

A strong community for excellent emerging talent



The Excellence Scholarship & Opportunity Programme has always been a project close to Sarah Springman's heart. She appreciated being able to get to know the talented students and the donors too.

© ETH Foundation / Nicola Pitaro 12 September 2021

Rector Sarah M. Springman has been patron of the Excellence Scholarship & Opportunity Programme for the past seven years. Before handing over the reins to Günther Dissertori, she takes a look back.

You are now in your final year as Rector, so this is also your final year as head of ETH's Excellence Scholarship & Opportunity Programme: where do you think we stand with the programme at the moment?

I am delighted that the programme is such a resounding success and that we were recently able to increase the number of scholarships. That was essential because of the rising number of students. ETH is very fortunate that it is able to afford a programme like this, thanks to the support from a growing community of donors.

Which of the scholarship students made a particular impression on you?

There are so many impressive individuals among them. Two who immediately spring to mind are Rosa Visscher,

President of AVETH (Academic Association of Scientific Staff at ETH Zurich), who carefully guided her organisation through the first wave of the coronavirus, and Mauro Hermann, who is committed to combatting climate change and was part of an Arctic expedition.

Events such as Meet the Talent also bring you into contact with the programme's donors. What does this direct contact mean to you?

These events are a vital means of demonstrating to our supporters that we use their donations responsibly and that their contributions can make a big impact. It's also lovely to be able to meet them in person and engage with their individual stories and feedback.

From conversations, we know that there are many different factors that motivate people to support the Excellence Scholarships. You are a donor too – what is your motivation?

Giving back to the institution that has offered me so many opportunities. I also feel it's important to nurture the next generation of talent. We want our alumni to stimulate innovation and to be in a position to tackle and even solve our world's problems. What better way than to give the most talented individuals the opportunity to focus on exactly that?

For a talented young individual, being awarded an Excellence Scholarship represents a fantastic opportunity. In your view, what responsibilities are incumbent on the Excellence Scholars?

A responsibility towards themselves – discipline – and a responsibility towards society as a whole, in the spirit of citizenship. Since so many ESOP alumni actively support the programme financially, I take it as a sign that they are serious about walking the walk in terms of citizenship.

What are your hopes for the future of the programme?

I hope that it is possible to increase the number of scholarships. The need is there. And the economy, science and society depend on that next-generation excellence, because brilliant minds usually have brilliant ideas that can also be implemented.

Three questions for new Rector Günther Dissertori

From February 2022, one of your many new duties will include responsibility for ETH's Excellence Scholarship & Opportunity Programme. What are you most looking forward to?

I'm looking forward to my first Meet the Talent event. It will allow me to get to know the current Scholars and, above all, the donors who make this programme possible.

Have you already come across any Excellence Scholars? Perhaps the ones in the Department of Physics?

Yes, I've come across many Excellence Scholars in my capacity as director of studies and chair of the admissions committee in my department and have always been impressed by these young individuals' enthusiasm and abilities.

What is important to you, personally, as the future head of the programme?

We need to retain the programme's exceptionally high quality standard. I'm also very interested in keeping the active conversation with the students and donors going. And I would be particularly pleased if we were able to make further increases to the number of scholarships.



[learn more about Günther Dissertori](#)

<https://ethz-foundation.ch/en/spotlight/a-strong-community-for-excellent-emerging-talent/>

PDF exported on 01/26/2026 18:01
© 2026 ETH Zurich Foundation