



## **e-Accessibility meets Technology**

### **Grusswort des Rektors**

Datum: 3. Februar 2016, 18:00 Uhr  
Ort: ETHZ, Semper Aula (HG G60)

Ambassador LeVine

Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

A warm welcome also from the University of Zurich! This event is a great opportunity to explore how new and innovative technologies can be used to reduce the barriers that persons with disabilities still face too often in their daily lives, also at our universities. We are in the midst of the so-called fourth industrial revolution, which has had and will continue to have a fundamental impact on the way we live, work, do research, study and communicate with each other. ICT plays an important role in this process and it is our responsibility to ensure that as many people as possible can participate in and are able to benefit from the rapid developments that transform our society.

In this respect, there is still work to be done. For persons with disabilities access to information and communication technologies is often limited. Simple actions such as entering a text on a mobile device or filling in an online form can be a significant challenge. Technology develops rapidly and can help to make such actions easier, but technology can also



introduce additional barriers. Understanding the specific needs of people with disabilities is therefore vital.

One of the aims of this event is to bring together the stakeholders – persons directly affected, researchers, tech companies and representatives of organizations such as “Access for all” – to create opportunities for networking and exchange, and possibly lay the foundation for future collaborative projects.

UZH declares in its mission statement that it is committed to “the principles of non-discrimination in all areas” and that all people holding “the necessary entrance qualifications” have a right to an academic education. UZH is supporting members of the university with disabilities from two sides.

On the one hand we have – since 2003 – a Disability Office, which offers a wide range of services to students and staff. It works towards the removal of as many physical, technical and administrative barriers as possible and offers information and individual counseling. This office goes back to the “Beratungsstelle für Studierende mit Behinderung”, which was founded in 1976 at the Department for Special Education. It was the first of its kind in German-speaking Switzerland.

On the other hand there are a number of research projects and courses running at UZH that investigate the topic from different angles. The Department of Computational Linguistics, for example, has been doing research at the interface of accessibility and technology for quite some time, addressing topics such as subtitling for hearing-impaired people, automatic translation into sign language or automatic text simplification.



A current project develops a system that automatically translates German train announcements into Swiss German Sign Language. Just recently the Institute of Computational Linguistics has declared the topic of the contribution of language technology to accessibility as a research priority. I'm looking forward to hearing more about the kind of research done at this institute later this evening.

*Es gilt das gesprochene Wort.*

**Kontakt**

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