

## Message from the Editors

We've now had a chance to meet most of our BiBas personally in Magdeburg. We had exchanged so many messages before our class members set foot on our soil that it almost felt like a family reunion – except we'd never seen each other in person. Exciting!! Before classes and thus the tough part of going to university begins on Oct. 14th, the past "Welcome Week" has been full of fun group activities (rallies through Magdeburg and through the University Campus, respectively) and other initiation events. There has also been an abundance of administrative things to take care of, in particular signing onto various systems for the first time, and getting the hang of how they work. The last of our BiBas will be arriving on the 14<sup>th</sup> – unfortunately 4 admitted students don't expect to get their visas any time soon, meaning that they will miss so much of class that they basically will be starting next year.

All in all, our "BiBa Class of 2028" now has 25 members who are physically present in Magdeburg. It looks like a great group!

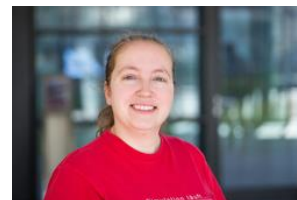
And at the same time, first mails with questions about admission in 2025 are reaching our e-mail hotline, BiBa(at)ovgu.de. Therefore, this newsletter now is "dual use": to inform our new students but also to whet the appetite of those thinking of starting in 2025.

This issue of our BiBa Newsletter has a spotlight on Prof. Sebastian Stober, a professor for Artificial Intelligence in our Faculty of Computer Science (FIN). Indeed, OVGU offers a whole host of courses in AI, reflecting how important the area has become for computer science.

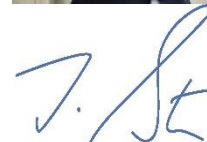
We then move on to report on the first impressions of our new BiBas. We carried out a survey on Oct. 8, 2024, and report on the results. To help ensure that the BiBa experience remains positive, we introduce the notion of "Class Representatives" and that we will ask the BiBas to elect their's later on in early November.

Finally, we introduce two new persons who will take responsibility for parts of BiBa, and provide a "Who's Who and does What for BiBa". – Enjoy!

Your BiBa Newsletter Editors



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We at OVGU are proud of our new Welcome Center which was inaugurated just last month. It is right beside the tram stop "University" and houses all student services. The Faculty of Computer Science building is located only some 150 meters from this location.

### Spotlight on Professors: Prof. Dr. Sebastian Stober

Sebastian Stober has been a Professor for Artificial Intelligence at OVGU since 2018.

For Sebastian, Magdeburg is what you might call “home turf”. He was born and raised in Halberstadt, only some 50 km from Magdeburg. At the age of 10, he already started programming. Much later, he discovered his love for music. Specializing in drums and practicing with high intensity to make up for his late start, he received a scholarship to study music during his last year of high school (Abitur, 1999) and first year thereafter.



Photo: Jana Dünnhaupt, OVGU

Entering university, he was faced with the decision to choose between computer science and music. He opted for the former and kept music as a hobby – for instance playing in the OVGU Big Band for almost 10 years – until it would find its way back into his research as a founding member of the International Society for Music Information Retrieval (ISMIR) that develops computational tools for processing, searching, organizing, accessing and generating music-related data.

Originally, Magdeburg had been a rather pragmatic choice as a place to study until, in his 3<sup>rd</sup> semester, taking "Introduction to Intelligent Systems" ignited his interest in artificial intelligence. Back in the early 2000s, the topic was much less popular than today but the OVGU already offered a whole host of courses that covered the field very well.

Sebastian earned his Diploma degree (the precursor of a BSc+MSc) in Computer Science in 2005, and his doctorate under the supervision of Prof. Nürnberger in 2011, both from OVGU.

During this time, he held highly prestigious scholarships from the “Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes”, which only the best 0.4 % of all university students and also less than 1% of doctoral students in Germany have the privilege of receiving. He also received OVGU’s “Best Dissertation Award” in 2012, i.e. he delivered research results of the highest caliber.

Before becoming a full professor at OVGU, he spent three years as a postdoctoral fellow in cognitive neuroscience at the Brain and Mind Institute of the University of Western Ontario in Canada, where he developed new techniques for analyzing brain activity. In 2016, he moved back to Germany to the University of Potsdam as the head of a junior research group for Machine Learning in Cognitive Science, before returning to Magdeburg in 2018. His team investigates how artificial neural networks (so-called Deep Learning) can help to solve problems in various applications ranging from speech and music processing to medical imaging. He teaches several courses on Deep Learning, as well as one on Music Information Retrieval.



Photo: Sebastian Stober, OVGU

Preparing a music generation demo in the AILab for the Long Night of Science.

Sebastian wishes the new BiBa students, as all new students of the faculty, all the best for their studies. His recommendation: Be curious, pursue your interests, but also look to the left and the right beyond a straight path in your careers! The university offers many interesting things to explore and try out as a student. This will be of benefit to you for a long time to come!

