

A photograph of a modern, multi-story building with large glass windows and a flat roof. A tree is in the foreground, and the sky is blue with some clouds. The image has a blue and purple color gradient overlay.

# **SPEAKERS**



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**Dr. Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir** is the Director of the Sustainability Institute at the University of Iceland. She holds over 25 years of international experience in sustainability, environmental education and leadership. She earned her PhD in Plant Ecology from the University of Basel in Switzerland. Passionate about sustainable leadership, she has inspired change through education, collaboration and a deep commitment to a better future.



**Matthias Beekmann** is research director at CNRS in France. He is working in atmospheric sciences on issues of air quality and its link to climate change. He co-developed a numerical chemistry-transport model which is today widely used for air pollution forecast, scenario calculations of mitigation measures, and scientific purposes. He (co-)organised several field campaigns in order to better understand formation process of so-called secondary pollutants (ozone, aerosol) chemically formed in the atmosphere from directly emitted primary pollutants. He was the first director of the Universe science observatory hosted at Université Paris-Est Créteil (UPEC), a research federation of environmental science laboratories. Matthias Beekmann is today assessor at UPEC for Aurora research and innovation. He is President of the Aurora Research Council.





## ELIZABETH BLACKBURN

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**Elizabeth Blackburn, Ph.D.** was recognized by the 2009 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for her scientific discoveries in telomere biology. These have uncovered a new understanding of normal cell functioning and given rise to a still-growing field of inquiry. The research has led to implications spanning a range of disciplines, from biomedical and health research to societal policies.

Dr Blackburn was born and grew up in Tasmania, Australia, and educated in Australia before going to Cambridge University, UK, for her PhD. She was a postdoctoral fellow at Yale university, then a faculty member at the University of California Berkeley in 1978, and in 1990 moved to her current institution, the University of California San Francisco.

Dr. Blackburn is currently Professor Emerita in the Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics at the University of California San Francisco, and holds the Morris Herzstein Endowed Chair in Biology and Physiology at the University of California, San Francisco.

During her career as a scientific researcher, Dr. Blackburn has been recognized for her contributions to the field of telomere biology and its impact on human health and well-being. She has been awarded numerous prizes, awards, and honorary degrees. Among them are the 2006 Albert Lasker Award for Basic Medical Research and elections to the US National Academy of Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Institute of Medicine. In 2007, Time magazine named her one of the '100 Most Influential People in the World,' and in 2008 she was the North American Laureate for the L'Oreal\_UNESCO For Women In Science. The scientific community bestowed upon her the ultimate recognition of her legacy by honoring Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn with the 2009 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.

Throughout her career, Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn has also served the scientific community in many ways. She has served in a scientific capacity on several international and national scientific advisory boards, including those of the interdisciplinary training program EUR LIVE (Universite Paris Est Creteil), and of Institut Imagine in Paris. She has advocated for stem cell research policies. She has been a consistent advocate for improving opportunities for women in careers in science. She has held leadership positions in several international scientific societies, including being elected President of the American Society for Cell Biology and President of the American Association for Cancer Research.



**Barbara Buchenau** is Professor of North American Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany. Her most recent publications include *Narrative in Urban Planning: A Practical Field Guide* (co-authored with Lieven Ameel and Jens Martin Gurr, 2023) and *City Scripts: Narratives of Postindustrial Urban Futures* (OSUP, 2023). She served as UDE's Vice-Rector of Social Responsibility, Diversity and International Affairs (2018 – 2022), and has directed the inter-university graduate research group *Scripts for Postindustrial Urban Futures: American Models, Transatlantic Interventions* funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (2018 – 2023). She is a member of the Aurora European University Alliance, has been the lead of work package 3 on Learning for Societal Impact and is currently leading work package 2 on Transdisciplinary European Research-Driven Educational Hubs.

Buchenau is Professor of North American Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany. Her most recent publications include three co-authored chapters on religious conversion and racial ambiguation (in *Ambiguität und Unterscheidung: Kaleidoskopische Betrachtungen*, edited by Benjamin Scheller and Marcel Müllerburg, 2024), the co-edited book *City Scripts: Narratives of Postindustrial Urban Futures* (OSUP, 2023) and *Narrative in Urban Planning: A Practical Field Guide* (co-authored with Lieven Ameel and Jens Martin Gurr, 2023). She served as Vice-Rector of Social Responsibility, Diversity and International Affairs at her institution (2018 – 2022), and has directed the inter-university graduate research group *Scripts for Postindustrial Urban Futures: American Models, Transatlantic Interventions* funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (2018 – 2024).



**Maurizio Cellura** is Professor of building physics and energy systems well as the Director of the Center for Sustainability and Ecological Transition at the University of Palermo. He is also a member of the National Coordination Committee of the Italian Network of Universities for Sustainable Development.



