MARSILIUS KOLLEG

UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG

MARSILIUS-KOLLEG

Marsilius-Kolleg

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A Forum for Interdisciplinarity

The Marsilius Kolleg of Heidelberg University

Many of today's challenges necessitate a culture of academic interdisciplinarity, one that goes beyond collaboration between neighboring fields of study. Against this background, Heidelberg's status as a comprehensive university offers enormous potential waiting to be unlocked. To ensure a productive exchange between even widely divergent fields, a forum is needed that encourages interaction, dialogue, and collaboration. Since 2008, this mindset has been the guiding principle of the Marsilius Kolleg.

Idea and Mission

The name itself has become synonymous with Heidelberg University's self-understanding as a strong, research-driven comprehensive university: Marsilius Kolleg. It represents a culture of interdisciplinary openness, exchange, and shared responsibility toward society. At the Marsilius Kolleg, scholars from different disciplines and fields collaborate to develop interdisciplinary projects, address the fundamental methodological questions entailed in such work, reflect on the academic and societal relevance of their research, and – through intensive collaboration – seek new and better methods, answers, and solutions. The Kolleg thrives on the willingness to place one's own highly specialized research in a broader context, to be challenged and inspired by different approaches, and to contribute to major discourses in science, culture, and society. The Marsilius Kolleg provides the ideal framework for this work as well as the necessary freedom and an open, respectful, and stimulating atmosphere.

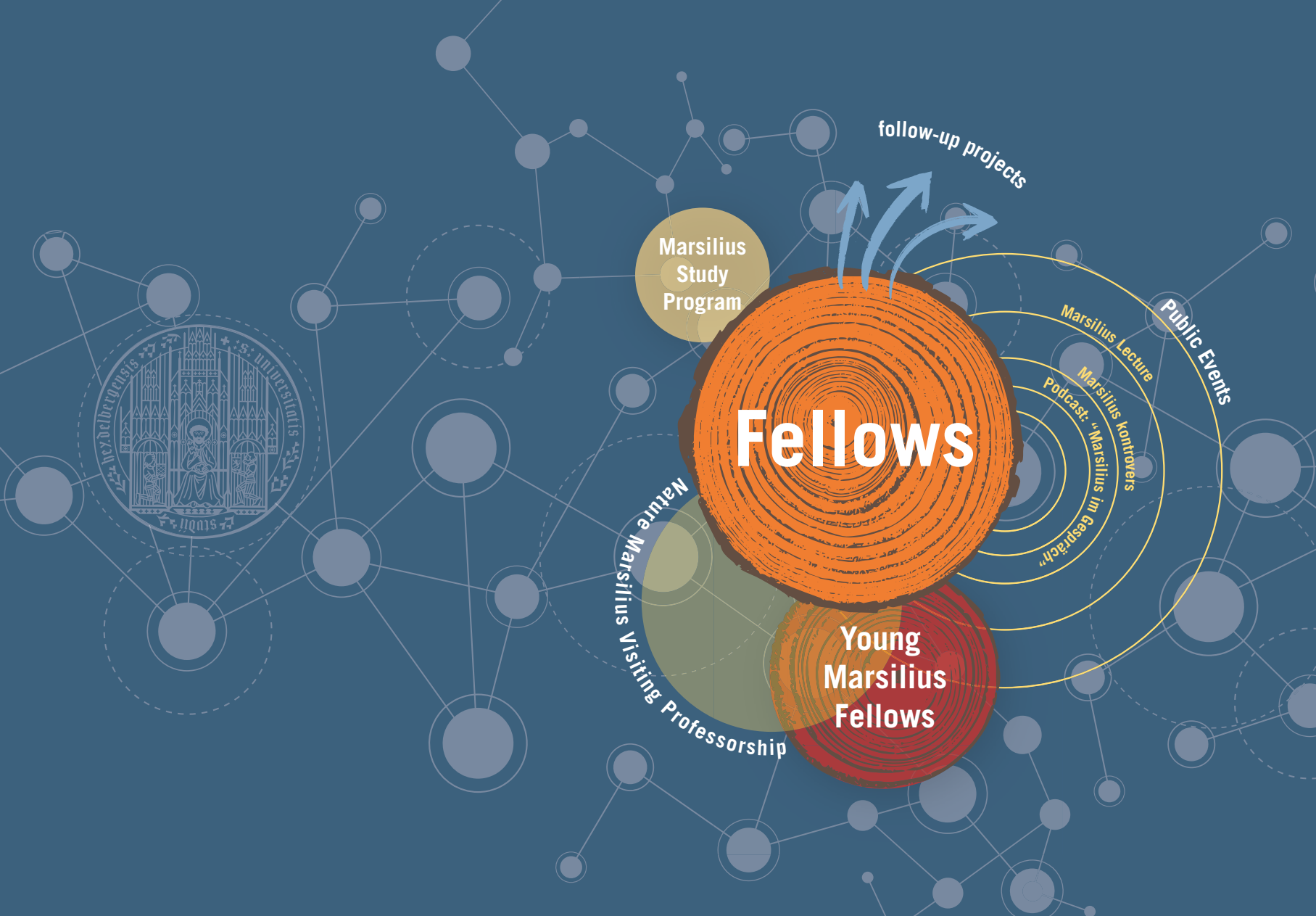
Founded in 2008 in the context of Germany's *Excellence Initiative*, the Marsilius Kolleg is a pioneering innovation and remains a central pillar of Heidelberg's excellence strategy to this day. From the outset, its aim has been to connect traditionally disparate academic cultures in Heidelberg – particularly between the natural, life, and engineering sciences on the one hand, and the humanities, cultural, and social sciences on the other. With the Marsilius Kolleg, the University is pursuing a clear strategy: to identify and cultivate opportunities for partnership through successful interdisciplinary cooperation, thereby increasingly unlocking the academic and societal potential of Heidelberg University and its surrounding research environment.

