

WELCOMING SPEECH

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Mayor of the City of Weimar

**Matriculation Ceremony
at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar
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Dear Professor Speitkamp,
dear deans, professors, lecturers,
And above all: dear students and new Weimarers!

Is there any better way to start a speech at an enrolment ceremony in our Goethe city than by citing perhaps the most famous lamentation of German literary history?

**»I've studied, alas, philosophy,
Law and medicine, recto and verso,
And how I regret it, theology also,
Oh God, how hard I've slaved away,
With what result?«**

You recognise it?! Faust, Part one. A truly gloomy prelude to the timeless tragedy. There Faust sits at night in a vaulted Gothic room at his desk. A pale moon shines into the room. Faust becomes – not surprising in this setting – depressed. The poor wretch gazes at a vial of poison and already the suicidal thoughts creep in. As if that weren't bad enough, he confesses frustratingly:

»I'm no whit wiser than when I began!«

Such a declaration of intellectual bankruptcy after years of hard work is something nobody would wish on any student! I asked myself how Faust got into this pitiful situation. He was clearly not familiar with the findings of a recent study by a Danish survey institute called EVA. The study conducted in March of this year surveyed 14,000 students. It came to the conclusion that there was a link between social interaction and successful graduation. The study found that students who went out with their fellow students for a beer – figuratively speaking – were more likely to finish their studies.

To put it another way: those who – particularly at the beginning of their studies – never showed up at student parties, fell out of contact with others. This led to a drop in students' motivation to stick with their studies. But, just so we understand each other: this study is, of course, not a carte blanche for complete drunkenness! But I'm not worried about you anyway.

Getting back to our Faust, his big mistake was that he understood all his studies as merely an unrelenting act of penance in the silence of his room. For he turned in upon himself, he was a loner. If he had also understood his studies as a time of exchange and camaraderie with like-minded people, he might have saved himself a lot of frustration, anger and devilry.

If he had done it the way you, dear students, hopefully will, he would have been better off. At any rate, I am very happy to be able to look out into the full rows in the Audimax! To see so many young people from all over the world is a beautiful sight. To all of you: welcome to Weimar! As Lord Mayor, I wish to extend a warm welcome to those of you who are new to Weimar. About one in five people came to us from abroad. That honours us. I would also like to extend my warmest greetings to the Weimar natives sitting here among you. Thank you for choosing to study in your home town. And of course, the same applies to all the other students who came to us from all of our federal states.

The semester orientation days are now behind you all. A new chapter in life is now beginning for all of you. Its effect will be long lasting. For a university education goes beyond the mere acquisition of specialised knowledge. It conveys standards and mindsets that last a lifetime. You will find that decades from now you will be asked: »What did you study?« And you will notice every time that your academic degree is an essential part of your own identity – even if your career path is not set in stone once and for all by your major.

Another common question you will come across is: »Where did you study?« And here you can be sure that with Weimar you have chosen a place that enjoys a very special reputation with an »aha-effect«. This city is one of the cultural culmination points of German culture and history. Goethe, Schiller, Bach, Liszt, Nietzsche and the Bauhaus geniuses surrounding Walter Gropius: they all worked and lived here – sometimes for life. They were all inspired by the genius loci of this city. Thanks to the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, the Bauhaus tradition in particular continues to flourish.

We are currently working especially hard on behalf of the world-famous hotbed of design and architecture. Work on the new Bauhaus Museum is in full swing. You will witness its completion during your studies here in Weimar.

But Weimar also has a place in the history of democracy: in 1919 the constitutional National Assembly met here. The first democratic constitution for the whole of Germany was formulated here. In 1919, the black-red-and-gold waved over the National Theatre for the first time as the national flag of a democratic Germany. Fundamental human rights for all, gender equality, women's suffrage, educational policy, family law, the right of assembly and the abolition of the death penalty, the relationship between state and citizenry, the state and the economy, as well as a comprehensive reform of the tax system – all this was fundamentally debated here in Weimar in 1919 by the National Assembly.

Last but not least, we in Weimar also had to discover how quickly people were prepared to say goodbye to this strenuous phenomenon called »democracy«.

The name of our town is closely linked with that of Buchenwald. More than 56,000 people lost their lives in the Nazi concentration camp on the nearby hill of Ettersberg. After 1945, the Soviet occupying forces caused another 7,000 deaths. High culture and barbarism are bedfellows in Weimar.

In these turbulent times, I'd like to make one thing clear: the city of Weimar will do everything possible to ensure that barbarism will never again triumph over the culture of humanism and decency! I also call upon you, dear students, to take an active part in our community. In projects, initiatives, political parties and associations – regardless of whether in the cultural, social or political sphere. Our democracy and our country need you! Help to shape them by taking on responsibility. My door will always be open to you in these endeavours.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We shall end as we began, with Goethe. When he started his studies at the age of 16, there was no university in his hometown of Frankfurt, so he went to Leipzig. From there, on 13 October 1765, he wrote to his father:

»You would not believe what it's like to be around professors. I was enchanted to witness some of these personages in all their glory!«

Those were the days: professors in their glory! Professors worshipped by their students have become rather rare – have they not, Mr. Speitkamp? But is it not possible to lead an institution like the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar as a whole, as a community of students, of teachers and learners, of donors and sponsors to an even greater glory? This will also fall to you, dear freshmen! In any event, I wish you a successful start to your studies. And remember: don't study in solitude, but rather as a community!

All the best for your future!