parents who never treated her as unusual, Verena and her three siblings, including a twin brother, considered it normal that she could not do the same things. Nevertheless, as the family grew up, organizing things had to evolve as well: Who will drive Verena into the city? Who will stay home with her? How do we manage this family holiday?

The freedom provided to her by an electric wheelchair was a tremendous breakthrough for her when she started elementary school, and having an around-the-clock personal assistant became key as she grew older. Having such an assistant is what made attending LMU a real possibility.

Enrolled in LMU’s Communications Science course, Verena knew that she wanted to participate in an exchange at some point, and in her third semester, a six-month internship in Brazil presented itself. Her father was going there for work and Verena was intently taking advantage of the opportunity to be able to work abroad and have the experienced support she required. She would not be bringing a personal assistant, but her father’s household would be able to provide for her.

As an international reporter for the journal *Bistumsblatt Passau*, Verena sent in regular coverage of the street life of children in Brazil’s favellas (shanty towns) as well as pieces on cultural insight. Getting around with the wheelchair was not as difficult as she had expected, despite the rougher terrain. The breakdowns were always mechanical, not electronic, so as the joystick, footrest, screws and wheels fell apart, they were fixed by a local cabinet maker. Also unexpected was the overwhelming friendliness of the Brazilians she encountered. “I think I caught the travel bug in the US when I was two.”

After three semesters back in Munich, the itch to go abroad again returned. Since Verena had already done an internship, this time she would do an exchange. She believed that learning Spanish wouldn’t be too difficult since she’d already learnt Portuguese in Brazil, so Verena made arrangements to do an ERASMUS exchange in Barcelona.

She was able to organize personal assistance and finances, without which the exchange would not have been possible, found a wheelchair accessible flat and a roommate. A private tour through the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya was provided unexpectedly by a wheelchair bound professor. UIC turned out to be completely wheelchair accessible.

Verena feels she grew a lot during those seven months, becoming more open-minded, more extroverted and, even more important, she learned to manage situations without her family’s help.

Handing in her bachelor thesis at LMU a few days ago, Verena’s next step will be her Masters. After that, she is not sure since she hasn’t yet decided on a career. But she does dream of the next step towards independence: “I would really love to get a converted car and a driver’s license.”

As one who says she’s not unlucky but just goes out and gets what she wants, there is little doubt she’ll be behind a wheel soon.
**LERU celebrates its first 10 years**

The League of European Research Universities (LERU), of which LMU Munich is a founding member, celebrates its first 10 years of activity this year. The association was set up in 2002, and currently represents 21 research-intensive European universities. Since May 2008, LMU President Professor Bernd Huber has served as the Chairman of LERU. The aim of the network is to contribute to the formulation of European policy in the areas of higher education and research by producing position papers, analyses and recommendations.

Major emphasis is placed on the promotion of basic research as the indispensable foundation of innovation, and on the need for sustained public investment in this sector. To date, LERU has formulated 33 position papers specifically addressed to the relevant decision-makers at the European level. On the occasion of its 10th anniversary, LERU was holding an international conference on 9 and 10 May 2012 at the Universitat de Barcelona. The theme of the conference was “European Research Universities: Guide and Engine for Europe 2050”. Leading representatives of the member institutions, together with experts on third-level education from Europe, the US, Australia and China, discussed the current and future roles of research-intensive universities in Europe, and outlined proposals for the configuration of European research policy.

www.leru.org

**LMU maintains its remarkable record in acquiring third-party funding**

Grant income is a key indicator of a university’s research strengths. Since 1991 the German Research Foundation (DFG) has published statistical data for the 40 most successful universities in their competitive grant programs. In the latest ranking, which covers awards made between 2008 and 2010, LMU takes second place to the Technical University (RWTH) Aachen, with a total of 264 million euros.

This impressive result reflects a consistently high level of achievement across the board. In every one of the past 20 years, LMU has come first or second in the DFG Funding Atlas. LMU President Bernd Huber is especially gratified by this remarkable constancy. “LMU’s continuing success in acquiring third-party funding clearly shows that it ranks among the strongest research universities, not only in Germany but in Europe as a whole. In fact, grant income now makes up almost a quarter of the University’s budget.”

The DFG Funding Atlas lists the overall level of funding awarded to each institution, as well as figures for each research area.

The latter shows that LMU performs very well in all fields. In the period from 2008 to 2010, LMU received 114 million euros in grant aid for projects in the Biosciences, and tops the table in the field. In Humanities and Social Sciences, LMU applicants garnered a total of 37 million. The remaining 62 million went to disciplines in the Natural Sciences.


**LMU nominee among new Humboldt Professors**

LMU Munich has notched up another success in the latest round of applications for Alexander von Humboldt Professorships. Stephan Hartmann, currently Professor of Epistemology and Philosophy of Science at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, who was nominated by LMU Munich, is among those recently chosen to receive the sought-after research award by the Humboldt Foundation’s Selection Committee. Stephan Hartmann is one of the leading lights in an international group of specialists who use methods borrowed from natural and social sciences to explore philosophical questions.

He becomes the fourth Humboldt Professor to come to LMU, following in the footsteps of systems biologist Ulrike Gaul, astrophysicist Georgi Dvali and philosopher Hannes Leitgeb. “This award demonstrates once again that LMU Munich offers an internationally competitive environment and excellent conditions for leading scholars and researchers,” says LMU President Bernd Huber. “The appointment of Stephan Hartmann strengthens our research profile further and makes LMU one of the top research locations in Philosophy worldwide.”

www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/ahp-2012-en.html

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