Minerva Prize 2026

11.11.2026- Press Release – Laura Dreissen winner 2026 Minerva prize

This year saw a very strong field for the Minerva prize, with seven nominees from a total of five universities. The jury was very impressed with their scientific achievements, their clear enthusiasm for communicating their love of science to others, and their important work in guiding and mentoring young researchers and students and creating an inclusive work environment. The nominees work over a very broad range of sub-fields of physics. However, prizes need winners, the jury unanimously recommended that this year's winner is:

Laura Dreissen

of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Motivation

The jury was unanimous in its view that Dr. Dreissen combines both excellent science *and* excellent outreach. She also brings an impressive commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive scientific environment, both in her own institution and in Amsterdam as a whole. All in all, the jury and DPC and NNV find her a very deserving winner of the 2026 Minerva Prize.

Background information

Dreissen is committed to strengthening the academic community and has taken on significant leadership responsibilities early in her career. In 2024, she was elected to the Amsterdam Young Academy and subsequently joined its board, where she contributes to science policy and the future of academia. As part of this engagement, she co-authored Fixing Academia, contributing to a broader discussion on how academia can become a more inclusive, supportive and sustainable environment, in which researchers are valued not only for scientific output but also for their contributions to education, mentoring and leadership.



Since 2025, she has also served on the management team of VU Amsterdam's Department of Physics and Astronomy as its first assistant-professor representative. In this role, she has been a driving force behind several concrete initiatives to strengthen the position and development of early-career researchers. She helped establish a PhD council to give doctoral researchers a direct voice in

departmental decision-making, contributed to new policies on PhD supervision and career development, and initiated a new internal funding scheme to stimulate interdisciplinary research and create opportunities for new collaborations. Her commitment to the scientific community extends to the national level, where she contributes to research assessment and funding through service on NWO committees, including the Veni committee. Through these activities, Dreissen translates her vision of a more inclusive and supportive academic culture into concrete change, both within and beyond her institution.

Dreissen has been involved in university education for more than a decade. She has taught at VU Amsterdam and Leibniz Universität Hannover and now teaches across Physics, Medical Natural Sciences and Science, Business & Innovation, from MSc courses of approximately 30 students to large BSc courses of approximately 200 students.
She has supervised more than ten BSc and MSc students and currently has responsibility for (co-) mentoring six PhD researchers, two of whom have already successfully defended their theses. Her approach emphasizes independence, scientific ownership and the development of young researchers into confident, capable professionals.

Dreissen also greatly enjoys communicating physics beyond her own field and sharing her enthusiasm for fundamental science with diverse audiences. Recent examples include a public lecture during *Weekend van de Wetenschap* and an appearance on NPO Radio 1's *De Nacht van de Wetenschap*, where she discussed how quantum technologies can help us understand the universe. She has also given an invited colloquium at Amsterdam UMC to an audience of neurosurgeons and engaged directly with politicians and policy makers about the importance of quantum science during a parliamentary event in Berlin.

Her trajectory from pioneering, record-precision spectroscopy to leading an ambitious programme in quantum-enabled tests of fundamental physics, while actively strengthening the community around her, makes her a strong and deserving winner of the 2026 DPC/NNV Minerva Prize.

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Photo Laura Dreissen: Sander Nieuwenhuys