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This young man is 19 years old – and is currently writing his doctoral thesis. About a highly gifted talent from the University of Konstanz

At the age of 15, Felix Petersen began his school studies at the University of Konstanz, and by the time he graduated from high school, he had his computer science degree in his pocket. About an academic life at full speed.

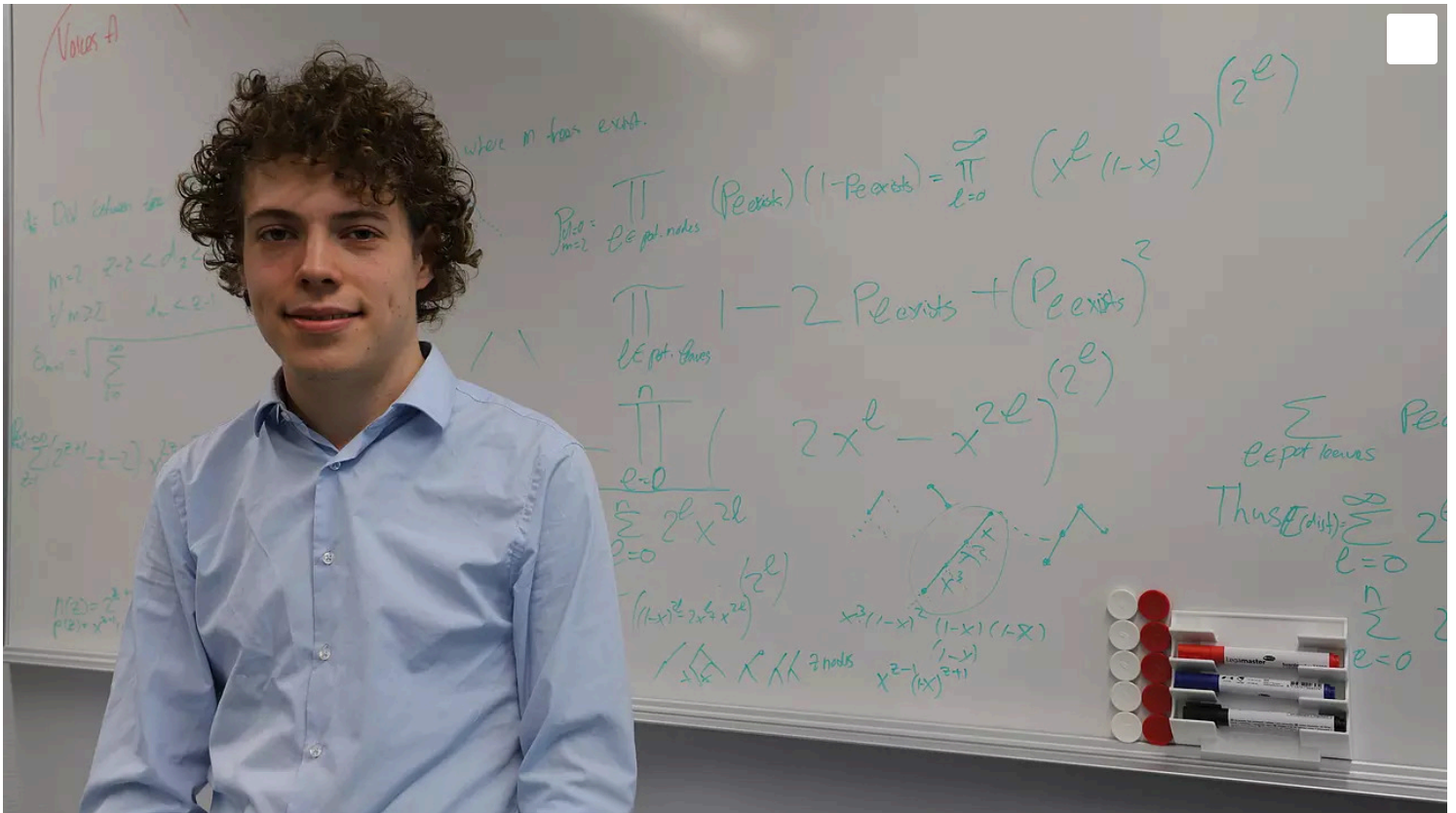


Image: Feiertag, Ingo



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Felix Petersen's life has its own pace. Full speed ahead. School. High school diploma. University. The important moments just rush past him. Stop? No time. Not even now. He is currently writing his doctoral thesis. But he is not only smart and fast. He is also very young. Felix Petersen is 19 years old.

