

GHS 10-Year Anniversary

Impressions from the Celebration November 23, 2018

Professor Thomas Abel, Graduate School of Health Sciences (GHS) president, chaired the special program for the 10th anniversary celebration which was held in the lecture hall of the UniS. He opened the celebration, with a brief history of the GHS from his perspective, having been with the program since the beginning, and president from August 2013 to December 2018. Professor Abel introduced the GHS coordinator, PD Dr. Marlene Wolf, who has been with the graduate school from inception. She explained the structure and function of the GHS in more detail, highlighting key statistics showing the steady growth in matriculations, and noting the graduate school is gaining recognition and acceptance with each year. The introductions were followed by a musical interlude from the university's own acapella group "Acapollon".



The scientific program kicked off with the first keynote speaker, Professor Marcel Salathé, L'École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), who gave a thought-provoking introduction to the increasingly relevant topic of "Digital Health & Epidemiology". Professor Salathé complements established traditional epidemiological methods of data collection with novel approaches such as data collection from the Internet and social media like Twitter. This digital epidemiology can very quickly provide data streams that can, for example, contribute to the understanding and prediction of influenza waves. The data available from social media lead to insights to assess digital change and its impact on health in our society. Traditional epidemiology can thus be supplemented by digital personalized health cohorts to investigate new concepts quickly and cost-effectively.

The second keynote speaker, Professor Kia Nobre, Department of Experimental Psychology of the University of Oxford followed with an engaging presentation titled, “Memory and Attention – the Back and Forth”. Professor Nobre illustrated her work using behavioral methods and non-invasive techniques to deepen our understanding into cognitive functions in the human brain, such as how memory and attention function.



Professor Marcel Salathé

The afternoon program began with short addresses by Professor Iris Baumgartner, Vice Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, and Professor Tina Hascher, Dean of the Faculty of Human Sciences, both from University of Bern. Professor Hascher emphasized the importance of recognizing signs of stress and learning how to deal with it, particularly during the doctoral studies. Professor Baumgartner used the opportunity to enthusiastically promote the program for a PhD in Clinical Sciences, newly added to the GHS, which allows PhD candidates who are medical clinicians to continue their clinical work at 50% capacity while devoting the remaining time to a PhD research project. This is the first program of its kind in Switzerland.

Following the keynote addresses, the audience had the opportunity to ask three GHS alumni about their experiences with the GHS. Interestingly, all three have remained in academia, two of whom have become professors. The graduates provided advice on life after the GHS doctoral program, offering examples based on their personal experiences. The morning session was followed by a lunch break during which participants made the most of the opportunity exchange ideas and experiences.



Professor Kia Nobre



Two distinguished guests, Professor Christian Leumann, Rector of the University of Bern and Professor Matthias Egger, President of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), were invited to provide their perspective and input on the future of PhD studies on this momentous occasion of the GHS 10th Anniversary. Professor Leumann highlighted a number of possibilities for pursuing an academic career after PhD studies. Professor Egger added that the SNSF has funding available for scientific research projects and stressed that the organization strongly supports women pursuing their doctoral studies, and to that end has established a fund specifically ear-marked for women candidates. These presentations and comments segued into the panel discussion on the future of PhD education.



Various topics were deliberated. The doctoral students indicated their salaries are an important issue. The need for further discussion into a number of issues was recognized and tabled due to the time constraints. The GHS is committed to following up on the topics. It is desirable to keep contact with the graduated students and to offer courses that prepare the students for working life after earning their PhD. This can include, but not be limited to improving work-life balance, which is especially important for graduates who have children. Professor Abel made the closing remarks, speaking on behalf of all attendees, acknowledging and thanking PD Dr. Marlene Wolf's significant and lasting contributions to the GHS program. He wished her well as she prepared to retire from her role as GHS coordinator after ten years of dedicated service. The day was concluded with an Apéro in a relaxed atmosphere.

