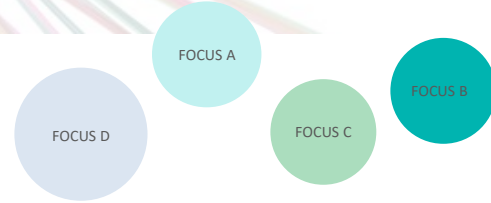


Dear UNITE Members,

Welcome to the **4th edition of the UNITE Newsletter!**

We are happy to share recent highlights, including a **recap of our seminars**, the **UNITE & Fellow Retreat**, and the latest **updates from our team**. In this edition, we also invite you to apply for the upcoming **travel grants**, provide an overview of **upcoming workshops and UNITE events**, and **introduce new members of the UNITE staff**. We hope you enjoy reading the latest news and look forward to the continued progress we'll achieve together!

Best wishes, UNITE Project Management Team



## CONGRATULATIONS

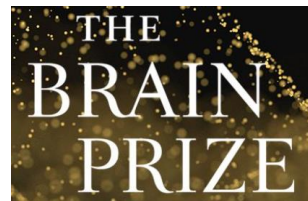


No less than three UNITE investigators are among the top one percent of the world's [most cited researchers](#) in their respective fields. Congratulations to **Wolfgang Wick**, **Michael Platten** and **Andreas von Deimling**!

Congratulations to all UNITE authors and co-authors! The [groundbreaking study](#) by **Hai-Kun Liu** and team in Cell Stem Cell introduces Individualized Patient Tumor Organoids (IPTOs), a powerful new model that predicts patient response to therapy in brain cancer.

**Denis Abu Sammour**, head of bioinformatics at CeMOS (THMA), received the [ROMIUS Foundation Award](#) for his software enabling precise tissue analysis via imaging mass spectrometry. Already used in cancer research, it holds promise for drug development and personalized medicine.

**Lukas Bunse** has been awarded the 2025 [Heinz Maier-Leibnitz Prize](#) for his work on immunotherapies against aggressive brain tumors. His research focuses on high-grade gliomas, aiming to develop effective treatments.



**Frank Winkler** has been awarded the prestigious [Brain Prize 2025](#) for his groundbreaking research on glioblastoma-neuron networks. This

esteemed award recognizes his significant contributions to understanding how brain tumors spread and resist treatment, paving the way for innovative therapies.

Congratulations to **Katharina Sahm** on receiving the [Else Kröner Exzellenzstipendium](#)! This recognition highlights her outstanding work in developing innovative immunotherapies for diffuse midline gliomas. Wishing her great success in this important research.



For his groundbreaking scientific work in the field of translational neuroscience and cancer research, **Michael Platten** has received the [Falling Walls Foundation's](#) "Breakthrough of the Year 2024" award in the life sciences category.



# SAVE THE DATE

## [UNITE Conference](#)

„UNITE Glioblastoma Conference 2025“

When: May 14-15, 2025

Where: DKFZ Communication Center

[Registration link](#) ↗



## [Scientific Retreat](#)

When: December 16, 2025

Where: Marsilius Kolleg, INF 130.1

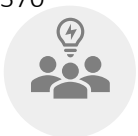
## [UNITE Seminar Series](#)

Britta Engelhardt: „How the brain barriers maintain CNS immune privilege“

When: April 10, 2025, 10:15 – 11:15

Where: Seminar room of the Gästehaus, INF 370

# UNITE SEMINAR SERIES



On January 23rd our CRC 1389 UNITE GLIOBLASTOMA had the pleasure of welcoming **Gaetano Gargiulo**! He delivered an outstanding lecture titled: **"CELL STATES IN GLIOBLASTOMA."** His presentation provided valuable insights into the complexities of glioblastoma cell states, sparking engaging discussions among researchers.



We thank Dr. Gargiulo for his valuable contributions and look forward to further discussions!

