

Dear Students,

welcome to the University of Lüneburg and if so welcome to a new chapter of your life. I clearly remember how I moved here literally knowing no-one. I went to my opening ceremony alone and I felt very lost.

I questioned myself: Was it really the right idea to move away five hours from home, alone without any friends to a city which I have been twice in my life before?

Two years later I can tell you: yes, it was! The minute you will walk out of the audimax to meet in your groups, you will find people to hang out and become friends with.

Some of you may just finished school, took a GAP year, travelled the world or you just finished your training as a mechanic. Some of you are 18, some 24 and others 40 years old. Some of you have children others don't.

You are all different and unique characters, but what you all have in common is, that you are now a fresher at our university. A place to learn, grow and change.

Turn to your left and right: use this community of like-minded people in your new surrounding to create something new. But also respect and appreciate opinions which are from people who think differently.

Use these points of views to broaden yours, it may not be easy, but it will help you to diversify your own thinking. We're all working on it, and we are all frustrated sometimes, but it only matters that we don't resign, that we keep on learning, that we keep on questioning.

Is there a topic you are really annoyed and frustrated about? Read about it and educate yourself. At our university you can find many different groups and initiatives to work in and be that change. Because as the cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead said: never doubt a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has.

But also keep in mind that sitting here at this place in a university is a privilege, a privilege other do not have, although they are as smart as you. May it be that they do not have the financial means, the support of their families or the access to institutions of

higher education. So, use your privilege to address and tackle disadvantages others are facing.

We believe in great projects, that we all as a community of students can realise. You may have heard of the powerful students' movements of the past. Still, today young people change this world. Think of the Fridays for Future movement where, in Germany alone, 1,4 million people went on the streets to protest for fairer climate politics.

For us it's hard to picture a world without the impact of young people's engagement in politics and society. Imagine how it would be without.

With this speech I'm not trying to persuade you to speak up against the problems of our societies and the structures we are living in, I also want to show you that engagement at this university can bring a positive change.

For example, in a recent initiative we halted a decision by the senate that the attendance for students in seminars should be mandatory. Within a week we collected over 2200 signatures. Because of all the voluntary participants and the persistent work of our student senators, we are now in the powerful position to present our ideas about how teaching can work better for all involved groups at this university. As a fresher at our university you are now part of the involved groups and should participate.

I am now - in contrast to you - near the completion of my master. 8 years after starting studying, including changing university starting with a new subject, changing my minor, finally graduating and starting my master's program.

Looking back, I remember extraordinary ups and significant downs. Usually there is no perfect study program. No perfect university. No perfect life. May it be that your family is against your choice of subject, difficulties with new tasks and chores, or just that one mandatory module you are struggling with.

But ... that shall never stop you from embracing the good moments and to take the opportunities this new chapter in your life[s] offers.

There will be overwhelming impressions and enlightening insights, new friends, likeminded souls, or partners - maybe for life-, a great multitude of views.

You will gain knowledge how to participate, how to alter processes, how to engage in scientific discussions, to make an impact.

So: use your privilege! engage! Burn for your passion

but: never burn out.

Sometimes ignore the obligations of your privilege, party, travel, maybe study abroad, give yourself some room. Neither think that you are the only one facing problems, nor that you have to face them all alone.

We can't guarantee you that we can help solving all problems that may occur, but we can guarantee you that we will do our very best in trying to help you, if ever needed.

We wish you all the best and that you once will look back, seeing the time at our university as one of the best times of your life. Thank you.