From the outset, it was also clear that the Kolleg's themes would resonate beyond the University. Dialogue with the public is not only part of academia's responsibility, it also enriches it. With this in mind, the Kolleg has gradually expanded its public-facing activities. Since 2018, it has placed particular emphasis on the field of science communication.

Formats for Exchange

Under the umbrella of an interdisciplinary *Institute for Advanced Study*, the Marsilius Kolleg combines an academic mission with a strategic role for Heidelberg University. It promotes excellent interdisciplinary research by systematically and sustainably strengthening the University's internal potential through networking and collaboration. To do so, the Kolleg has developed a broad portfolio of programs tailored to different audiences and interests:

- The **central Fellowship Program**, with its one-year fellowships for Heidelberg professors, has been the scientific and communicative heart of the Kolleg since 2008.
- **International Summer Schools** have been held regularly since 2009, addressing overarching topics and engaging primarily doctoral candidates and master's students.
- The **Marsilius Study Program**, launched in 2010, offer students an opportunity to experience interdisciplinarity in their own studies.
- The **Nature Marsilius Visiting Professorship** for Science Communication, established in 2018, provides workshops for members of the University and events for the general public.
- The **Young Marsilius Fellowships**, introduced in 2021, are designed for postdoctoral researchers at Heidelberg University and nearby non-university research institutions.
- In parallel, the Marsilius Kolleg has built a vibrant **program of public events** – including the Marsilius Lecture as its flagship series (since 2008), "Marsilius kontrovers" as a discursive debate format (since 2016), numerous individual lectures and discussions, and, since 2022, the podcast "Marsilius im Gespräch" (Marsilius in Conversation).


follow-up projects
Marsilius Study Program
Fellows
Public Events
Marsilius Lecture
Marsilius kontrovers
Podcast: "Marsilius im Gespräch"
Young Marsilius Fellows
Nature Marsilius Visiting Professorship

Governance

The Kolleg does not belong to any single faculty or department but reports directly to the Rectorate. Its internal leadership structure reflects the principle of interdisciplinary bridge-building: one professor from the humanities and social sciences and one counterpart from the life and natural sciences are elected by the Senate for a three-year term to jointly form the Board of Directors. Since 2020, theologian Friederike Nüssel and genome researcher Michael Boutros have led the Kolleg. They succeeded molecular biologist Thomas Rausch and historian Bernd Schneidmüller (2014–2020), who in turn followed virologist Hans-Georg Kräusslich and sociologist Wolfgang Schluchter (2007–2014). The office of the Kolleg supports and advises the Board on technical, organizational, administrative, and strategic matters. New fellows are appointed by the Rectorate based on recommendations from a selection committee comprised of internal and external members.

Impact

With its diverse portfolio, the Marsilius Kolleg exerts influence across Heidelberg University and beyond. As a dynamic network, it fosters collaboration between scholars from different fields and opens pathways for dialogue and exchange. As a platform, it provides institutional frameworks and established formats for new initiatives. As an incubator, it offers a protected space in which participants can develop and test new ideas. And time and again, the Kolleg functions as a think tank, reflecting on issues relevant to the University, academia, and society, to propose concrete solutions.

To this day, the Marsilius Kolleg remains a unique institution in the academic landscape – both nationally and internationally. As an incubator of Heidelberg University, it has, over more than fifteen years, initiated and implemented numerous research projects, teaching formats, and transfer activities. At the same time, it has nurtured a spirit of interdisciplinary curiosity, mutual respect, and collaboration throughout the University. We invite you to explore the various programs, topics, and results of the Marsilius Kolleg in the following pages – and to immerse yourself in its spirit of interdisciplinary engagement.

A Laboratory of Interdisciplinarity

The Marsilius Kolleg's Central Fellowship Program

Where interdisciplinarity can truly be experienced first-hand: the fellowship program for Heidelberg professors is the beating heart of the Marsilius Kolleg. It creates intellectual spaces in which researchers from across the University develop projects, contribute their expertise, and learn from one another. In doing so, they generate new impulses that reach far beyond the Kolleg itself and leave a lasting mark on Heidelberg University.

Freedom as a Resource for Research

Research thrives on freedom – freedom of thought, of exchange, and of trial and error. Truly new ideas rarely emerge under time constraints or within narrow disciplinary confines. They need time and space to grow, openness to other perspectives, and creative friction through dialogue. The Marsilius Kolleg at Heidelberg University offers exactly that: a place where interdisciplinarity is not only encouraged but actively lived. Curious minds from a wide variety of disciplines come together to pursue research across boundaries, learn from each other, and develop new projects. The fellowships provide time, resources, and relief from everyday academic duties, creating an inspiring intellectual environment. Because each fellowship lasts for one academic year, new personalities, themes, and perspectives shape the Kolleg annually – a constant impulse of renewal for the entire University..

