

WELCOMING SPEECH

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**Matriculation Ceremony
at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar
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Dear students, especially new students of this university,
dear family members, parents, siblings and friends,
dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you on behalf of our university today. I am pleased that you are here, and I am delighted that you, the new students from Germany and many other countries around the world, have decided to study at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. You have made a good decision, and we will work together with energy and pleasure to ensure that in future you can also say that it was a very good decision. Why was it a very good decision? There are three good reasons why, and they are to be found in three-parts of our name: Bauhaus-Universität Weimar.

First, the city of Weimar. At first glance, Weimar may appear to be an astonishingly homogeneous and idyllic city with a closed and uniform urban landscape that is home to classical, Gründerzeit and Art Nouveau buildings, cobblestone pavements, horse-drawn carriages, parks and a number of outstanding architectural and cultural monuments. Much of it, like two Art Nouveau buildings of our university, is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At second glance, however, Weimar is also a multifaceted city. It was, and still is, a cultural centre where eminent personalities meet and not only Goethe and Schiller; it continues to be an intellectual centre with two special universities and a wealth of cultural offerings. Looking closer still, Weimar finally reveals itself a city that reflects not only the great heights but also the profound depths of German history. Buchenwald, the nearby Nazi concentration camp, is not the only witness to this. It is also reflected in the architecture of the city itself, as evidenced by the former Gauforum, a never-completed parade ground designed by the National Socialists on a monumental scale as an unparalleled demonstration of power. And yet, Weimar is also the birthplace of the Weimar Republic, the first German democracy and, incidentally, also the first German welfare system. In short, Weimar distils in an extraordinary way all the ambivalence of German history and politics. Weimar is worthy of our contemplation; for the city reveals just how important social and political engagement is, even today.

So, now we come to our university. What is a university anyway? To start with, a university is not a school or a training centre. A university is an educational space, an educational opportunity that society provides for you free of tuition and with a great deal of freedom. And, this is important to us: you are no longer a pupil, nor are you a customer who can acquire educational licenses from us. You are now members and collaborators of our university. We are only as good as what we can achieve here together.

Our university is home to four faculties: Architecture and Urbanism, Civil Engineering, Art and Design, and Media. The combination of research and study, of art and instruction, of reflection and design, of theory and practice – this is our task, and it can only be accomplished together with you. From the very beginning, we integrate you into our scholarly projects, our technical projects, and our artistic projects. Please take advantage of these opportunities, work with us. This is what our understanding of education is all about.

For this is the only way we can also learn from you: we want to know what expectations, hopes and demands you bring with you. We want to know what your academic and professional ideals are, what drives you, where you want to go, what your interests and talents are. In short, we want to know who you are. You have to communicate this to us: by engaging with us, asking questions, expressing expectations, helping to shape the university. After all, the university is not a rigid structure, but rather a constantly shifting one. Universities must continually reinvent themselves, their goals, themes, practices and teaching methods. We can and must all be involved in this process of development. There are few places more interesting than a university because new people are constantly arriving, bringing new ideas, questions and surprises, and because no one can prevent us from thinking up and trying out new things here.

You can take part in two ways: on the one hand by actively participating in projects, courses, seminars, excursions, et cetera, in an influential, questioning and demanding way. Secondly, by participating in the

university self-government at the level of the faculties on the Faculty Board or on the university level in the Student Government or Senate, the parliament of our university, so to speak – there are many ways to get involved. And only those who clearly voice their expectations and take part are entitled to complain if something is unsatisfactory, or if expectations are not met.

Finally, we come to Bauhaus. What is it actually, why is this university called the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar? That has only been its name since 1996, but its history is older. In 1860 a Grand Ducal Saxon Art School was founded in Weimar. In 1907 a school of applied arts was added. But our most important pillar of tradition is the State Bauhaus, which was founded here in Weimar in 1919 by the architect Walter Gropius. In 1925, the Bauhaus moved to Dessau, mainly for political reasons, because at the time nationalist forces gained influence in Weimar and the international reform movements of the Bauhaus were a thorn in its side. A civil engineering university remained in Weimar. It survived – under various names – both the National Socialist era and the GDR. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990, the university was reorganised, finally expanded into the university as we know it today, and received its current name the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar.

What does Bauhaus stand for; what does the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar stand for? When the Bauhaus was founded in April 1919, Germany was in crisis. The Great War, which had ended in 1918, claimed millions of lives. And millions of former soldiers poured back into Germany looking for housing, food and jobs. The public debate revolved around a political constitution – monarchy, a system of councils and parliamentary democracy were all up for debate – and overcoming the consequences of war, including what was thought to be national humiliation by the victorious powers. During this time, extraordinary courage and optimism were part of the process of founding a completely new school of reform. Science and technology were again to be joined to the arts and crafts. The founders of the Bauhaus believed in improving individuals and society as a whole through self-realisation and collaborative study and work. They created models and life-styles for a better future. Members and pupils of the Bauhaus, many of whom were ostracised and banished by the Nazis, spread the ideas of this founding period throughout the world. Today, in design as well as in construction, from Chicago to Tel Aviv, you can find testimonies of this truly global movement all over the world.

In the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar we also study this heritage. But we are not just concerned with preserving tradition, but also with shaping the future. You have arrived in Weimar at a special time because in two years, 2019, the Bauhaus will celebrate its 100th anniversary. We are preparing ourselves for this celebration, which will take place in the winter semester 2018/19 – that is, in one year's time, with a dedicated Bauhaus semester. We want to offer interdisciplinary introductory courses, open modules and interconnected projects. We want to present the Bauhaus semester under the guiding principles of »connecting – learning – moving« – that is, working together, discovering new ideas and shaping the future. Indeed, here at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar we ask: what are the most pressing questions of the present and the future? Many at this university are working on these, from technical models and digital simulations to artistic designs and theoretical concepts. We are all driven by similar questions: how can we take part today in shaping the future of tomorrow? What disciplines must we combine today? How can science, technology and art, research and practical design work together in a time that seems increasingly characterised by specialisation? How can we support processes such as globalisation and internationalisation, digitalisation and automation in a manner such that we are the agents, that we are the drivers and not simply pushed along and driven by external forces?

To do this we need freedom, creativity, openness to new things, a willingness to work with others. The university is just such a space, but a place for creativity and innovation. Here you can and must try out new things, even when there is risk involved; you must ask unconventional questions, give surprising answers, forge new paths. Science, research and art, instruction and learning require freedom. Here, at our university, that freedom exists. But what our university needs most of all are courageous and creative people: that is where you come in. We, the approximately 800 members of the staff in science, art and administration, including almost 100 professors, are here to offer you help and support. We are always at your service, please contact us. It is so important that you seek out advice, that you turn to us for help and challenge us.

It is likely that a great many of you will only be here for a relatively short period, just a few years of your life. But these are important years, formative years. Take advantage of them, for they are far too precious to be allowed to slip by in passivity. We are a small university with the great advantage of compactness, which makes encounters with so many people from other disciplines possible. This offers constant stimulation. So once again: use this time, enjoy the opportunity to study in freedom, and of course: enjoy life, the openness of Weimar, the flexibility offered by studying at our university and in this city today.