**Mathilde Chaumont** is in the third year of her Bachelor Degree in Administration and International Exchange. She serves as an assessor for the Aurora European university alliance at the Université Paris-Est Créteil (UPEC). She is also President of the Aurora Student Council. Additionally, she is an elected student representative at the General Council of UPEC and serves as the Treasurer of the Fédération des Associations de Créteil, which is an association created to represent students and assist other associations by providing training for their members, among other student-focused activities.





**Dr. Susanne Conze** is Head of Unit for Higher education in the Directorate General for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport of the European Commission. The unit is the lead service for the development of the European Education Area's higher education dimension as well as devising and managing the higher education strand of the flagship Erasmus+ Programme via the National Agencies and the Executive Agency EACEA.

During her career, both in the Commission and before, Susanne worked in different areas of education and social inclusion policies as well as in the management of European education programmes. She studied history, sociology and political science and holds a PhD in history.



**Jean-Luc Dubois-Randé** has been President of Université Paris-Est Créteil (UPEC) since 2018. A medical doctor specialised in cardiology, he is a university professor at UPEC and a hospital practitioner in cardiology at Henri-Mondor Hospital since 1994. He also served as Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at UPEC from 2010 to 2018 and was President of the Conference of Deans of Medicine in France from 2016 to 2018. Jean-Luc's passion for medicine was further reinforced when he became Head of the Cardiology Department at Henri-Mondor Hospital since 2000. In addition, Jean-Luc Dubois-Randé has been the President of the Digital University in Health and Sports (UNESS) since 2020, and President of the UPEC Foundation since 2021.



**Zuzana Hunková** is Coordinator for Sustainable Development at Palacký University Olomouc, where she managed the creation of the Sustainable Development Strategy and respective Action Plans. Zuzana is also co-founder of the Association of Sustainability Managers of the Czech Republic and the Chairperson of the Local Agenda 21 and Smart City Commission of the City of Olomouc.



**David Itier** is Current Head of Unit, European Strategy of Research and Higher Education at the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research. He is also Science and Technology Counsellor, French Permanent Representation to the EU institutions. He serves as Chief of Staff to Institut Pasteur's DG Stewart Cole, and he is Coordinator of EU Affairs at Institut Pasteur.





**Dr. Romana Klášterecká** holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology (Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech Republic, 2008) and is a member of the Czech Anthropology Association. She is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Health Sciences at Palacký University in Olomouc, where she is involved in faculty research focused on active aging, health promotion and disease prevention. In 2021–2023, she was in the team of coordinators for the Aurora project “Active Aging – a Healthy Lifestyle“, cooperating with URV, Spain, and the University of Košice, Slovak Republic. In 2023, she was invited to participate in the Visiting Researchers Program at the University of Ottawa (Canada) and held an invited talk on Active Aging there. Since then, she has been participating in the project “Brain – Heart Interconnectome“ (University of Ottawa).

She is the principal investigator of the international project NUTRIAGE24, supported by the Aurora Alliance, in collaboration with Universitat Rovira i Virgili (Spain) and the University of Iceland, focusing on healthy aging and nutrition across different European contexts. She has published a book chapter, several academic articles, and is a reviewer of international journals.



**Prof. Dr. Simone Moser** holds a degree in Chemistry from the University of Innsbruck, where she completed her PhD focusing on the isolation and structural characterization of natural compounds. Her postdoctoral research at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) centered on elucidating the modes of action of small molecules.

Following her postdoctoral studies, Dr. Moser joined the Analytical Development team at Novartis in Austria. She later returned to academia, establishing her research group within the Chair of Pharmaceutical Biology at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (LMU), where she completed her habilitation in 2022.

In September 2023, Dr. Moser was appointed Head of the Department of Pharmacognosy at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. Her research on the pharmaceutical properties of newly discovered natural products has earned her several prestigious awards, including the Blair-Curtius-Pfleiderer-Wachter Prize for Pteridinology (2020) and the Dr. Willmar Schwabe Prize from the Society for Medicinal Plant and Natural Product Research (2022).





**Dugan O'Neil** is an accomplished particle physicist who has played a leadership role in building Canada's digital research infrastructure within its diverse scientific community.

As Simon Fraser University's (SFU) Vice-President, Research and Innovation O'Neil leads SFU's strategic research initiatives and champions SFU's comprehensive innovation strategy across its eight faculties. He works to secure research and innovation partnerships with academia, industry and the community.

A key element of O'Neil's role focuses on knowledge mobilization by facilitating opportunities to transfer research discoveries to society and create a positive social, economic and environmental impact on the world stage.



**Prof. MUDr. Martin Procházka, Ph.D.** has served as the Rector of Palacký University Olomouc, after having been elected to this position in May 2021. Before assuming the position of Rector, Professor Procházka was the Dean of Palacký University's Faculty of Health Science.