The Marsilius Fellowships

The Marsilius Fellowships are aimed primarily (though not exclusively) at professors in Heidelberg who come to the Kolleg for one year together along with colleagues from other disciplines. In small, interdisciplinary teams, they propose joint projects that are presented and critically discussed in the weekly Fellows Seminar. To enable fellows to dedicate time to their fellow projects and to Kolleg activities, the program provides funding to relieve them of certain teaching or administrative duties. More importantly, the fellows are motivated by a desire to contribute their expertise to broader debates and thereby participate in larger societal discourses.

Diversity of disciplines and perspectives is at the core of this program. To ensure this, the Kolleg deliberately avoids prescribing thematic focuses. The only requirement is that each project must bridge the gap between the humanities and social sciences on the one hand, and the natural and life sciences on the other. Recent examples illustrate this variety:

Selected projects

LANDSCAPES

Marcus Koch (Biology), Marcus Nüsser (Geography), and Jale Tosun (Political Science) examined how gradual environmental processes and sudden disasters reshape landscapes – and how governance and adaptation strategies can respond.

DYNAMICS OF FEVER-RELATED DISEASES

Friedrich Frischknecht (Infection Biology), Stefanie Gänger (History), and Ulrich Schwarz (Biophysics) explored the social and biological dynamics of fever-related diseases.

IMPOVED PATIENT EDUCATION

Maja Hempel (Human Genetics) and Stefan Bär (Sociology) collaborated on improving the evaluation and communication of medical information for patients.

HEARING RESEARCH

André Rupp (Neurophysiology) and Christiane Wiesenfeldt (Musicology) revisited historical hearing research in Heidelberg in light of modern neuroscience.

CONCEPTS OF PAIN

Norbert Weidner (Neurology) and Julia Peters (Philosophy) investigated how philosophical concepts of the self relate to neurological experiences of pain.

FORMS OF AGGRESSION

Nathalie Holz (Neuropsychology), Thomas Maissen (History), and Armin von Bogdandy (Public International Law) analyzed forms of individual and collective aggression.

These examples demonstrate how cross-disciplinary dialogue can generate new perspectives and shared questions. They also show that such projects often yield tangible societal relevance – whether by deepening our understanding of pain, developing new approaches to landscape conservation, or improving patient communication.

Outcomes and Long-Term Impact

The results of the fellowships are wide-ranging: scholarly articles, book publications, new research and transfer projects, events for students, researchers, and the public, media features, and much more. In many cases, fellowships serve as the starting point for initiatives that continue to evolve over several years before yielding concrete, lasting outcomes.

Beyond the immediate projects, fellowships often have both medium-term and long-term effects. Ideas first discussed or tested at the Kolleg frequently take on new life in different contexts with new participants — sometimes in completely unexpected constellations. Scholars who have worked closely together at the Kolleg often discover further shared interests and launch new research collaborations, sometimes years later. These effects are difficult to track but highly significant.

Because fellows often remain connected to each other and to the Kolleg long after their fellowship year, a vibrant Marsilius community has emerged – a dynamic network that helps identify and harness the University's creative potential across disciplinary boundaries.

Added Value for Academia and Society

Research and Transfer Outcomes

From Multiperspectivity to Interdisciplinarity

Research at the Marsilius Kolleg means connecting and integrating different perspectives on shared questions. Ideas and insights emerge from this process, some that would hardly be possible within traditional academic structures. The Fellows' constructive and critical dialogue builds trust, understanding, and mutual respect — essential conditions for developing solutions that transcend disciplinary boundaries. The Kolleg helps to dismantle institutional barriers and provides the framework within which diversity can mature into developed interdisciplinarity. Since 2008, the Marsilius Kolleg has documented this process in its Annual Report, showing how ideas evolve into results and how interdisciplinary collaboration transforms academic practice.

Diversity of Results

Just as the perspectives and disciplines represented at the Kolleg are diverse, so too are the outcomes. Fellows publish academic papers, joint statements, edited volumes, and monographs; they submit grant proposals for collaborative research projects, initiate new research networks, or organize dialogue between academia and society. Over the years, this has led to a remarkably wide range of activities. The following examples highlight how the Kolleg identifies emerging themes and addresses them in interdisciplinary depth..

Project Examples

FEVER DISEASES

The Kolleg and its network served as a catalyst for historian Stefanie Gänger on her path to securing a prestigious ERC Consolidator Grant ("Fever"). Working in close cooperation with Friedrich Frischknecht (Infectious Diseases) and Ulrich Schwarz (Biophysics), she sharpened her historical analyses of infectious disease and explored their contemporary relevance.

INNOVATIONS FOR QUALITY OF LIFE IN OLD AGE

As a Marsilius Fellow (2015/16), Katja Mombauer (Robotics) initiated the interdisciplinary *Heidelberg Center for Motion Research* and organized a Marsilius Summer School on the topic. Building on that foundation, together with Hans-Werner Wahl (Gerontology, Fellow 2013/14), the *Network Aging Research* (NAR), and other partners, she launched HeiAge (2019–2025), a project generously funded by the Carl Zeiss Foundation. HeiAge investigated how technological innovation can help preserve mobility and quality of life in old age. This project demonstrates how the Marsilius Kolleg, through its extended network, indirectly enables the development of new research fields.

