

## *Health Psychology Programs in Member Countries*

### **Two new Master Programs in the context of Human Development, Lifelong Learning, and Institutional Change at the International University of Bremen**



*Prof Ursula M Staudinger*

The [Jacobs Center for Lifelong Learning and Institutional Development](#) starts its teaching program with two transdisciplinary Master Programs this year. Both aim to impart knowledge and paradigms helpful to master recent developments in Western societies such as demographic aging and a shortened half-life of knowledge. Dr. Ursula M. Staudinger, Professor of Psychology and Dean of the Jacobs Centre, identifies the central issue of: "...the development of environments optimised for continuous individual learning over the whole lifespan and of structures best facilitating institutional change." Therefore, "...our program is as complex and interdisciplinary as the topic [...]. The studies encompass disciplines such as Neuroscience, Human Performance, Lifespan Psychology, Health Psychology, Motivational Psychology, but then also Educational Science, Communication Science and on the macro level we deal with Sociology, Economics and Business Administration."

Asked to describe the main differences between the two Master Programs, U. M. Staudinger accentuates: "Mainly they are directed towards two different target groups. The [Executive Master's Program](#) is dedicated to persons already active in the labour market. We are targeting people in the Human Resource and Organizational Development Department, especially when they are interested in demographic change and what it means for their company. Therefore, it can be organized as a part-time study program. [...] While the first round of this program is already booked up, prospective students can already apply for 2006." The other program is "a regular full-time academic [Master/ PhD Program](#). [...] Within the Master's track of this Graduate Program participants have to plan two years to obtain the Master of Science. If they choose the PhD track, participants can proceed to the PhD level, provided that they successfully finished a research-orientated Master's Thesis and a qualifying exam. For this track participants need to plan three more years of studying, conducting research and writing their dissertation thesis at the IUB. Depending on the main focus of their dissertation thesis, they can obtain a PhD in each of the related fields. For this program prospective students still have the option to apply until the 1st of May."

Within this manifold field of teaching and research, U. M. Staudinger points out the role of Health Psychology as a domain that can handle questions such as: "...the bodily functioning of the aging worker. The motivation of individual health behaviours becomes a central issue for the required transformations of an aging society." Besides the obvious necessity of a healthy lifestyle for a lifelong learning person, she highlighted the domain of Health Psychology as a lifelong topic itself. For example "...we need to think about how Health Psychology can be better interwoven with everyday practice in the labour force." And moreover, "...that assumptions sometimes held in health psychology about the generality of models of health behaviour to apply across the lifespan, may not necessarily be true. [...] Especially when dealing with old age, I am convinced that Health



Psychology is facing specific challenges, because at that point the definition of health becomes very tricky. At the age of seventy for instance, when morbidity and illness become largely normative, it might be a question that a person with only one diagnosis is still healthy.” To deal with questions like this, the Jacobs Centre has invited Britta Renner to form a research group for...

### Health Psychology at the International University Bremen

Within this highly interdisciplinary environment the new [Health Psychology Research Group](#) focuses on the judgment and decision-making processes that underlie the onset, maintenance, and cessation of health-relevant behaviours with a particular emphasis on risk perception and reactions towards risk information. The activities of the research group are designed to further the synthesis of basic research on how people process and utilize health information and whether there are age-related differences in the functionality of health behaviour changes. These efforts are motivated by the broader goal of developing theoretical frameworks that can be applied across a range of behavioural domains.

Furthermore the research group aims to apply its theoretical knowledge to the fields of Risk Communication, Health Counselling and the motivation and habituation of health behaviours. From a medical perspective the group primarily targets sexually transmitted and cardiovascular diseases.

A second line of research focuses on interpersonal perception with a particular emphasis on expectancies and curiosity. The goal of this line of research is to determine how people derive judgments of the other person, which factors facilitate or diminish the accuracy in personality judgments and how accuracy varies with age. Moreover, the research group examines the conceptualising of and social reactions towards optimism, pessimism, and realism. The goal of this line of research is to study whether judges respond differentially to optimism, realism, and pessimism, and to which specific cues differential responses can be related.

### Andries Oeberst

*We thank Ursula M. Staudinger for the intriguing interview.*

*For more information about the Programs and/ or the Health Psychology Research Group please use the links within the text.*



*To get a visual impression: From the left: Martina Panzer, Youlia Spivak, Britta Renner, Freda M. Hartung & Andries Oeberst.*