# UNITE RETREAT

On November 5 and 6, 2024, our **UNITE Retreat** was held at the Marsilius-Kolleg in Heidelberg, bringing together all projects for two days of intensive exchange. Researchers **presented the latest findings and progress from the second funding period**, fostering insightful discussions on current challenges and future directions. The retreat provided an excellent platform to strengthen collaboration, share expertise, and refine our collective research strategy for the coming years.



Our **SAB** was also on site and **provided valuable advice and suggestions**. The expertise of these high-caliber advisors made a significant contribution to further sharpening UNITE's research strategy and providing important impetus for the future direction of the initiative.



We would like to **thank all UNITE members** for their **participation and dedicated exchange**. This retreat has once again shown how important and inspiring the collaboration within the initiative is - a big step forward on the way to making glioblastoma treatable one day!





## FELLOW RETREAT

On November 15, 2024, the **UNITE Fellow Retreat** took place. The retreat included a workshop by SciComHD that focused on soft skills and science communication, using theater as an inspiration. The workshop included physical exercises aimed at priming the voice and activating awareness of body movements, as well as training the Fellows to maintain eye contact with the audience even in stressful situations and while multitasking.



Another part of the workshop involved talking to different types of audiences and methods of presentation structures for effective communication. Finally, the newly learned strategies were applied to the Fellows' own scientific projects, with individual feedback on style and body language. The Fellows are now well prepared to present their work effectively at upcoming events. The retreat concluded with dinner and networking in a relaxed atmosphere.



## COMPLETED DISSERTATIONS

**Dennis A. Agardy (B01)**, 05.12.2024, „Immune cell dynamics in irradiated gliomas“

**Denis Abu Sammour (C04)**, 16.11.2023, „Spatial Probabilistic Mapping of Biomolecular Ensembles in Tissue via Mass Spectrometry Imaging“  
[10.11588/heidok.00034101](https://doi.org/10.11588/heidok.00034101)

**Simay Celikyurekli (A02)**, 24.10.2024, „Specific combination therapy for H3K27M pediatric diffuse midline glioma“

**Yu-Chan Chih (B01)**, 12.12.2024, „Development of MHC-dependent immunotherapy for gliomas“  
[10.11588/heidok.00035845](https://doi.org/10.11588/heidok.00035845)

**Julia Sundheimer (C01)**, 16.12.2024, „Blood-brain barrier and tumor cell communication are potential drivers of therapy resistance in ependymoma“

## UNITE WORKSHOP

The **UNITE Soft Skills & Career Guidance Workshop** titled “Project PhD: The Path to a Successful Doctorate”, led by Dr. Daniel Friedrich from Impuls Plus, was held on November 20, 2024. The workshop focused on project management, effective time management, and self-motivation, with 11 fellows participating in the session.



## TRAVEL GRANTS

We are happy to announce the availability of travel grants for all UNITE fellows. You can apply until **30.04.2025**. We have sent a separate email to all fellows with most important information on the process and application forms.

Below you can find an overview of (selected) upcoming Neurooncology conferences with important information.

### Neurooncology:

[ASCO](#) | May 30-June 3, 2025 | Chicago, IL, USA & Online

[EACR](#) | June 16-19, 2025 | Lisbon, Portugal

[BNOS](#) | June 18-20, 2025 | London, UK

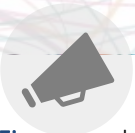
[EACR-CN](#) | October 14-16, 2025 | Bilbao, Spain

[EANO](#) | October 16-19, 2025 | Prague, CZE

[SNO](#) | November 19-23, 2025 | Honolulu, Hawaii

### Neuropathology:

[AANP](#) | June 19-22, 2025 | Minneapolis, USA



## NEW INITIATIVES D02

The **first UNITE bioinformatics Jour Fixe** was held in February. Some valuable insights were gained but the turnout was rather low.

We encourage you all to attend the next one on May 22. This is your opportunity to guide the ongoing work of D02 including the development of the UNITE portal and the bioinformatic services offered.

The **first Python basic skills course** takes place over three days in the first week of April.

The **UNITE Coding Clinic** is running **every two weeks on Thursdays 9:00-10:15** in seminar room 1 or 2 of the Kopfklinik. A few of you have already participated, but we would like to re-iterate that this is open to everybody, no matter your level of expertise, and it is an opportunity to seek (and lend!) support on programming, bioinformatics/statistics and cluster-based issues.

