

UNIPRENEURS Awards Recognize Professors' Commitment to Entrepreneurship in Higher Education

Start Time: Friday, September 15, 2023

End Time:



[UNIPRENEURS](#), an initiative dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship in German universities, celebrated its mission by honoring 20 outstanding professors who have made significant contributions to the world of university startups and entrepreneurship. Among the distinguished recipients are Prof. Reinhard Schomäcker and Prof. Stefan Hecht, both affiliated with UniSysCat.

UNIPRENEURS, backed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, grants the largest recognition for promoting entrepreneurship within the academic and research sectors. With over 700 nominations from entrepreneurs, this initiative aims to highlight the critical role that universities play in nurturing innovative startups.

The prestigious award ceremony took place on September 6, 2023, at the Allianz Forum near the Brandenburger Tor in Berlin. It was attended by the Federal Minister for Education and Research, Bettina Stark-Watzinger, and Dr. Anna Christmann, the Commissioner for Digital Economy and Startups at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action. The event celebrated the exceptional achievements of these professors and their vital role in shaping the entrepreneurial landscape of Germany.

[Prof. Dr. Reinhard Schomäcker](#) has been leading the Chair of Technical Chemistry at TU Berlin for over 25 years. His research focuses on catalysis and reaction engineering for the conversion of renewable and sustainable raw materials into chemical value chains. His current research areas include the production and storage of hydrogen, the utilization of carbon dioxide as a building block for chemical products and energy carriers, and the refinement of hydrocarbons from renewable resources and biogas into basic chemicals and polymers.

A significant aspect of his work is the translation of research findings into industrial applications, particularly through strong support for start-ups. He was the initiator of the incubator laboratory [INKULAB](#) at TU Berlin, and he serves as the scientific director and founding member of the [Chemical Invention Factory](#).

Prof. Schomäcker expressed his delight at receiving the award, stating, "I am very pleased about the award. It is good to have the work and commitment I have devoted to this issue in recent years seen and appreciated by others. It also confirms that we are on the right path to solving many of the problems our society is facing."

About the prospects for collaborations between universities and entrepreneurship in the future, he says "The rapid implementation of basic research results is a difficult task. Researchers and decision-makers are often too far apart to jointly bring a new product to market. This is where startups from academia play a very central role. They will help bring solutions to pressing problems quickly to the markets with innovative products and business models. Since start-ups do not yet have extensive equipment for their research in their early phases, close cooperation with universities will be an important driver of innovations and their implementation. Our Chemical Invention Factory will be 'the place to be' for such start-up teams."

[Prof. Stefan Hecht, Ph.D.](#) is an esteemed figure in organic materials chemistry. He is currently Einstein Professor for Organic Chemistry and Functional Materials at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the Founding Director of the [Center for the Science of Materials Berlin](#).

Stefan Hecht's extensive research portfolio spans from macro- and supramolecular chemistry over photochemistry to and surface science, with a particular emphasis on the development of photoswitchable molecules for controlling materials, devices, and manufacturing processes. His remarkable scientific contributions have been widely recognized and thus he has been elected into the German Academy of Science and Engineering (acatech), the Academia Europaea, and the European Academy of Sciences.

Beyond the academic realm, Professor Hecht champions the transformative potential of materials research on society. In 2019, he co-founded [xolo GmbH](#) alongside Martin Regehly and Dirk Radzinski. Their venture focuses on commercializing an innovative volumetric 3D printing technology, xolography, tailored for diverse applications. He has been overwhelmed by the award "I am deeply grateful and honored to have been selected into this very distinguished group of UNIPRENEURS. I see the award both as important recognition and stimulating encouragement to continue my work". Inspired by his entrepreneurial journey, he now mentors and guides the next generation of material researchers and entrepreneurs at the Center for the Science of Materials Berlin.

Given their emphasis on developing innovative and sustainable technologies, this award and the work of professors Schomäcker and Hecht align with the objectives of the [Next Grand Challenge](#), "Responsible Innovation in Times of Transformation." The Next Grand Challenge represents a collective research agenda across Berlin, curated by the [Berlin University Alliance](#) (BUA), aimed at addressing the most pressing challenges of the 21st century.