



Digital Society Initiative – February 2026



Dear interested, dear researchers,

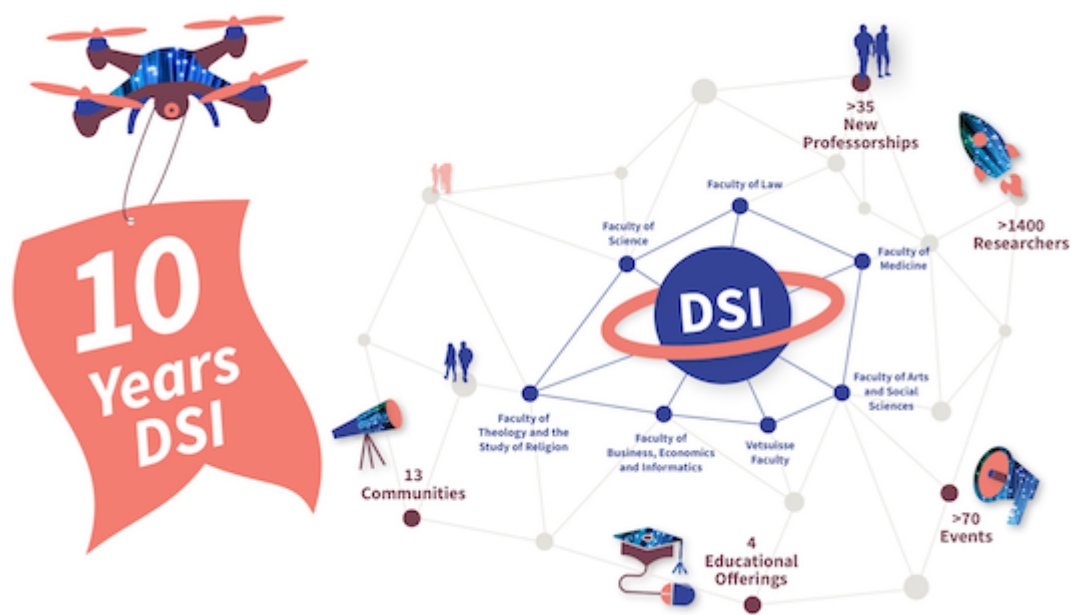
The DSI is celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2026. In the first DSI News of this year, we therefore look back on a decade of impact on the digital society. And, of course, we also look to the future: we are already looking forward to our anniversary celebration on November 24, 2026. Mark this evening in your calendar.

Also featured in this issue: a god who fits in your pocket, and unknowns in machine learning algorithms. We also draw your attention to the open application window for our Excellence Program, welcome, offer congratulations, and look forward to exciting events in the coming days and weeks.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Your Digital Society Initiative team

News



10 YEARS DSI

A decade of impact for the digital society

The **Digital Society Initiative (DSI)** at the University of Zurich is celebrating its **tenth anniversary**. Since its founding, the DSI has established itself as an interdisciplinary **competence center** that connects research, education and society in the context of **digital transformation**.

This anniversary is an opportunity to look back on this development: Under **«History & Impact»** on our website, we show how the DSI has continuously evolved and what impetus it has provided for a reflective digital future.

By the way: We will be celebrating the DSI's birthday on **November 24, 2026**, with renowned guests. So it's worth marking the evening in your calendar now.

[The DSI since 2016](#)



DSI INSIGHTS

Thanks to AI, God fits right in your pocket

In the latest [column](#) (in German) in the «DSI Insights» series, religious anthropologist **Beth Singler** shows how AI is increasingly shaping religious experiences – and why «**digital gods**» are more than just a technical curiosity.

In the column series «DSI Insights» the DSI showcases its **expertise** and **interdisciplinarity** on topics of **digital transformation**. The columns by authors from the DSI network appear in the [online magazine «Inside IT»](#).

[Read all «DSI Insights» \(in German\)](#)



APPLICATION WINDOW NOW OPEN

DSI Excellence Program

In 2026, the DSI will once again offer UZH doctoral students the **DSI Excellence Program**.

The supplementary curriculum is aimed at **students from all disciplines** in doctoral programs and specifically prepares them for an environment in which interdisciplinary collaboration plays a central role in addressing digitalization issues.

Applications for the DSI Excellence Program 2026 are still being accepted until **March 15, 2026**.

[More information](#)

NEW DSI PROFESSOR

Welcome to the DSI, Gemma

We are delighted to welcome **Prof. Dr. Gemma Newlands** as a DSI Professor. Gemma is an Assistant Professor in the **Sociology of Societal Digitalization** at the Department of Sociology at the University of Zurich.

Her research focuses on the **transformation of work in the age of artificial intelligence**. At the Department of Sociology, she leads a research team dedicated to examining **human-AI hybridity** in the workplace.

We warmly welcome Gemma as DSI Professor and wish her much joy, success, and happiness.