New Research Structures

ARTIFICIAL AND BIOLOGICAL INTELLIGENCE

In the 2020/21 fellowship year, Andreas Draguhn (Neurophysiology), Ekkehard Felder (German Linguistics), and Magnus Schlette (Philosophy) collaborated on the theme "Patterns of Thought, Interpretations, and Claims in Modern Neuroscience." Supported by a private foundation, they organized a conference that led to the initiative "Linguistic Framing of Artificial and Biological Intelligence." Additional contributors included former fellow Michael Gertz (Computer Science). The group later secured a three-year BMBF (now BMFTR) grant in 2023, funding multiple doctoral positions across disciplines.

BIOMEDICINE – ETHICS – LAW

The EURAT consortium (Ethical and Legal Aspects of Translational Medicine) exemplifies the long-term influence of the Marsilius Kolleg. It originated from Klaus Tanner's fellowship in Theology and Ethics (2010–11) and from a Marsilius project that produced an influential position paper on whole-genome sequencing. The recommendations were adopted by Heidelberg University and other research institutions. The consortium with its speaker Eva Winkler (Oncology and Medical Ethics) continues its work to this day, issuing statements on the release of genomic raw data (2019) and on the handling of incidental genetic findings in minors (2023), thereby contributing substantially to debates in science, medicine, and policy-making.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH

Already in the first fellowship cohort, fellows from economics, physics, and geography laid the groundwork for the Heidelberg Center for the Environment (HCE). Their Marsilius Project "The Global Governance of Climate Engineering" (2010–2013) helped attract new collaborators and supported the founding phase of the HCE. It will soon be transformed into a permanent central scientific institution, headed by three Marsilius members: André Butz (Environmental Physics), Jale Tosun (Political Science), and Thomas Rausch (Molecular Biology).

JELLINEK CENTER FOR ETHICS

One of the more recent examples of an institution shaped by discussions at the Kolleg, the “Camilla and Georg Jellinek Center for Ethics” was inaugurated on October 6, 2025, to raise awareness of ethical dimensions in research and to consolidate expertise on ethical issues within the University. Two former Marsilius fellows, Thorsten Moos (Theology and Ethics) and Eva Winkler (Oncology and Medical Ethics), were appointed as founding directors.

INNOVATION CAMPUS HEALTH & LIFE SCIENCE ALLIANCE HEIDELBERG MANNHEIM

The Kolleg provided crucial support during the founding phase of this Innovation Campus funded by the State of Baden-Württemberg, connecting partners and acting as an interdisciplinary and organizational hub.

HARVARD–HEIDELBERG COOPERATION

The Marsilius Kolleg has been a key forum for demonstrating Heidelberg University's potential as a comprehensive research institution. This role also contributed to successfully initiating the new partnership with Harvard University, which is supported by the State of Baden-Württemberg. During the visit of Harvard Vice Provost Mark C. Elliott, the Kolleg served as the central meeting place for scholars from all disciplines and as the venue for his lecture "Thoughts on the Future of the Global University."

Publications

Research at the Marsilius Kolleg often resonates far beyond narrow disciplinary circles — and this is reflected in the variety of publication formats and media. The book "Societal Self-Empowerment in Germany" (2022) by Peter Kirsch (Neuropsychology), Hanno Kube (Law), and Reimut Zohlnhöfer (Political Science) originated during their fellowships and drew on unique data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project attracted significant media attention, prompting the authors to present their findings in a co-authored volume aimed at the wider public. Another example is Nikolas Jaspert's monograph "Fishers, Pearls, and Walrus Ivory – The Sea in the Middle Ages" (2025), made possible by a Volkswagen Foundation grant obtained during his 2020/21 fellowship. Last but not least, several academic articles have been published, such as, "Do I Care for You or for Me?" (2022). This article is based on an fMRI study by Sabine Herpertz (Neuroscience) and Friederike Nüssel (Theology), conducted during their 2017/18 fellowships and published in a renowned international psychiatry journal.

Dialogue with Society

The Kolleg has repeatedly served as the starting point for projects reaching beyond academia. The exhibition "To the Vein! New Perspectives on an Old Practice" (2024/25) at the Kurpfälzisches Museum in Heidelberg is one striking example. Developed by fellows Karen Nolte (History of Medicine), Martina Muckenthaler (Molecular Medicine), and Katja Patzel-Mattern (Economic and Social History), the exhibit combined historical, socio-economic, and medical perspectives on bloodletting, presenting a complex and often stigmatized topic to a broad audience.

Another impressive case was *ivamos, simbiosis!*, a science–arts community project exploring the relationship between human beings and the ocean. Initiated by Annika Guse (Cell Biology) and Nikolas Jaspert (Medieval History) as Marsilius Fellows, the 2022 festival in Águilas, Spain – a coastal town heavily affected by climate change – brought together scientific expertise, artistic expression (painting, dance, film), and civic dialogue.

