



Speech at the official opening of the academic year 2013

Rector Dag Rune Olsen's speech at the official opening of the academic year, August 13. 2013.

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A child, a teacher, a book and a pen can change the world.

That was Malala's conclusion when she spoke to the UN General Assembly on her own 16th birthday earlier this summer. Malala, the young girl from Pakistan, has recently been praised throughout the world for her burning commitment to the importance of everyone's right to an education, not least girls.

We are lucky enough to live in a society where equal right to an education is something we take for granted. After 13 years of schooling, you have now chosen to set to work on the last stage of education that our society offers: studies at a university. Higher education will ensure you knowledge, insight and skills on which our society is increasingly dependent. In Norway, there is a crying need for competent labour. A solid education opens the door to many opportunities for challenging, interesting and meaningful work. Even in those parts of southern Europe where the unemployment is frighteningly high among young people, an education gives a clear advantage in the labour market.

The specific professional knowledge and the skills you acquire through your studies here are naturally important when you shall later begin your working career, but the capability of reflection and critical thought - the core of what we call breeding - will also give you a ballast as a citizen of society. It is nothing new to tell you that education involves more than just a knowledge of facts and specific skills. As early as 2,500 years ago, the Chinese philosopher Confucius was already of the clear opinion that education refines people and contributes to a more harmonious society. With your education, you will be involved in developing Norway as a knowledge nation. With your knowledge, you will help form the society.

We at the University of Bergen are proud that you have chosen our university as a place to study.

We know that you have thereby entrusted us with the task of giving you an education of the utmost quality. That is a task that we will embark on with great pleasure and enthusiasm, but also with the deepest seriousness. The University of Bergen has many extremely professional academic environments - some of which are truly world class. Our ambition is that you as a student will derive great benefit from the knowledge that our researchers provide you. We want to offer something more than instruction based solely on textbooks from the book store; we offer an education based on our

own research and the knowledge we develop together with our colleagues throughout the world. That guarantees you a quality that you will profit greatly from later in your career.

The University of Bergen is an internationally oriented educational institution with students and staff from all over the world and from a great variety of different countries. Not only do we have an extensive research collaboration with colleagues abroad, we also have agreements on the exchange of students. We strongly encourage you to take one or more semesters of your studies at one of our collaborating institutions. The advantages of so doing are enormous - not just academically - but also in the form of cultural understanding, language skills and networking.

Make demands on us; that's how we improve as an educational institution. We will likewise make demands on you. What we require is effort and dedication. We demand the same of ourselves! Your feedback to your lecturer and through course evaluations is important to us and helps improve the quality of our programme. Take advantage of this opportunity. On the last Friday of every month, you will also have an opportunity to meet the rector - or one of the other staff in the Rectorate - in the Student Centre. There you will find one of us sitting in a chair; the other one is reserved for you. We are there to listen

Studying is hard work, and at times it can be quite difficult even when everything has been properly arranged; however, you are not the only one to experience this. In the poem "Ny duk" (New tablecloth), the author Olav H. Hauge writes:

New yellow cloth on the table.
New sheet of white paper!
This is where the words must come,
here where the cloth is so fine
and likewise the paper!
The ice has covered the fjord,
so now the birds are sitting on it.

Of course, we are right at the beginning of the semester, and it will be a long while before the ice covers the water, but there is still no reason to put off taking out the new, white sheets of paper!

Although life as a student will involve a lot of hard work and be stressful at times, your time of study will also be a period for personal, as well as professional, development. The University is a melting pot of different, interesting people from both at home and abroad. You will develop friendships here that will last for the rest of your life, and - who knows - this may be where you find the love of your life sitting at a table in the Student Centre or in the park at Muséhagen behind us here.

This week is Mentor Week. It is an important time for you to make contacts and build social networks in what - for many of you - is a new city. You shall get to know the city, and the city will get to know you. In the middle of Mentor Week, it may not be so easy to come across as the "refined" people that

Confucius imagined an education would make us. Remember, however, that you are ambassadors of the University of Bergen in each and every thing you do.

Bergen is a fantastic student town! The city appreciates and is always interested in its students. The students enjoy the city and leave their mark on it. Bergen has an unusually broad cultural programme, and the student culture is an important part of Bergen's culture. There are many teams and organisations that would like to have you on board. Make Bergen your student town!

Welcome to Bergen, to the University of Bergen - we welcome you!