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Ritter M, Blume C, Tang Y, Patel A, Patel B, Berghaus N, Benotmane JK, Kueckelhaus J, Yabo Y, Zhang J, Grabis E, Villa G, Zimmer DN, Khriesh A, Sievers P, Seferbekova Z, Hinz F, Ravi VM, Seiz-Rosenhagen M, [Ratliff M](#), [Herold-Mende C](#), Schnell O, Beck J, [Wick W](#), [von Deimling A](#), Gerstung M, Heiland DH, [Sahm F](#). Spatially resolved transcriptomics and graph-based deep learning improve accuracy of routine CNS tumor diagnostics. *Nat Cancer* 6, 292–306 (2025). [10.1038/s43018-024-00904-z](https://doi.org/10.1038/s43018-024-00904-z)

Peng T, Ma X, Hua W, Wang C, Chu Y, Sun M, Fermi V, Hamelmann S, Lindner K, Shao C, Zaman J, [Tian W](#), Zhuo Y, Harim Y, Stöffler N, Hammann L, Xiao Q, Jin X, [Warta R](#), [Lotsch C](#), Zhuang X, Feng Y, Fu M, Zhang X, Zhang J, Xu H, Qiu F, Xie L, Zhang Y, Zhu W, Du Z, Salgueiro L, Schneider M, Eichhorn F, Lefevre A, [Pusch S](#), Grinevich V, [Ratliff M](#), Loges S, [Bunse L](#), [Sahm F](#), Xiang Y, Unterberg A, [von Deimling A](#), [Platten M](#), [Herold-Mende C](#), Wu Y, [Liu H](#), Mao Y. Individualized patient tumor organoids faithfully preserve human brain tumor ecosystems and predict patient response to therapy. *Cell Stem Cell*, [10.1016/j.stem.2025.01.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stem.2025.01.002)

[Tetzlaff SK](#), [Reyhan E](#), [Layer N](#), Bengtson CP, Heuer A, Schroers J, Faymonville AJ, [Pourkhalili Langeroudi A](#), Drewa N, Keifert E, Wagner J, Soyka SJ, Schubert MC, Sivapalan N, Pramatarov RL, Buchert V, Wageringel T, Grabis E, Wißmann N, Alhalabi OT, Botz M, Bojcevski J, Campos J, [Boztepe B](#), [Scheck JG](#), Conic SH, Puschhof MC, Villa G, Drexler R, Zghaibeh Y, Hausmann F, Hänzelmann S, [Karreman MA](#), Kurz FT, Schröter M, Thier M, Suwala AK, Forsberg-Nilsson K, Acuna C, Saez-Rodriguez J, [Abdollahi A](#), [Sahm F](#), [Breckwoldt MO](#), Suchorska B, Ricklefs FL, Heiland DH, [Venkataramani V](#). Characterizing and targeting glioblastoma neuron-tumor networks with retrograde tracing. *Cell*. 188(2):390-411.e36. [10.1016/j.cell.2024.11.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2024.11.002)

Chih Y-C, Dietsch AC, Koopmann P, Ma X, [Agardy DA](#), Zhao B, [De Roia A](#), [Kourtesakis A](#), Kilian M, Krämer C, Suwala AK, Stenzinger M, Boenig H, Blum A, Murcia Pienkowski V, Aman K, Becker JP, Feldmann H, [Bunse T](#), Harbottle R, Riemer AB, [Liu H-K](#), Etminan N, [Sahm F](#), [Ratliff M](#), [Wick W](#), [Platten M](#), Green EW, [Bunse L](#). Vaccine-induced T cell receptor T cell therapy targeting a glioblastoma stemness antigen. *Nat Commun* 16, 1262 (2025). [10.1038/s41467-025-12188-4](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-025-12188-4)

## EVENTS @ CAMPUS HD



Here you will find further „non UNITE“ events.