All these activities accentuate the role of the Marsilius Kolleg as a think tank that translates interdisciplinary exchange into tangible outcomes: research projects, institutional structures, publications, and public engagement. It is a place where the boundaries between scientific cultures become permeable and where ideas emerge that enrich science, the University, and society alike.

Excellence, Dialogue, and Responsibility

The Young Marsilius Fellowships

For early career scholars, academic life often comes with intense pressure to specialize narrowly and demonstrate excellence within a single, well-defined field. This leaves little space for interdisciplinary exchange or reflection on the broader social dimensions of academia. At the same time, many young scholars aspire to do exactly that — to build bridges between disciplines, place their research in a wider context, and take on social responsibility. The Young Marsilius Fellowships (YMF) program was created precisely for these ambitions. It provides a framework that allows young academics to combine both: excellence in research and the enriching experience of interdisciplinary dialogue and societal engagement.

An Opportunity for Early-Career Researchers

The Young Marsilius Fellowships offer young postdoctoral scholars and doctoral candidates in the final phase of their PhD the chance to network across disciplines and explore new approaches to innovative science communication. Each year, up to twelve fellows are selected from all fields of Heidelberg University and from local non-university research institutions.

The program is designed to be low-threshold and flexible, tailored to the needs of early-career researchers. The time commitment is deliberately moderate, and no separate research project is required for participation. Each fellow also receives an individual grant of €5,000 to support their own research or professional development.

Challenge and Enrichment

Each fellowship year revolves around a guiding theme — most recently "Right & Wrong" (2024/25) and "Back & Forth" (2025/26). The Young Marsilius Fellows (YMF) explore interdisciplinary perspectives on their own research, open themselves to critique and inspiration from other disciplines, exchange ideas on science communication, and collaboratively design their public closing event. Through this intensive exchange, fellows learn from one another, challenge their own assumptions, and discover how rewarding it is to see their research critically and constructively examined by peers from entirely different fields.

Communicating Research in Engaging Ways

A distinctive feature of the YMF program is its strong focus on science communication. The Nature Marsilius Visiting Professors play a central role here: in dedicated workshops, they train the Young Marsilius Fellows to communicate their research clearly, creatively, and with sensitivity to their audiences. This stimulates more creative outcomes that go beyond traditional academic publications – podcasts, art-science competitions, exhibitions, and even computer games. The final symposium each year showcases these innovative approaches and invites a broad public to experience research from a new and inspiring perspective.

As such, the program is far more than a conventional funding scheme: it also serves as a laboratory for ideas, a network, and a public stage. A vivid example of this spirit was the symposium "Dancing with Right & Wrong: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Knowing, Doing, and Not Being Sure," held on July 17, 2025, at the Marsilius Kolleg.

Thinking Beyond Boundaries — Studying Interdisciplinarity

The Marsilius Study Program as an Open Program for Students

Openness, curiosity, and a willingness to engage across disciplinary boundaries are essential foundations of successful research. Since 2010, the Marsilius Study Program has offered students and doctoral candidates at Heidelberg University the opportunity to explore other disciplines and connect their own fields with the perspectives, methods, and questions of others.

Origins and Concept

The initiative for this program came from a group of committed students who, during the founding phase of the Marsilius Kolleg, expressed a wish for greater interdisciplinarity in their studies. Along with them, a concept was developed that is both intellectually demanding and accessible to all. Inclusivity remains a defining principle to this day: there is no elite selection process — anyone with interest and commitment is welcome. Participants can choose to attend a single course or complete the entire program and earn the Marsilius Certificate. This flexibility has proven to be very popular. Students participate out of genuine motivation, and instructors appreciate the enthusiasm and engagement of their students.

Bridge Seminars – The Heart of the Marsilius Study Program

The Bridge Seminars are at the core of the Marsilius Study Program: interdisciplinary courses co-taught by instructors from at least two distinctly different academic fields and attended by students from across the University. The seminars give instructors freedom to test innovative teaching concepts and encourage active participation from students. Many (though not all) teachers are current or former Marsilius Fellows who bring their Kolleg experiences into the classroom while drawing new inspiration from teaching. This model has been highly successful for many years. Each semester, between three and six Bridge Seminars are offered — now totaling more than 100 courses on a wide variety of topics.

Recent Examples of Bridge Seminars include:

- AI Safety and Biomedicine
- Humans and the Sea
- Reality and Virtuality
- Fever – A Historical and Scientific Perspective
- Risk Management, Fairness, and Transparency for AI
- Innovation for Future? Potentials and Pitfalls of the Circular Bioeconomy
- Education for Sustainable Development – Goals, Indicators, and Implementation

The Marsilius Certificate

So far, around sixty students have completed the Marsilius Studies with the *Marsilius Certificate*. To earn it, participants attend Bridge Seminars and deliver a presentation in the interdisciplinary colloquium, guided by a mentor — usually a Marsilius Fellow from a different discipline. These colloquia are true highlights: they showcase the creativity and intellectual potential of Heidelberg's students and vividly demonstrate how interdisciplinary collaboration can succeed in practice.

