

OPENING ACADEMIEJAAR 2020-2021
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At this rather unusual start to the academic year, I would like to say how pleased I am that the new year is starting and that we're regaining some momentum and perspective. I wish everyone the best possible academic year. Welcome, in particular, to the first-year students. The lockdown in March had a large impact on what should have been an amazing time: your final months of secondary education. And now you have to start your first year in 'corona mode' ... that's not ideal. But, dear students, let's make the best of it. 'On campus as much as possible', that's our motto. That's what we're going for, together.

However, we also need to look beyond these next few months. The coronavirus pandemic is a breaking point, a new world is coming our way. And together, students and the university, in higher education, we can help shape that world. The world of tomorrow really is in the hands of young people today. Dear students, you are in the front row ready to shape this new world. Through study, through reflection, through research, through commitment. Let's shape the future! That's the University of Antwerp's slogan.

What will tomorrow's world look like? Growth has its limits, that much is clear. The over-development of our world has resulted in the coronavirus pandemic and climate challenges. In tomorrow's world, we'll have to tackle both global health and climate change in one huge project. That means thinking about everything. For instance, over-development is linked to outsourcing production all over the world to produce everything as cheaply as possible. That model is no longer sustainable. Another striking aspect has been government minimalism. The role of government after the pandemic needs to be reconsidered and adapted. In my opinion, we should once again give a greater role to the government to develop a well-run state, focusing more on strategic investments, for instance. Education, health, agriculture, spatial planning and so on should all be reimagined for the new world that's coming. As drivers of education, research and innovation, universities are pillars of the new high-tech society, which must go hand in hand with a vision for humanity and society based on freedom and human rights.

It is this freedom that we will need to shape further in the years to come, striking a new balance. In which we've learnt not just that trees grow upwards. But also that we need trees, and squares and streets, and biodiversity, and a circular economy, in a healthy economy and environment, standing up for one another, and getting through tough times together.

Dear students, as I've already said: whatever programme you're taking, you are now in the front row, the architects of tomorrow's world. We will do this through education and research, while always intensely debating humanity and society.

That's why at the start of this academic year, we bring together researchers, lecturers, students and society. All of us shape the future together.
Best wishes to you all.