**Rector’s speech at semester start at the University of Agder 2019-2020**

Dear students, dear Mayors Harald Furre and Kjetil Glimsdal, dear Labour Party Deputy Leader Hadia Tajik, who is our guest speaker, and dear staff.

Welcome to the University of Agder.

You have all heard the phrase: Today is the first day of the rest of your life. It is a cliché that is used in many different contexts, but today is one of those days in your life where this phrase really means something. You are starting a new chapter in your life; and for the first time you choose what to learn. In the range of study programmes on offer, you have made a choice based on your own interests. But you don’t just choose what to learn, you also choose how to learn. This is the main difference between being a pupil and being a student. According to the dictionary, a pupil means someone who receives instruction.

Now you are a student, which means someone who learns. As a student you are going to become independent and you will have a lot of freedom deciding how you want to spend your time. This transition may be difficult.

Our job as staff at UiA is to help you in this process of becoming an independent learner – which among other things involves learning to develop critical thinking skills and being able to distinguish between evidence-based knowledge and fake news.

In today’s society you are never fully qualified. Your goal for your studies should therefore not only be to acquire good skills within your chosen field, but also good learning strategies which you may use throughout your life.

UiA is a learning organisation – which means that everyone who works here is also a student in a way. Those who do research and teach must continually acquire new insights to be able to develop new knowledge which society needs – as you progress in your studies, you too will take part in developing new knowledge, for example through bachelors or masters dissertations or other kinds of projects and contribute in your way to the positive development of our society.

That is why we see you as a partner in our knowledge organisation – our common goal is to make sure that our society has the skills needed to solve the challenges we face at all times.

We who work here at UiA really hope that you share this vision and will see yourself as an important participant in a knowledge community. Already next year, you will get a new position in this community and will be able help the class of 2020 to settle in and also give them professional advice. If we together manage to create such a learning culture, we all have exciting times ahead of us.

Being a student today is very different from when I was a student – mainly because society as a whole has changed – the growth of social media has changed the way we relate for better or for worse, and the new social issues may appear overwhelming and frightening for you who have a long life ahead of you.

For those of us who have been around for a while, it is hard to really understand how this affects your thoughts about the future and how it will affect your experience of being a student. Here you possess a knowledge that we do not have and that we need in order to help you succeed as a student.

That is why I want to have student mentors, one from each of our two campuses, who I can consult to ensure I get the insight I need. These positions will be posted today on the website Kompetansetorget: UiA’s own career portal: kompetansetorget.uia.no.

In addition, you will of course have ample opportunity to affect the student experience by signing up as student representatives, take part in societies and clubs, stand for election for various positions in the student organisation. There are also many opportunities at UiA for students to get paid work in different departments. Just check out karriere.no. I hope that you will get actively involved – not only will your university experience become more exciting but having commitments other than your studies is also something future employers will value.

This first week will be a little different – you will meet your buddy (fadder) and meet your teachers for the first time. Both UiA and the Student Association of Agder have made a great effort to give you a proper welcome. Use this first week to get to know your fellow students. You are going to meet a lot of people who share your interests and make friends, perhaps for life.

Next week, the hard work begins. Good luck with your studies. I wish each and every one of you an instructive and pleasant time as a student!

Sunniva Whittaker 12.08.2019