A Success Story with a Future

The Marsilius Study Program has become one of the success stories of the Marsilius Kolleg. The Program encourages students to look beyond the boundaries of their own disciplines, foster creativity and dialogue, and help prepare them to meet the complex challenges of the future. The Kolleg plans to continue this success story by further expanding, deepening, and integrating the program into the broader academic offerings of Heidelberg University.

Toward Better Understanding

Strengthening Science Communication

A Contribution to Societal Understanding

Science communication has always played a central role at the Marsilius Kolleg. It is essential not only for engaging with the public, but also for fostering interdisciplinary dialogue — where theories, methods, and findings must be communicated clearly and accessibly across disciplinary boundaries. Given the growing societal skepticism toward science, the importance of effective communication has only increased in recent years. Recognizing this, the Nature Marsilius Visiting Professorship for Science Communication was established in 2018 as a cooperation between the Klaus Tschira Foundation, Holtzbrinck Berlin, and Heidelberg University. Since then, the program has become an integral part of the Marsilius Kolleg.

Expertise and Reflection from Practice

Each semester, an outstanding figure from science journalism or a related field is invited to spend four weeks in Heidelberg. The visiting professors participate in both internal and public events, lead workshops for students and researchers, and present their work in public lectures. This creates a vibrant exchange that benefits everyone involved — the visiting professors, the public, the students, the academic community, the Marsilius Kolleg, and the University as a whole.

In a time when scientific research is increasingly challenged in public debate, it is crucial to present complex issues in clear and accessible ways. The Nature Marsilius Visiting Professorship helps sharpen scholars' and students' awareness of the importance of competent, respectful communication with the public. Participants learn how to convey scientific content clearly and meaningfully beyond disciplinary borders. Through these workshops and public events, the visiting professors help bridge the gap between academia and society, enriching the culture of science communication at Heidelberg University.

To ensure that all parties benefit, the Marsilius Kolleg actively integrates the visiting professors into its academic life and network: they participate in fellows' seminars, join discussions, and contribute their unique perspectives. For the Young Marsilius Fellows, they also offer a specially designed workshop.

Nature Marsilius Visiting Professors

The visiting professorship has been met with great enthusiasm both at the University and among the general public. Its success lies largely in the fruitful collaboration between the Klaus Tschira Foundation, Holtzbrinck Berlin, and Heidelberg University, which together have attracted exceptional personalities with diverse backgrounds:

VANESSA VU

In Winter 2025/26, Vanessa Vu of "Die Zeit" holds the 11th Nature Marsilius Visiting Professorship. She brings her expertise in reportage, essays, and podcasts, as well as her focus on migration, displacement, asylum, and social justice in plural societies.

KAI KUPFERSCHMIDT

In Winter 2024/25, science journalist Kai Kupferschmidt (Science Magazine) examined how misinformation and disinformation shaped the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic – and how artificial intelligence could exacerbate these challenges.

VERENA MISCHITZ

In Summer 2025, Austrian journalist and filmmaker Verena Mischitz offered theoretical and practical insights into new methods and trends in audiovisual science communication, using climate change and biodiversity loss as compelling case studies.

FIONA FOX

In Summer 2024, Fiona Fox, founder and director of the UK's *Science Media Centre,* focused on the relationship between science and politics and on the role of science in controversial public debates.

Visiting professors until 2024

Previous visiting professors (2018–2024) have also made lasting contributions: Martin Enserink (Winter 2023/24), Michele Catanzaro (Summer 2023), Mai Thi Nguyen-Kim (Winter 2022/23), Ionica Smeets (Summer 2022), Eva Wolfangel (Winter 2021/22), Dagmar Röhrlich (Winter 2019/20), and Sir Philip Campbell (Winter 2018/19 and Summer 2019). The Visiting Professorship is also part of the Kolleg's own efforts to improve the communication of scientific knowledge and results. The informal "Fireside Chat" serves as an opening event, and the visiting professors' final public lectures are recorded and published on Heidelberg University's YouTube channel.

Changing Perspectives

The Nature Marsilius Visiting Professorship is far more than an event format. It strengthens the Marsilius Kolleg's identity as a place of dialogue across disciplines and professions, enriches Heidelberg University with new impulses for transfer and teaching, and helps improve the relationship between science and society. By bringing renowned figures from journalism and science communication to Heidelberg, the professorship broadens perspectives, builds practical communication skills, and makes the University a visible voice in public discourse — one that stands for fact-based, respectful communication.

In Dialogue

Interdisciplinarity as a Social Responsibility

Building Bridges

Today, more than ever, science and society depend on one another and require reliable forms of exchange. As a forum for dialogue and cooperation within academia, the Marsilius Kolleg also serves as a platform for engaging with the public — fulfilling a responsibility that extends beyond the University itself. Over the years, the Kolleg has developed a diverse range of public programs and dialogue formats that have significantly shaped both its activities and its public profile.

Lecture Series and Event Formats

Through a variety of formats, the Kolleg addresses different audiences and communication needs. The Marsilius Series have become a highly visible and integral part of the University's overall outreach.

MARSILIUS LECTURES

The Kolleg's classic lecture series has been held once each semester since 2008. Each lecture features an outstanding scholar from Germany or abroad, alternating between the life and natural sciences and the humanities, cultural, and social sciences. The invited speakers present their research to a broad audience and highlight its interdisciplinary and societal dimensions. Recent lecturers have included Martina Löw (TU Berlin, Sociology), Wafaie W. Fawzi (Harvard University, Global Health), Ulrike Malmendier (UC Berkeley, Economics), and George Q. Daley (Dean, Harvard Medical School) – along with 34 previous speakers who have all been distinguished scholars offering fascinating insights into their fields.