[Learn more about Gemma](#)



3 Questions about OpenOSR

Prof. Dr. Manuel Günther presents **OpenOSR** – a project from the «**DSI Infrastructures & Labs**» series.

What is the main goal of OpenOSR?

With OpenOSR, on one hand we want to clarify that machine learning methods cannot be applied to every type of scenario. On the other hand, we aim to enable researchers at the University of Zurich and beyond to use our methods to improve the classification in the presence of the unknown by applying them to their own problem settings.

What is meant by «unknown» and how does OpenOSR recognize it?

Machine learning algorithms are often designed to work in constraint environments. All inputs that go beyond such environments are unknown to the system. There are generally two ways to detect such unexpected inputs: For existing models, we can compute distributions of the internal representations of known classes, and declare deviations from these as unknown. New models can be trained so that the internal representations are better suited for computing such distributions.

What benefits do you expect for researchers or developers in the long term?

We hope that the research community will adopt and further develop OpenOSR in order to provide more and better methods for the detection of unexpected inputs. Due to the strict focus on reproducibility, it is possible to quickly determine whether methods are effective, and which of the methods is best suited for the specific problem settings of the researchers.

Learn more about OpenOSR and Manuel [here](#).

[Click here to see all projects in the series](#)



PROMOTIONS FOR TWO DSI PROFESSORS

Congratulations!

We are delighted to congratulate two DSI Professors on their promotions:

Karsten Donnay has been a DSI Professor and Assistant Professor of Political Behavior and Digital Media since 2020. As of August 1, 2026, he has now been appointed Associate Professor ad personam for **Digital Democracy**.

Viktor von Wyl has also been a DSI Professor since 2020. Since then, he has been an Assistant Professor with tenure track for **Digital and Mobile Health**. He has now been appointed Associate Professor for this subject area as of February 1, 2026.

We congratulate them both warmly and wish them continued joy and success in their work.

[Meet all DSI Professors here](#)

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF THE DSI

Inaugural Lectures

Newly appointed professors and private lecturers provide an overview of their respective research areas in their **inaugural lectures**, and at the same time offer an insight into the colorful diversity of teaching and research at the University of Zurich.

We are particularly pleased to announce two lectures by **members of the DSI**:

Live(r) Science: Post*biblische Perspektiven auf Hepatoskopie by Prof. Dr. Nesina Grütter

March 2, 2026, 17:00 / KOL, Universität Zürich Zentrum, Rämistrasse 71, 8006 Zurich / Room: G 201 Aula

Ist das Strafrecht noch zeitgemäss? by Prof. Dr. iur. Nadine Zurkinden

March 2, 2026, 19:00 / KOL, Universität Zürich Zentrum, Rämistrasse 71, 8006 Zurich / Room: G 201 Aula

The inaugural lectures take place in the auditorium of the University of Zurich (Zentrum), are **open to the public**, and are **free of charge**.

[Click here for all inaugural lectures](#)



MORE NEWS IN BRIEF

DSI Shorts

In this section, we highlight **more news** from the DSI universe:

- We are delighted to congratulate **twelve teams** with DSI involvement on their **successful project applications**: two teams in the [DIZH Founder Call](#) and ten teams in the [DIZH Project Call](#).
- **CYREN ZH**, a project of the DSI Community Cybersecurity, is organizing a [Summer School](#) in June/July 2026 on the topic of «**Human Factors in Cybersecurity and Privacy: Interdisciplinary Research Methods**».
- We welcome [Dr. Zhou Lin](#) to the DSI. He will be part of the **DSI Community Work** as a **DSI Fellow** from mid-March to mid-May 2026.
- DSI has a new **Partner Organization**: [The Division of Business and Economic Development](#), Office for Economy, Canton Zurich, promotes innovation and supports companies throughout all stages of their growth.
- We are now also introducing [Employees of DSI Projects](#) on the DSI website. For example, Mats, Fatma-Zohra, and Marco, who are working on two projects together with DSI Postdoc [Reto Gubelmann](#).

Events

Today

AI, Culture & Society Reading Group

An event in the «AI, Culture & Society Reading Group» series on the topic «Artificial Stupidity and Artificial Intelligence in the Anthropocene».

Organized by the DSI Community AI, Culture & Society.

[More information](#)

Today

Rethinking AI Ethics: The Startup Edge

A book vernissage and panel discussion bringing together industry, start-ups, and academia.
Co-organized by the DSI Community Ethics.

[More information](#)

**02. -
03.03.**

7th Scale-IT-Up Workshop 2026

Topic: Advancing Digital Women's Health Across the Life Course

Co-organized by the DSI Community Health.

[More information](#)

28.04.

Autonomous Driving and the Legal Challenges of Allocating Liability

This workshop, organized by the DSI Communities AI & Law and Mobility, focuses on the legal challenges for autonomous vehicles, especially on liability.

[More information](#)

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