## BiBa Entrance Survey Highlights

As part of our ongoing effort to enhance the BiBa experience, we conducted an entrance survey on Oct. 8, 2024 to gauge our BiBas initial impressions and the effectiveness of our communication tools. Here are the key findings from the 17 students who took part.

### Communication Tools

We had developed several platforms to engage potential BiBa students, and the feedback is invaluable to assess their impact:

- **Mail Hotline:** 93% found it important or somewhat important.
- **Phone Hotline:** 33% rated it positively.
- **Hangouts:** 31% felt it was helpful.
- **Newsletter:** 73% appreciated its influence on their decision.
- **WhatsApp:** 86% deemed it important or very important for their decision.

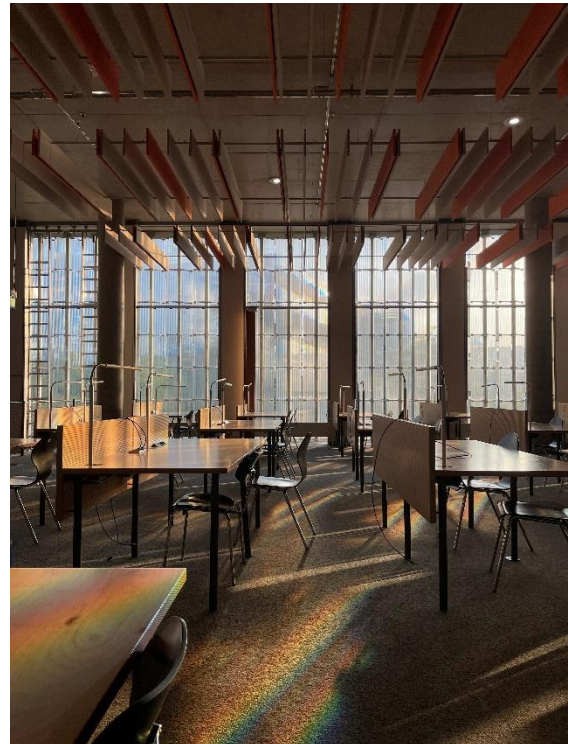
Overall, many students highlighted the **BiBa Newsletter** as the most significant factor in their decision to join, praising its structure, and the academic information it provided. Moreover, the **WhatsApp group** was frequently mentioned as a vital resource for navigating challenges and fostering engagement within the program. Generally, the communication is described as effective and well-structured.

Consequences: We will close the hangout, but keep the other platforms, including the phone hotline (because the effort to run it is very low anyways).

### Arrival Experience

Upon arrival in **Germany, Magdeburg**, and at the **University**, the overall experience was generally positive, though some respondents reported mixed or negative feelings:

- **Germany:** 64% of respondents reported a positive or very positive experience, while 36% experienced it as "okay" or negative.



Courtesy of BiBa Nour Elsayad

First impressions of the university library during prep course week, September, 2024. Almost all the students, except for the photographer, had already mosied on off into the sunset for their social program.

- **Magdeburg:** 64% had a positive or very positive impression of the city, with 36% reporting it as "okay" or negative.
- **University:** An impressive 93% had a positive experience, while only 7% felt their arrival was either just "okay" or negative.

While almost all students felt welcomed by the university community, their first impressions of Magdeburg, and in part of Germany, too, were overshadowed by the challenges they faced with respect to accommodation. Indeed, their number one challenge was securing a place to live. One respondent was also disappointed by the lack of traditional European architecture in Magdeburg.

Consequences: Next year, we will commit to providing our students with better access to accommodation. We will also step up our expectation management for first impressions of Germany and Magdeburg.

## Prep Course Feedback

The feedback on **prep courses** was generally favorable, particularly for the **social activities**:

- **Teachers:** 67% of students had a positive experience with their instructors, while the others found the teaching to be either "okay" or negative.
- **Course Content:** 69% of students found the material beneficial, with 31% reporting it as "okay" or negative.
- **Social Programs:** A remarkable 100% of participants reported a positive experience, with everybody full of praise.

Some course contents did not meet the expectations of the students. Judging by the verbal remarks on the survey, a differentiation by experience level would have been helpful, and we will try to organize two course levels next year, differentiating the teaching by the level of experience individual students bring to the table. We believe that this ought to improve the situation of next year's students. We extend our thanks to FaRaFIN, our faculty student council, for organizing English language prep courses for the first time this year!

## Some Final Thoughts

Overall, we are proud to report that the participants noted that the faculty, the administration, and their fellow students were welcoming and friendly, contributing to a positive start to the BiBa journey. We appreciate the feedback and are committed to continuously improving the BiBa experience for all students.

We would like to thank all those who participated in the survey for sharing your insights, and we look forward to supporting you throughout your studies!

## BiBa Class Representatives (CR)

Every class has a mood, faces collective challenges, and sometimes needs guidance as a group. Not all topics can nor need be discussed within the entire group, but it is often sufficient or even more effective and beneficial, if one person from the class addresses issues at hand.