MARSILIUS KONTROVERS

In this series of public debates, the Kolleg takes up major societal issues that are also addressed in its interdisciplinary research projects. Participants – usually current or former Marsilius Fellows – offer short inputs, engage in discussion with one another, and enter into open dialogue with the audience. These events foster lively, multivoiced exchanges both in person and via livestream. The topics reflect the Kolleg's thematic diversity, ranging from "AI and Mental Health" to "Genomic Screening in Newborns," "Crisis Prevention," "Hope for Climate Protection?" and "Pandemic Over – What Have We Learned?"

NATURE MARSILIUS TALKS

The public lectures held as part of the Nature Marsilius Visiting Professorship for Science Communication (see previous chapter) offer a special perspective on science. Here, it is not scientists who speak, but journalists and communication experts. From an observer's standpoint, they reflect on the changing societal role of science and science communication — exploring its challenges, opportunities, risks, and successes.

Individual Events

In addition to these established series, the Marsilius Kolleg serves as a platform for numerous individual events in various formats. Examples include the talk "The Future of the Global University" by Mark C. Elliott, Vice Provost of Harvard University, the very personal field report "How Do You Live with It? The War in Ukraine – Conversations with People in Bucha" by psychiatrist Stephan Herpertz (University of Bochum), and the exhibition "To the Vein! New Perspectives on an Old Practice" at the Kurpfälzisches Museum in Heidelberg.

Digital Media

In addition to its presence on LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook, the Marsilius Kolleg launched the podcast "Marsilius im Gespräch" ("Marsilius in Conversation") in 2021. In this series, fellows discuss their projects in a relaxed format, sharing insights about their origins, progress, and outcomes. Many events are also recorded and made publicly available through the University's heiONLINE platform.

Looking Ahead

Born out of the Excellence Initiative, the Marsilius Kolleg still embodies Heidelberg University's profile as a Comprehensive Research University more than any other institution. It is an *Institute for Advanced Study* – yet unique in its concrete form and purpose. To this day, it remains a cornerstone of Heidelberg's excellence strategy – and far more: a visible space for the University by the University, open to its partners and to society at large. It is a place where scholars from across disciplines come together to think collectively, learn from one another, generate new ideas, and engage in societal discourse. The distinctive character of the Kolleg lies not only in its many tangible outcomes but also in its intellectual atmosphere and culture of debate: it is intellectually demanding yet open to new ideas, characterized by appreciation, respect, and constructive exchange. Different perspectives are taken seriously, criticism is voiced constructively, and discussion aims at improvement and solution. In this way, the Marsilius Kolleg has created a scientific ecosystem in which interdisciplinary research can flourish, and even be enjoyed. On this foundation, the Marsilius Kolleg is well positioned to meet future challenges, to continue evolving, and to make lasting contributions to the University, to academia, and to society.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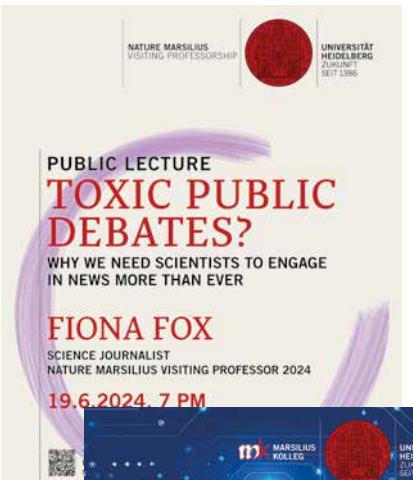
UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT SEIT 1386
kontrovers
HOFFNUNG FÜR DEN KLIMA-SCHUTZ?
EMOTION ODER INFORMATION
Eine interdisziplinäre Diskussion mit:
Timo Goeschl, Umweltökonomik
Jan Rummel, Psychologie
Jale Tosun, Politikwissenschaft
Marsilius-Kolleg
Im Neuenheimer Feld 130.1,
69120 Heidelberg
und im LIVESTREAM


