



Newsletter November 2022

500 Women Scientists Bern-Fribourg

The last months have been exciting times for science communication and we can't wait to tell you more about the events that our pod has organized during summer and autumn!

We also want to thank all the new members that showed interest to join our pod. Please, come to our **next pod meeting** at [Grosse Schanze Restaurant](#), and get to know us in person. You will be very welcome! (register [here](#) to attend)

See more news below!

500 Women Scientist Bern-Fribourg Pod Coordinators

Claudia Kasper, Andrea Fortier and Ana I. Benítez-Mateos



TOP STORIES

Initiative to change the accreditation standards

Why do universities in Switzerland receive their accreditation even though they do not fulfill gender equality as required by the [Higher Education Act](#)¹? Public organizations that provide services of public interest, such as educational institutions, need public funding to operate. To receive public funding, they must meet strict conditions set by federal laws.

¹ Art. 30 para. 1 no. 5: "For institutional accreditation, the following requirements must be met:
a. Higher education institutions and other institutions within the higher education sector have a quality control system in place to ensure that: 5. tasks are carried out in a manner that encourages equal opportunities and true gender equality

Accreditation is the process of checking whether the conditions are met. To address the concern of universities being accredited despite lacking gender equality, we teamed up with [StrukturElle](#), and met with the **Akkreditierungsrat** (accreditation council) and the Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance on June 24, 2022 (you can find the presentations and a link to an SRF report [here](#)). Although the meeting was very interesting and informative, we could not achieve an immediate commitment to change. The usual game of ping-pong was played, in which responsibility was shifted to another institution ("it's the responsibility of the universities!"). The claimed non-responsibility of the Accreditation Council for this concern was brought to our attention several times (what else is it then responsible than checking if standards are met?!?). However, we sincerely hope that our concerns will be heard and that the Accreditation Council will insist more strictly on compliance in the future and not continue to fail women scientists. It is a frustrating experience that "highly intelligent, well-intentioned people of privilege maintain their power and privilege despite their own intentions" by "locating causes of inequity in large societal systems over which they have little influence and [...] justifying inaction."² In our fight for gender equality, we need people to use their power and privilege (which they may first have to become aware of) to change the status quo.

The power of networking apéro

On the 5th of July 2022, our pod member Dr. Nezhla Aghaee organized the event [The power of networking apéro](#).



² How well-intentioned white male physicists maintain ignorance of inequity and justify inaction ([arXiv:2210.03522](https://arxiv.org/abs/2210.03522); <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2210.03522>)

It consisted of three talks by Dr. Ana I. Benítez-Mateos (introducing our pod 500 Women Scientists Bern-Fribourg), **Dr. Sabine Höfler** (as a representative from the Office of Gender Equality, University of Bern), and **Dr. Christa Zoufal** and **Dr. Elisa Baeumer** from IBM (introducing quantum computers). Last but not least, we learned from the journalist Mrs. Ariane Lüthi the situation of women in business and diplomacy.



We are grateful to the [NCCR Digital Fabrication](#) for sponsoring a delicious coffee break and apèro that enabled us to chat with other scientists and expand our network! It was a great opportunity to get to know other (female) researchers in academia, industry and governmental institutions.

500WS in the pub - September 2022

Our second pub event of 2022 took place on the 5th of September at [ONO Bern](#). Oksana lamshanova organized a wonderful evening full of science and games!



We listened to two great speakers, **Dr. Nezha Aghaee** who told us *What is string theory?* and **Sabnam Mahat** who explained her research about *Mercury in wildlife*. Moreover, we enjoy our traditional *tail-or-heads* games among other fun activities. Congratulations to the winners who enjoyed a very well-deserved drink!



READ

Our latest blog posts:

- [Eight questions for women embarking on academic leadership](#) by Prof. Janet G. Hering.
- [Academic mental health and imposter syndrome](#) by Dr. Lucia Rotheray

SAVE THE DATE

November 24th, 18:00-21:00

The event “*Really? What now?*” is dedicated to female PhD students and organized by the [500WS pod in Zurich](#).

More info [here](#)

DO NOT MISS

Women and glaciers in central Asia

An online symposium organized by Adventure of science to hear and discuss with international female speakers. Register for Zoom event (1 December 2022) [here](#).

YOU CAN JOIN OUR POD [HERE](#)



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