

RWTH Young Academics Day 2023

Focus topic: Mental Health in Academic Careers

Report on a proven event in a new format

The event at a glance

- **August 31st, 2023** from 12:30 pm – 6:00 pm in the RWTH Super C
- **Annual event** by the RWTH Center for Young Academics
- **First time on-site** after Corona with a **joyful, interactive atmosphere**
- Open for **all doctoral candidates and postdocs** of RWTH Aachen University.
- **100 participants:** 80 % doctoral candidates, 20 % post-docs; Many of them with international background
- **Four Aims addressed:**
 - Informing about career possibilities, support services and focus topic
 - Get to know the RWTH services
 - Networking
 - Foster the ‘we-feeling’ and bonding with RWTH
- **Focus topic “Mental Health in Academic Careers”** presented as a keynote speech about humor as a benefit for mental health
- **Very good evaluation:** 94% recommendation; 1,8 (1=best; 6=worst) overall evaluation

Program

- 12:50 - 01:00 pm Get-together & grab a beverage
- 01:00 - 01:10 pm Opening by the Moderator Melanie Klaes
- 01:10 - 01:20 pm Welcome by the Spokesperson of the CYA Steering Committee, Prof. Elisabeth Clausen, AMT
- 01:20 - 02:20 pm Speech by Rector Prof. Ulrich Rüdiger: „Career Decisions for Young Researchers – A Personal Rector’s View“ including Q&A Session
- 02:20 - 02:40 pm Coffee Break
- 02:40 - 03:40 pm Keynote by Britta Piel: „Use more Humor, Be more Human: Some (Unexpected) Advice and Useful Techniques for a Healthy Research Career“
- 03:40 - 04:00 pm Short Introduction of RWTH Services for Young Researchers
- 04:00 - 06:00 pm Time for Market Place with RWTH Services, Open Networking, Ice Cream and Beverages

The event in detail

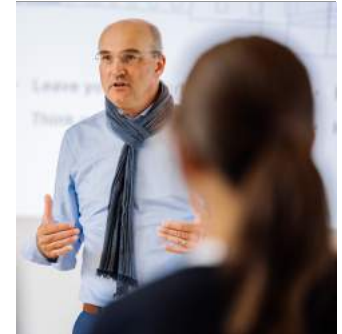
The Young Academics Day (YAD) serves four main aims for RWTH's early stage researchers:

The detailed review shows how the YAD 2023 realized these aims.

1) Information

Aim: Informing young academics about their career possibilities as researchers, support offerings by RWTH services and about a focus topic with relevance to academic careers.

Realization: The rector's talk including an open Q&A session, the welcome speech by Prof. Elisabeth Clausen and the



introduction round by the RWTH services provided a good overview of career opportunities and support at RWTH. The focus topic „Mental Health in Academic Careers“ was chosen based on a survey among doctoral candidates and postdocs prior to the event. The keynote speech by Britta Piel on humor as a benefit for mental health covered this topic in an interactive way. She highlighted the preventive aspects of humor for stress and burnout.



2) Get to know the RWTH Services

Aim: Showing the diversity of advice services, further development possibilities and infrastructure and facilitating that both services and researchers get into contact.

Realization: The day served as a platform for information about the offerings. In addition, the participants could get into an individual exchange in the market place. To facilitate conversations, services prepared interactive games, questionnaires and informational posters or flyers at their stalls.



3) Networking

Aim: Creating an open space for networking, which is important for information exchange, supporting personal and professional development as well as possible collaboration.

Realization: Networking was made possible in the coffee break and the free exploration time. It was supported among others by teaming up for interactive activities at the stalls and by the humorous and interactive keynote speech creating a casual atmosphere.



4) Foster 'we-feeling' and bonding with RWTH

Aim: Building a feeling of belonging to a community of young researchers at RWTH and spreading the message „You are not alone on your individual journey“.

Realization: The speeches, especially the welcome speech by Prof. Elisabeth Clausen, addressed the thought „We are different individuals but in the same boat“. The free exploration time continued with a joyful program which made it attractive to stay for networking and getting around. High RWTH representatives were open for a personal exchange which values being a young academic of the RWTH Aachen University.



Takeaway Messages and Outlook

The evaluation proves that the YAD was a very good fit for RWTH's young academics. We will repeat the event with a similar agenda in early September 2024.

Participants appreciated the most (results of the anonymous evaluation)

- The overview of the RWTH services and direct contact with its representatives
- Connection to other researchers beyond faculties and institutes
- English as event language
- Ice cream and food

The CYA-team values especially

- The keynote: Good balance between information, entertainment, interaction and impulses for every-day-life and work.
- The offers at the stalls: Playful interaction and information

Still there is always something to improve:

- Communicate that the focus topic of the day is not influencing all parts of the agenda but is a keynote speech. Some participants missed the issue of pressure and dependency from the institute or supervisor in the context of mental health.
- Hand out name tags for every participant (first name + institute) to facilitate networking.



Thank you

to all RWTH-contributors to this event – especially to:

- Prof. Elisabeth Clausen for the inspiring welcome speech
- Prof. Ulrich Rüdiger for the insight in his career and the opportunity to ask for specific advice and opinion
- All participating services for their attendance to show the diversity of support for doctoral candidates and postdocs as well as ways to engage for the university



Imprint & contact

edited by:

RWTH Center for Young Academics

Department 12.0 – Staff development and talent management

Kackertstraße 9

52072 Aachen

Email: cya@rwth-aachen.de

www.rwth.aachen.de/cya-en

Photography:

Martin Braun

Thinking the Future
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