At the age of 15, the Lübeck native moved from Hamburg to Lake Constance. He heard that the University of Konstanz offered a special student course for young people interested in science.

► This is the student study

Around 20 to 30 young people attend lectures at the university in addition to school every semester. There are currently no school students enrolled at the HTWG. "Some are just about to graduate and are still unsure what they want to study. This gives them a very real opportunity to try things out," says Ulrike Leitner, for whom the school course at Gießberg was the first project of her work as a study advisor eleven years ago. "Others are very interested in individual things," she continues, "and others just need more." It's a balancing act between boredom and demands - as is the case with Felix Petersen.

From day one, he set an incredible pace. In the ninth grade, he came from northern Germany to the Alexander von Humboldt Gymnasium. Every now and then. "From the very beginning, I spent more time at the university than at school," says the 19-year-old doctoral student. "When I was away for a week and then came back, there was loud cheering and my classmates shouted: Thank God, Felix is here. He hasn't disappeared after all."



Image: Www.Photo-Spice.Com

“Felix’s office is bigger than mine.”

STUDY ADVISOR ULRIKE LEITNER

While his former classmates are now traveling around the world or struggling to find their way through the first semesters at a university, he already has his own office in the university's computer science department. "I was there recently," says student advisor Ulrike Leitner and laughs: "His room is a lot bigger than mine." The child prodigy has long since overtaken his sponsors.

When he received his school leaving certificate with a grade of 1.9 in the summer of 2018, Felix Petersen had already completed all of his studies. However, since he was not allowed to submit his bachelor's thesis until the second semester, the teenager used the first six months after graduating from high school to do research in Tel Aviv.

The Israeli city on the Mediterranean has wonderful beaches and attracts young people from all over the world because of its nightlife. But Felix Petersen says soberly: "A professor from there invited me and his field of expertise was a good fit with my research."

Well, the city is "really beautiful and not too big. You can do everything by bike," he adds. That's the best thing for the speedy scientist from Lake Constance. Because Petersen doesn't have much time for anything else besides research.

