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PRESSEMITTEILUNG

Prof. Dr. Stephan Dabbert has passed away: University of Hohenheim shocked by the death of its President

Prof. Dr. Stephan Dabbert passed away after a serious illness on October 1, 2024 / his last official act was an orderly handover to the President's Office team / digital condolence book and impressions from the tenure of an exceptional university president at <https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/en>

Digital condolence book: <https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/en/condolence-dabbert>

He was instrumental in shaping the University of Hohenheim and setting it on the road to success. Prof. Dr. Stephan Dabbert was voted the most popular university president in Baden-Württemberg seven times, and was even voted the most popular university president in Germany in 2016. In him, the University of Hohenheim has not only lost a levelheaded leader who worked to integrate different perspectives, but also a special individual who was always prepared to give everything for "his" University of Hohenheim. After suffering from a serious illness, in September President Dabbert entrusted the President's Office team with taking over his official tasks with immediate effect and until further notice. He also requested that the election process for his successor be initiated.

His most important concern in his last meeting: Things should continue for the University of Hohenheim. With this in mind, Prof. Dr. Dabbert encouraged the five-member President's Office team to continue on all the paths they have taken, set the course, and make decisions.

"I would like to thank you all for working together so well and in such a trusting manner. I know that the University of Hohenheim is in good hands with you, even in this difficult situation," the President said in the meeting convened at short notice in September. At this point, he had already asked the Chair of the University Council, Dr. Susanne Herre, to initiate the election process for his successor.

Painful loss of an exceptional leader

"The sudden loss of Prof. Dr. Dabbert affects us profoundly and leaves a deep wound. In him, we are losing an intelligent, empathetic, and highly esteemed person as well as an exceptional leader," said a joint statement by the five members of the President's Office. This includes Prof. Dr.

Julia Fritz-Steuber, Vice President for Research, Early Career Researchers, and Transfer; Prof. Dr. Andreas Pyka, Vice President for International Affairs; Prof. Dr. Caroline Ruiner, Vice President for Digital Transformation and Sustainability; Prof. Dr. Sebastian Hess, Vice President for Academic Affairs; and Dr. Katrin Scheffer, Chancellor of the University of Hohenheim.

“The sudden death of Prof. Dr. Dabbert leaves us all stunned and deeply saddened. It is a terrible and infinitely sad loss for the University and for all the people who had the privilege of working with him and appreciating his work,” added Dr. Susanne Herre, Chair of the University Council.

“Prof. Dr. Dabbert was a personality who was characterized by humanity, a sense of responsibility, and his passion for taking care for the university and its members,” emphasized Marion Johannsen, Chair of the Universitätsbund. “He embodied the ‘Hohenheim Spirit’ and motivated many to give their best for the University of Hohenheim like him. He was warmly and altruistically devoted to the Universitätsbund Hohenheim. We are losing a highly esteemed, wise advisor and trusted supporter.”

Exceptional president who “achieved something great at a great university”

Prof. Dr. Dabbert was in office for a total of more than 12 years. During this time, the exceptional president was voted the most popular university president in Baden-Württemberg seven times in the German Association of University Professors and Lecturers’ (DHV) rectors’ ranking. In 2016, he even received the title of nationwide University President of the Year.

Once asked about the qualities required for such an award, he drew the following comparison: “I feel a little bit like a band leader, who receives all the applause but knows that there would be no concert without the musicians and technicians.”

Prof. Dr. Dabbert commented on his work: “At a great university you can achieve great things” – this is how President Prof. Dr. Dabbert explained the many changes of the past years. “The University of Hohenheim is a small university with a very specialized profile. People know each other and complement each other, and this gives rise to scientific cooperation among all faculties. All these conditions inspire creativity and put people in contact with each other. And this is how new things are created.”

Highlights of Prof. Dr. Dabbert’s term of office

The University of Hohenheim underwent many innovations during Prof. Dr. Dabbert’s twelve years in office. It experienced its President as an inspiring personality who took other people along with him and enabled them to achieve new goals together with perseverance and tenacity.

Under his leadership, the University of Hohenheim sharpened its academic profile, set research and teaching priorities in the areas of bioeconomy, digital transformation, and sustainability, and thus strengthened its future viability.

With him, the University of Hohenheim gradually took steps to continue to improve its competitiveness in research. These steps included major projects such as the Hohenheim Center for Livestock Microbiota Research (HoLMiR), which will open next year as a research building (in accordance with Article 91b of the Basic Law), or the joint application for a Cluster of Excellence together with the Universities of Heidelberg and Tübingen, which will be decided in 2025.

With his support, the University of Hohenheim also developed a unique profile in teaching. Research-based learning under the slogan “Humboldt reloaded” or the interdisciplinary certificate course for key digital skills (AIDAHO) are unique in Germany. In 2023, the University of Hohenheim was one of the first universities in Germany to regulate the use of ChatGPT in teaching.

President Prof. Dr. Stephan Dabbert also placed particular emphasis on expanding and maintaining outstanding international networks. Examples include the top-class association with several excellent European universities to form the European Bioeconomy University (EBU) and membership in the Euroleague for Life Sciences (ELLS).

Prof. Dr. Dabbert was particularly committed to the ongoing efforts to counteract the renovation backlog in the university buildings and to exploit energy-saving potential on the university campus. Current projects include the idea of an agri-photovoltaic system, which will both serve as a research object for green energy from agriculture and make a tangible contribution to the energy supply on campus.

Above all, the University of Hohenheim got to know Prof. Dr. Dabbert as a person with strong democratic and humanistic values, who knew how to take a stand even in a crisis-ridden world, and who always saw the human being in his counterpart with empathy.

Search committee for electing a new president to be formed at the beginning of October

Until a new president is appointed, the President’s Office team will share the President’s duties. This will probably be necessary for several months, as the election of a president is a very detailed legal procedure. The exact procedure is regulated by the State Higher Education Act (Landeshochschulgesetz, LHG) and is led by a search committee made up of members of the Senate and the University Council. The members are to be determined at the upcoming meetings of the two bodies.

BACKGROUND: Stages in the life of Prof Dr. Stephan Dabbert

Stephan Dabbert was born on 23 June 1958 in Braunschweig and spent most of his youth and school years in Bremen.

After vocational training as a farmer, Prof. Dabbert studied Agricultural Science and Agricultural Economics at the University of Kiel and Pennsylvania State University in the USA and graduated with a “Master of Science in Agricultural Economics” from Pennsylvania State University.

He completed his doctorate and habilitation at the University of Hohenheim. He headed the Institute of Socioeconomics at the Center for Agricultural Land and Land Use Research in Müncheberg from 1992 to 1994. In 1994 he was appointed as the chair of the Department of Production Theory and Resource Economics in Agriculture at the University of Hohenheim. Here he was Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences from 2000 to 2006.

In 2011, he prevailed by a large majority as the internal candidate for president against 13 other candidates to succeed Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Liebig. On 30 June 2023, Prof. Dr. Dabbert was re-elected for a third six-year term of office to a standing ovation.

Prof. Dr. Dabbert's scientific work focused on the economics and politics of organic farming, the economic and agricultural policy evaluation of environmentally friendly land use methods, resource economics, and agricultural economic sector modelling within the framework of interdisciplinary landscape modelling.

Additional information

- Highlights of the term of office in pictures
- Digital condolence book
- CV Prof. Dr. Dabbert
- Publication list Prof. Dr. Dabbert

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