NATURE MARSILIUS VISITING PROFESSORSHIP
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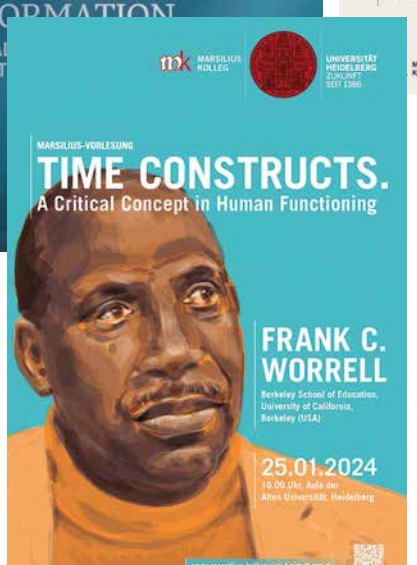
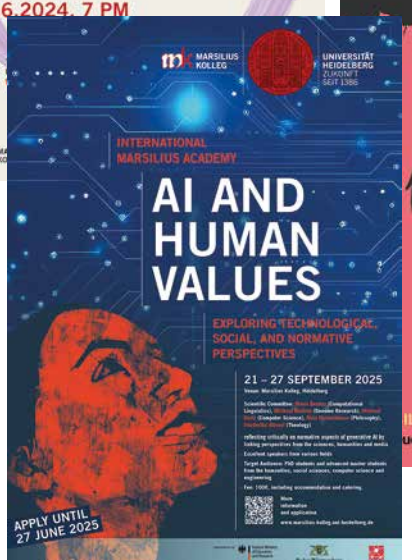
PUBLIC LECTURE
TOXIC PUBLIC DEBATES?
WHY WE NEED SCIENTISTS TO ENGAGE IN NEWS MORE THAN EVER
FIONA FOX
SCIENCE JOURNALIST
NATURE MARSILIUS VISITING PROFESSOR 2024
19.6.2024, 7 PM


MARSILIUS KOLLEG
UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT SEIT 1386
MARSILIUS-VORLESUNG
TIME CONSTRUCTS.
A Critical Concept in Human Functioning
FRANK C. WORRELL
Berkeley School of Education,
University of California,
Berkeley (USA)
25.01.2024
16.00 Uhr, Aula der Alten Universität, Heidelberg
www.marsilius-kolleg.uni-heidelberg.de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INTERNATIONAL MARSILIUS ACADEMY
AI AND HUMAN VALUES
EXPLORING TECHNOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, AND NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES
21 – 27 SEPTEMBER 2025
APPLY UNTIL 27 JUNE 2025


MARSILIUS KOLLEG
UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT SEIT 1386
17.7.2025
10:30 – 17:30 UHR
DANCING WITH RIGHT &WRONG?
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY SYMPOSIUM ON KNOWING, DOING AND NOT BEING SURE
Join the Young Marsilius Fellows 2024/25 for their final event – an inspiring day with discussions, workshops, an exhibition, special guests, food and more.
ILIUS-KOLLEG
uenheimer Feld 130.1 | 69120 Heidelberg
Details and registration:


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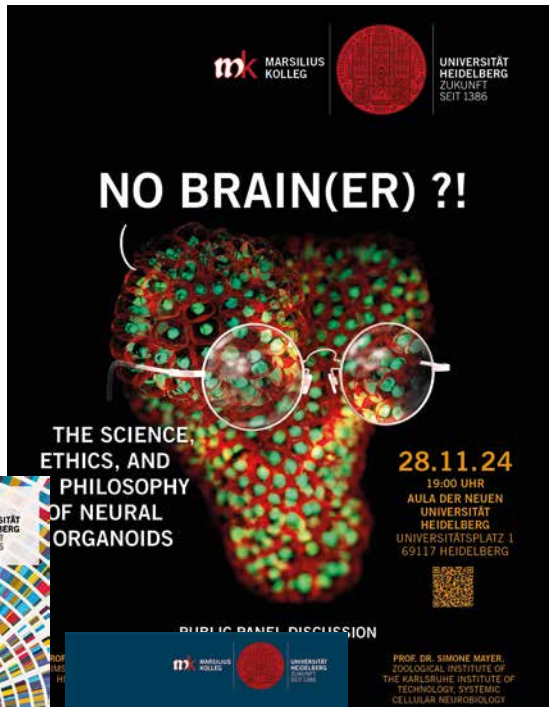
ZUKUNFT SEIT 1386
MARSILIUS-VORLESUNG
WIE ERFAHRUNGEN UNS PRÄGEN
Langfristige Auswirkungen von Krisen und anderen Erfahrungen auf wirtschaftliche Erwartungen und Entscheidungen
14.11.2024
16.00 Uhr, Aula der Alten Universität, Heidelberg
ULRIKE MALMENDIER
Haas School of Business
University of California, Berkeley (USA)
Mitglied des Sachverständigenrates Wirtschaft
www.marsilius-kolleg.uni-heidelberg.de


THE ART OF GOING WRONG
Visualizing the beauty of failures,


MARSILIUS KOLLEG
UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT SEIT 1386
NO BRAIN(ER) ?!
THE SCIENCE, ETHICS, AND PHILOSOPHY OF NEURAL ORGANOIDS
28.11.24
19:00 UHR
AULA DER NEUEN UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG
UNIVERSITÄTSPLATZ 1
69117 HEIDELBERG
PROF. DR. SIMONE MAYER,
ZOOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF THE KARLSRUHE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, SYSTEMIC CELLULAR NEUROBIOLOGY


EURAT
MARSILIUS KOLLEG
UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT SEIT 1386
3.6.25
19 UHR
kontrovers
GENETISCH GETESTET INS LEBEN STARTEN?
GENOMISCHES SCREENING BEI NEUGEBORENEN AUF DEM PRÜFSTAND
Eine interdisziplinäre Diskussion mit:
GEORG F. HOFFMANN, Kinder- und Jugendmedizin
RALF MÜLLER-TERPITZ, Rechtswissenschaft, Universität Mannheim
CHRISTIAN SCHAAF, Humangenetik
EVA WINKLER, Medizinethik
Marsilius-Kolleg
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