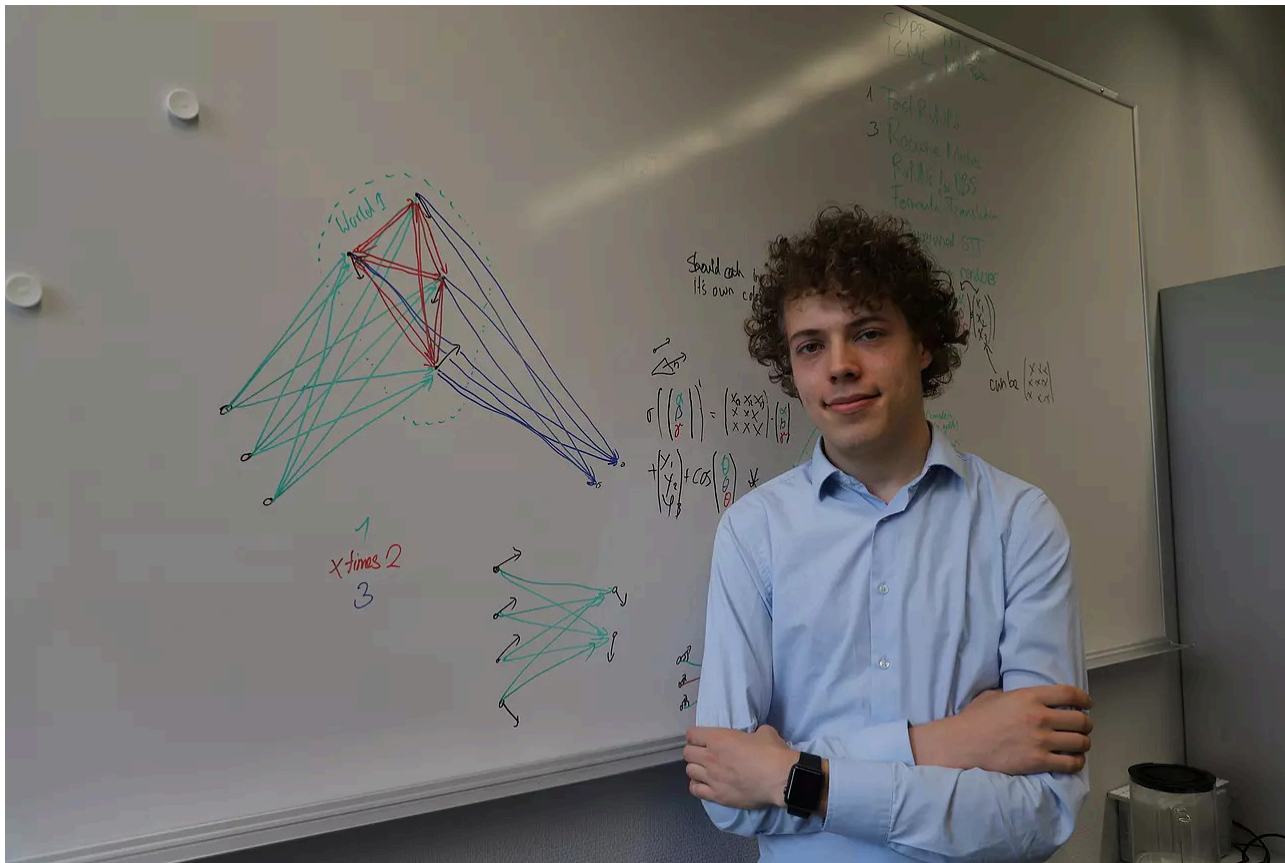


Image: Feiertag, Ingo

During his three-and-a-half-year student course, which is also his real course of study, the convinced vegan gets to know fellow students who spend more time in the evenings and weekends in Konstanz's clubs and bars than in the lecture halls during the week.

"Some of them dropped out of college," says the 19-year-old. Sometimes he goes out with the other students, but overall it certainly doesn't hurt his education that Felix Petersen, although often thought to be older, is still too young for many of the establishments at the time.

Felix Petersen does internships at the best addresses

There isn't much free time anyway with a so-called fast-track course, training in the fast lane. Felix Petersen is collecting internships at the best places. The highly gifted student has been a guest at DESY in Hamburg, the world's largest electron synchrotron and particle accelerator, several times, then at CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, and at the Paul Scherrer Institute in Switzerland.

The main goal of the student course is not to be faster than all the other students, as Ulrike Leitner explains. "It's an educational opportunity," she says, "you can choose the dose yourself. The spectrum ranges from a quick taste without taking any exams to a full course like Felix's."

► This is how the student studies with Felix Hummel went



Felix Hummel is one of the first student students in Konstanz. The 27-year-old has just completed his doctorate in mathematics. | Image: Feiertag, Ingo

You can hear the pride when the student advisor talks about the students whose journeys she has accompanied over the past eleven years. About the ninth-grader from Villingen who wrote the best exam in linear algebra at university, or a girl who taught herself Japanese for fun while at school together with other students. "You always get to know really great, impressive young people who are also very talented," says Leitner.

During their studies, the students primarily acquired the "key skill of self-organization." "They learn to stand up for themselves and to negotiate," Ulrike Leitner observed. "And some have to learn how to learn first. Simply sitting down and getting an A like in school is no longer so easy."

Unless your name is Felix Petersen. He says that it doesn't really matter how quickly he finishes his doctoral thesis. "It's more important to me that I do useful research during that time," he explains, but adds: "I think it would be cool if I could finish my doctorate in two years from now. But it would also be completely realistic if it took me four years."

At the same time, the 19-year-old, who has previously had a scholarship and worked as a research assistant, wants to continue researching and, as he puts it, "make life easier" for other people through his work. He also often travels to conferences all over Germany, and in October he will spend some time at an event in Mountain View, California.

With all the appointments and the rapid pace, Felix Petersen sometimes needs to be reminded of the universe outside the university walls. "Life is not just about numbers," his girlfriend wrote on a flipchart in his office.

"I know that. Numbers aren't important anyway," says Petersen, without changing his expression. "It's more about concepts. Just like moral concepts are important, not the words you write down to go with them." Just to remind you: this aspiring doctor is 19 years old.

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