Heidelberg’s twelve laureates along with the 14 Nobel Prize winners who have taught and researched there bear witness to the fact that Heidelberg has just such a creative environment, which attracts academics. For example, Rudolf Mößbauer (Nobel Prize 1961) and Wolfgang Ketterle (Nobel Prize 2001), who was born in Heidelberg, were post-doctorates at Heidelberg Institute for Physics where they spent important years of their research careers. Four foreign Nobel Prize winners of the 1950s and 1960s worked at Otto Meyerhof’s Heidelberg Institute early during their careers. Meyerhof himself met Otto Warburg (Nobel Prize 1931) in Heidelberg at the start of the 20th century. From 1978 to 1981 Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard and Eric Wieschaus were research group leaders at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) at Boxberg in Heidelberg where they made their fundamental findings on genetic control of early embryonic development, for which they won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1995.

Establishing and maintaining academic contacts in Heidelberg

Map  shows the work places of all Nobel Prize winners who did their doctorates in Heidelberg or studied there. These include, in the humanities, Charles Gobat from Switzerland (Nobel Peace Prize 1902) and Carl Spitteler (Nobel Prize in Literature 1919). In the natural sciences, the influence of outstanding, individual scientists such as Robert Bunsen and Gustav Kirchhoff attracted students and young scientists from all over Europe and the USA. The Nobel Prize winners in Chemistry or Physics from 1904, 1905, 1907, 1913, 1914, 1918, and 1925 had spent time at Heidelberg University. In addition there are further Nobel Prize winners who have other biographical connections with Heidelberg or are connected to the city or university through honours. A total of ten external and three Heidelberg Nobel Prize winners were awarded honorary doctorates from Heidelberg University. Amongst those from outside Heidelberg were the German physician Robert Koch (honorary doctorate 1886), the German chemist Adolf von Baeyer (1886), the Scottish chemist Sir William Ramsay (1903), the Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius (1903), who was influential on the Nobel committee, the Dutch chemist Jacobus van’t Hoff (1908), the Argentinean foreign minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner Carlos Saavedra Lamas (1936), the German-American physicist James Franck (1957), the German chemist Karl Ziegler (1958), and the German-American physicist Hans Dehmelt (1986). Carl Bosch was made honorary senator of the University in 1922.

The awarding of a Nobel Prize is, for the recipient, associated with worldwide recognition of academic achievement. It ensures lasting public respect from representatives of the discipline, an increased chance to exert academic political influence and prestige. After being awarded a Nobel Prize, the winners are, more than ever, in the public limelight and are confronted with numerous requests for donations, interviews and lectures. The geographical activity pattern of a Nobel Prize winner is presented in using the example of Harald zur Hausen, who after his award used numerous occasions all over the world to promote his specialist field of molecular virology and to represent Heidelberg City and University.