### Series on gender medicine

30.04.2025, at 4:30 p.m.,  
**Prof. Dr. med. Bernd Lenz** "Do we need a sex- and gender-specific perspective on alcohol use disorder?"

27.05.2025, at 4:30 p.m.,  
**Prof. Dr. Julia Stingl** "Personalized drug therapy: Aspects of gender-sensitive pharmacology".

01.07.2025, at 4:30 p.m.,  
**PD Dr. Margarida Souto-Carneiro** "Understanding female-biased autoimmune diseases from male patients' data: new perspectives into rheumatoid arthritis and systemic lupus".

Link: via Zoom: [eu02web.zoom-x.de/](https://eu02web.zoom-x.de/)

Meeting ID: 637 8066 9187; Password: 69120



## NEW UNITE STAFF



**Magdalena Wierzbicka**

**Magdalena Wierzbicka** is a postdoctoral fellow contributing to the UNITE Work Package C01 focused on preclinical pharmacology for glioblastoma treatment, supervised by Prof. Dr. med. Stefan M. Pfister and Dr. Gzona B. Sylejmani. She comes from Poland where she completed PhD at the University of Wrocław gaining

expertise in peptide and protein chemistry and mass spectrometry. Following a postdoctoral fellowship in Liege University, where she developed analytical methods targeting protein oligomerization for cancer research, Magdalena now **specializes in the qualitative and quantitative analysis of biologically active substances using LC-MS/MS**. She is eager to network with other Work Packages.

**Philipp Mahlknecht (B03)** completed his preclinical studies of medicine at Munich University, where he was able to gather first experience with experimental studies looking into the effects of calbindin on neural cell differentiation. He conducts his doctoral studies under the supervision of Dr. Abigail Suwala and PD Dr. Stefan Pusch as part of the Work Package B03 **looking into the relationship between 2-hydroxyglutarate, IDH-mutation and DNA-methylation in astrocytoma progression**.

The focus of **Volker Sturms (C02)** research project is on **modifying/optimizing novel MR sequences** that rely on a unique detection enhancement technique for low-concentration biomolecules. These sequences are novel chemical exchange saturation transfer (CEST) techniques, particularly APTw MRI as well as 2HG-directed MR spectroscopy. Furthermore, **he will examine the robustness and reproducibility of the above mentioned sequences**. Thereby UNITE can help the successful implementation of this project by providing well characterized patients. There is a close network of project C02 with A03 (Kessler/Wick) and C05 (Abdollahi/Dokic).



**Alexander Weiland**

**Alexander Weiland** joined the Winkler Lab in April 2025. After completing his first state examination in summer 2024, he now begins his MD in WP A01 under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Frank Winkler and Dr. David Hausmann.

His research focuses on **overcoming glioblastoma resistance by using small molecule inhibitors to specifically disrupt pacemaker cells**. The main goal is to lay the groundwork for potential new therapeutic agents against glioblastoma. He is also grateful for the opportunities provided by UNITE and looks forward to learning from all his fellow members.



**David Vönhören**

**David Vönhören** earned his bachelor's degree in Biomedical Science from Marburg University, where his thesis explored the role of epigenetic modifiers in the development and progression of solid tumors. He completed his master's program at DFKZ and Heidelberg University, focusing on the characterization of proteomic and phosphoproteomic changes in IDH-mutant astrocytoma.

For his PhD, he is working under the supervision of Dr. Theresa Bunse and Prof. Michael Platten within Work Package B01. His research aims to **characterize regulatory mechanisms of innate immunity that orchestrate cytotoxic T cell responses and thus contribute to response or resistance to T cell-mediated immunotherapies in glioma**.



**Judith Bergs**

**Judith Bergs** has joined UNITE as a **Scientific Coordinator** from November 2024, succeeding Lisa Langbein. Together with Cara Malburg, she coordinates **UNITE** and the **UNITE School**.

The coordination office is responsible for managing various aspects of UNITE, including grant calls, special funding opportunities, organization of UNITE events, and overseeing budgets and important deadlines. The UNITE office also supports in the preparation of reports and of proposals for application of further funding.