

Speech for Mantė Žygelytė

Day One 3.9.2024

Arvon Rehtori! Arvon Provosti! Dear Aalto Community!

Joyful academic year to the new and returning students.

I would like to congratulate all the new students on getting a study spot at Aalto University. Well-deserved congratulations and warm welcome to the Aalto community! Onnittelut ja tervetuloa Aalto-yhteisöön! Grattis och välkommen! And a friendly greeting to all familiar faces returning back to their studies for the academic year 2024 to 2025.

It is a special moment to share today's stage with all of you. Back in 2021, I was on the other side of the screen, watching Aalto Day One ceremony as a new international master's student of School of ARTS. Moving from Lithuania to Finland, my emotions in the first weeks ranged from anxiety to excitement and vice versa. Those days were filled with me trying to attend every possible event to make 'the most out of it' and the get-togethers gifted me long-lasting friendships and cherished memories.

Each student journey is unique and there are various ways to participate. Each student journey is unique and there are various ways to participate. The vibrant Aalto student community provides many opportunities to engage, whether that be being active in a hobby club, running for a board member position in a guild or association, or getting involved in student politics, to name a few. The student years are full of new experiences, connections, highs and lows, offering much more to life than just studies. I encourage you to step out of your comfort zone, explore the unseen and connect with new and diverse people in the process.

Learning from my own experience as a first-year student a while back, I would advise you to be kind to yourself - there will always be events and opportunities to be part of. You don't have to participate in everything that is out there. Remember to take care of yourself and rest in between.

Last year, the university campuses across Finland, including Aalto, witnessed students of different fields and backgrounds come together. The students bravely occupied university premises and demonstrated for weeks against the social welfare cuts and immigration policies proposed by the Finnish government. The mobilization and unity of students sparked a lot of discussion and support within the university circles and beyond. I was, and still am, worried about these cuts and their impact on students and our well-being. As we step into the new year, I appreciate that Aalto University and its leadership are taking once again a strong stance on behalf of the international community through the launch of today's campaign. In retrospect, the student unity across Finland gave me hope. It highlighted the importance of coming and being together in difficult times.

As I conclude this speech, I want to return to where I began. It is an honor to stand here on this stage. Three years after joining the Aalto community, I am grateful yet still somewhat in disbelief to stand on the other side of the screen, greeting you all on behalf of the Aalto University Student Union.

In these turbulent times, I wish all of us, students, peace to study! Toivon meille opiskelurauhaa. Jag önskar oss studiefred!

Kiitos! Tack! Thank You! Ačiū!