For the faculty and our staff, each degree program has a Degree Program Coordinator (PC), who is responsible for making sure that things are working well and any glitches affecting the entire group of students are taken care of. In our case, this is Prof. Thomas Strothotte.

Once things settle in and our BiBas have gotten to know one another, we will ask the class to elect a representative ("Class Rep" or CR) and a deputy, DCR).



View from Computer Science's Terrasse Café after a student's hard day's work, Sept. 2004

Picture Credits: BiBa Nour Elsayad

While the mentors (Darija and Twisha) are responsible primarily for individuals' issues, the CR will meet regularly with the PC to discuss how things are going within the class, both from a student and a faculty perspective. The results are to be conveyed by the participants to their constituents.

The CR and their deputy are responsible for the following tasks:

- Serve as a liaison person between the PC and the Members of the BiBa Class of 2028. Take part in regularly scheduled meetings, with additional *ad hoc* meetings as necessary.
- Be aware of important developments within the class and communicate these as necessary. Report important developments from FIN to the Class and the other way around.
- Approach the Program Coordinator in an appropriate manner if problematic issues arise, which (may) affect the entire class, or significant parts thereof (e.g. the class is getting tired of and deaf to certain kinds of messages).
- Convey and explain messages from the Program Coordinator to the class as issues arise within the university of which class members should be aware (e.g. if the effects of certain personality traits should be lessened).
- Use discretion as appropriate (e.g. if an issue pertains to some students but it would be inappropriate to name them).

The class should elect personalities as CR and Deputy CR who would fairly represent the entire class' interests. The term of office is for the current academic year (until Sept. 30, 2025). After that, a new CR / Deputy CR will be elected.

The election will be held at the beginning of November, we will organize it through the existing communication channels.

## Newly Appointed Deputy Program Coordinator

In the meeting of the Faculty Council of Computer Science, Prof. Dr. Alexander Binder was elected to support Prof. Thomas Strothotte in his function as the BiBa Program Coordinator. He will serve as Prof. Thomas' deputy.



Alex is still relatively new at OVGU, having joined in early 2024. He is a professor in the Department of Simulation and Graphics within FIN. As a professor, he was introduced to our BiBa community already in the BiBa Newsletter No. 1 (May, 2024). BiBas can get to know him as a teacher when taking a course in Computer Vision.

**Alex can best be reached via the BiBa WhatsApp Group.**

## New BiBa Program Manager

Since October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, we have a new BiBa Team member. Thea Stiehler joined the BiBa staff as our study course manager. She will be mainly responsible for the organization of BiBa outside of the actual teaching: Events, Newsletter, support of the program coordinators – and our BiBas themselves.

Thea Stiehler is a teacher for English and German, having completing two Master of Arts degrees, one in English and Comparative Languages, the other in German as a Foreign Language, both at the University of Mainz in Germany. After completing her university education, she spent 4 years working in South Korea and later worked in Germany at an international High School.

**Thea can be reached via our WhatsApp group and our email hotline.**

## Who's Who and does What for BiBa?

There are lots of people around who's job it is to help out as challenges come up. The following is a list of the most important go-to persons for our BiBas. We can all be reached via the Whatsapp Group for the Class or via the mail hotline (BiBa(at)ovgu.de).

- **Program Coordinators (PC)**  
They share the overall responsibility for quality management of the degree program and report to the Dean of the Faculty of Computer Science.  
Prof. Thomas Strothotte and Prof. Alex Binder (Deputy PC)
- **International Coordinator (IC)** of the Faculty has overarching responsibility for international students, and is therefore also responsible in particular for BiBas in the English track: Dr. Claudia Krull
- **Program Manager (PM):** Responsible for the smooth evolution of everyday matters, for meetings and excursions as well as general topics: Thea Stiehler, MA
- **Mentors (ME):** These are students' go-to persons for all kinds of topics pertaining to student life: Darija Grisanova, Twisha Parmar, Samapika Nayak

For additional help on specific topics, please scan the QR code in the next column.




Computer Science Building, OVGU Magdeburg  
Picture Credits: BiBa Nour Elsayad

## BiBa Calendar

Date(s)	Event / Deadline ...
Mon., Oct. 14, 5 pm	Welcome Reception for BiBas
Sat., Oct. 19, 9-12 am in the gym	Handball training session to prepare for the next day's field trip
Sun., Oct. 20, 4:00 pm	Field Trip to the SC Magdeburg Handball game against Leipzig
Early November	Election of a BiBa Class Rep and their deputy

## Further Information

Ref.	Description	QR-Code
p. 6	Go-To persons for FIN students, including BiBas, in case help is needed.	

## About us, your BiBa Editorial Team

Bilingual Bachelor's Program (BiBa) in Computer Science

BiBa Newsletter Editors

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Picture Credits (except where otherwise already noted)

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