

**Aleksi Tujunen, Chair of the Board of the Student Union of the University of Helsinki,
speech at the opening ceremony of the academic year on 5 September 2022**

Madam Rector and distinguished Vice-Rectors, your excellencies and honoured guests, dear students and honourable guests, dear members and friends of the University community,

Section 2 of chapter 1 of the Universities Act states the following: “The mission of the universities is to promote independent academic research as well as academic and artistic education, to provide research-based higher education and to educate students to serve their country and humanity at large.”

I think that there is these days a rising trend to replace the word ‘humanity’ in this wonderful statement with the words ‘business life’. Admittedly, the research conducted at universities and our university graduates benefit business life and help Finland succeed. It is also true that almost 80% of new jobs require competencies acquired in higher education. Having said that, I am saddened by the omission of the intrinsic value of science, education and Bildung in many contexts. Through science and research, we as humanity learn more about the world and ourselves. Through training and higher education, we gain useful knowledge as well as the capacity to analyse and acquire more knowledge, and the ability to perceive the world.

I think the time spent at university should be appreciated in its own right. It is – or should be – a time of growth, personal development and learning about your own and other disciplines. During your studies, you should try new things also outside the lecture room. I strongly recommend taking part in the activities of the many subject-, faculty- and hobby-specific organisations operating under the Student Union of the University of Helsinki, as well as those of civic organisations and the associations known as student nations.

This autumn in particular, I also wish to highlight the election for the Student Union’s Representative Council, where our own student version of parliament will be elected for the organisation to decide on spending and the focus areas of operations. In the council election, all attending students of the University are eligible to vote and stand as a candidate. The next election will take place in late October and early November! We students also have the opportunity to directly influence the University and our studies through, for example, degree programme steering groups, which make decisions on, among other things, compulsory and optional courses in the programmes.

There are many problems to solve and challenges to tackle in the world, many of which the University and we, members of the University community, can have an impact on. Promoting equality, eradicating poverty and solving environmental crises require smart and capable people. Dear new students, make the most of your time at the University, make the world a better place and keep the flag of research and education flying high!

I wish us all a good start to the academic year.
Jag önskar oss alla en bra början på läsåret.
Toivon meille kaikille huikaaa alkavaa lukuvuotta!