A graduate of the Palacký University Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, Professor Procházka is Professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics. Since 1994 he has worked at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the UP Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and University Hospital Olomouc. Previously, he also headed the Department of Midwifery at the UP Faculty of Health Sciences. He gained professional experience during study stays and internships in Belgium, Sweden, and the Netherlands.



*Moderator*

**Miranda Prynne** is the editor of Campus, Times Higher Education (THE)'s platform for academics and university staff to share their professional insight and advice. She has been instrumental in the editorial strategy and growth of Campus, having joined THE in 2020 to support in the planning, launch and development of this product. In addition to its editorial output, Campus now has 75 partner institutions across more than 20 countries and five continents.

Prior to this, Miranda worked as a newspaper reporter, with stints on national titles including The Daily Telegraph and The Sun, and as a content marketing and media relations consultant representing clients across multiple industries.





**Ramon Puras** is the Secretary General of Aurora, a European network of universities dedicated to fostering social impact, sustainability, and academic excellence. In this role, he leads strategic initiatives that enhance transnational collaboration, institutional development, and higher education policy alignment at the European level. Before joining Aurora, Ramon held several leadership positions in Dutch higher education, including serving as Dean of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Vice-Dean at the Amsterdam University College, where he played a key role in strengthening interdisciplinary education, global engagement, and academic innovation.

Ramon holds a PhD in Biochemistry and his passion for teaching the interdisciplinary course Gastronomy, the Art and Science of Cooking, reflects his blend of interests in science, cooking, and education.



**Ramon Rispoli** is Associate Professor of Design at the Department of Architecture, UNINA. Co-lead of the Aurora WP3 “Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation”.



**Lolita Rubens** is a Professor of Social Psychology at the Université Paris Est Créteil. She conducts applied research at LIRTES (Interdisciplinary research laboratory on transformations in educational and social practices). She is particularly interested in supporting behavior change, especially in the environmental field. She is also involved in these issues at university level through her role as Vice-president of social responsibility at the university.





**Sabine Sainte-Rose** is a seasoned leader in international education, with a career spanning 27 years across seven countries. In January 2025, she assumed the role of Secretary General for the ENGAGE.EU European University Alliance, where she connects governance bodies, working groups, and external partners to ensure strategic alignment and long-term impact.

She has previously served as Programme Director at the Aurora European University Alliance, led internationalisation endeavours at Université Grenoble Alpes, and held leadership roles within France's international cultural and cooperation network under the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, directing educational institutions across North America and Central Europe.

Sabine sits on the General Council of the European Association for International Education (EAIE) and is a long-standing member of its expert and trainer pool. She also contributes to the strategic advisory committee of the ERASME transformational project at Université Paris-Est Créteil and has held various volunteer mandates throughout her career.

Born in France, she now lives in Utrecht, Netherlands, and is passionate about the role of education in fostering global collaboration and transformation.



**Martin Schwell** is the Vice-President in charge of European Affairs at Université Paris-Est Créteil (UPEC). He has been a professor of physical chemistry at UPEC's Faculty of Science and Technology since 2013. He was its Vice-dean for International Relations between 2016 and 2022, and has worked for the international development of his Faculty.

Martin Schwell is an alumnus of the Freie Universität Berlin, where he studied and obtained his doctorate in 1998. He is currently attached to the Laboratoire Interuniversitaire des Systèmes Atmosphériques (LISA). He was head of the LISA Spectroscopy and Atmospheres group from 2011 to 2018. His research focuses on the ultraviolet spectroscopy of molecules of astrophysical and atmospheric interest. He has a passion for scientific events and has organised numerous international schools and workshops.



**Veronika Sexl** is a renowned cancer researcher specializing in tumor surveillance and signaling in leukemogenesis, with over 200 peer-reviewed publications and numerous awards. She maintains extensive international collaborations and serves on various boards, including the European Hematology Association (EHA). Since March 2023, Veronika Sexl is Rector of Universität Innsbruck.





**Benedetta Toledo** is PhD Candidate in Philosophy of Design at the Department of Humanities, Università Federico II of Naples. Within Aurora, she is a Member of the Aurora Student Council and also UNINA Trusted Local Communicator (TLC).



**Bing Wu** is currently a professor in the Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Iceland. She has more than 20-year research experience in Singapore, US, and Iceland. Her research focuses on innovative water and wastewater treatment, resource recovery, and renewable energy via advanced membrane technology and environmental biotechnology. Her research activities include process design and testing, techno-economic analysis, and life cycle assessment, towards solving the challenges in “Water-Food-Energy” nexus and strengthening climate resilience.



**Marjolein Zweckhorst** is Professor for Innovation and Education in the health and life sciences at VU Amsterdam, where she is also Program Director for Biomedical Sciences and the head of the Community Service Learning Project.