



Speech at the

First Years' Convocation Ceremony 2023: Welcome@TUM

16. October 2023

Prof. Dr. Thomas F. Hofmann

Präsident der Technischen Universität München

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Dear students,

Are you curious? Sure, you are — just as much as I am — seeing you arrive on campus. On behalf of my colleagues here on stage, let me welcome you at TUM.

I am Thomas Hofmann, the president of this great university.

In welcome addresses, university presidents usually tell you that you are amazing individuals, that you have been selected from among the most talented high school students. This may be true — but this is not the point I want to make.

Instead, I want to encourage you to approach TUM unimpressed by how impressive you are. I hope you come to us with more questions than answers. I hope you are willing to say, “I don’t know...but I want to find out.” I want you to have the courage to say, “Perhaps I am wrong and others are right.” That is how you will learn the most here at TUM.

If you are here to ask questions about one another, about the world around us, about tomorrow — then you are at the right place, right here!

This is how you will be able to contribute to our culture of curiosity across the entire TUM family, from founders and faculty, students and staff, to alumni and parents, partners and friends.

So, be curious about the tremendously exciting time ahead of you. It is a time of getting oriented around campus, and meeting new people, many of them will become your friends in the coming weeks and months.

I send my welcome to all parents, family members, and friends. For them, this may be a day of curiosity, too — but also a day of mixed emotions: of deep pride, hopes for a good future, and a good portion of nervousness about you — as some of you are leaving home.

I want to assure you that while you are exploring TUM and refining your own paths, we will support you as much as possible.

Over 14,500 ambitious new students have enrolled at TUM in Munich, Garching, Freising, Straubing and Heilbronn: 52,000 students in total!

You come from all different walks-of-life, from all corners of the globe — 44% international students from more than 140 countries — each one of you with different strengths and weaknesses, different backgrounds, different life philosophies, experiences and perspectives.

However, we are all united in curiosity — by asking questions.

This diversity creates our strength as Germany's flagship university, and is more needed than ever before. Today, the world is facing increasing challenges, uncertainty, and disruption:

- (i) from racial inequities to geopolitical threats such as the war in Ukraine, and the ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza with thousands of innocent civilians torn from life on both sides, and
- (ii) from the global inflation to the unbroken climate challenge.

Let those challenges not dampen your spirit. Instead, use your time at TUM to re-engage with one another and the world. Consider what truly gives you inspiration, fulfillment, purpose and meaning.

You may ask how can I achieve this? I have three recommendations for you:

My first recommendation is engage deeply and explore broadly.

So, engage deeply within your own field of study in one of our seven schools.

No matter what your discipline is I strongly encourage you to join a team who is working on faculty-led research to make real contributions to human knowledge.

This will help make you a better critical thinker by learning how to ask and answer precise questions, and how to assess the strength and limitations of conclusions.

And explore broadly. Discover interests you did not know you had before. Embrace learning across disciplines, develop new skills and grow your personality.

I can tell you this is harder than just doing what you already know that you are good at. But, it is also a lot more fun — and will deeply enrich you as a person.

There are plenty of opportunities to get involved outside of the classroom.

You enter a university, which is second to none in its offerings in Germany:

- Become a member of the TUM Junge Akademie. This program supports you working in diverse teams to address real-world problems on your way to reach positions of responsibility in society.
- Or get involved in the programs of our EuroTech Universities Alliance. You can benefit from joint offerings of our partners: the Technical University of Denmark, the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne, the Institut Polytechnique de Paris, the Technion/Israel Institute of Technology, and the Eindhoven University of Technology

Such programs will give you unique experiences. You will get in-depth knowledge in one field, and the capability to think and act across disciplines. This will help you to see the world for all its complexity.

Future leaders are devoted to active citizenship. They think deeply about the world's problems and contribute to the advancement of human society.

I encourage you to take advantage of the course offerings of the new TUM School of Social Sciences and Technology. Find out what responsibility in research and innovation really means, or how we can make communication between the sciences and the public more effective.

Explore our courses in philosophy, which we offer jointly with the Munich School of Philosophy. Learn how to strengthen your arguments. Learn what you truly believe in.

This is increasingly important, as future leaders can draw on a broad scope of knowledge — about people, not just technology.

Future physicians will have a command of science, but also have exposure to the humanities. This can help them to communicate more empathetically with patients.

In addition, if you ask leaders in tech firms, they look for employees with a broad background that includes the arts, humanities or social sciences. This can help to better develop human-centered products and services. It will enable you to anticipate ethical and societal impacts of your work.

Therefore, exploring broadly and engaging deeply is the best way to prepare yourself for a future that is very uncertain. It makes you adaptable in times of change.

Secondly, I want to encourage you to embrace adventure by working in student teams.

Today's body of knowledge grows at a stunning rate. Research and innovation have become a team effort in which breakthroughs require collaboration of people with different types of expertise and skills.

Stay true to yourself, while at the same time take advantage of the growth and opportunities that come from being a team member.

My advice to you is connect with your fellow students, work with each other, learn from each other, challenge and support each another. This will open doors to new ideas, and will make you a valuable contributor to a team's success.

TUM offers multiple opportunities to engage in the TUM Project Weeks. Students and teachers can work across disciplines, curricula and locations on interesting challenges in this new format.

This does not only allow you to apply your disciplinary expertise, but it will help you to broaden your horizon, strengthen your interdisciplinary skills, and to accomplish more in a team.

If this sparks your interest, I also encourage you to engage in one of our vibrant student initiatives. We have currently 140 TUM Student Clubs. They consist of motivated students from all levels such as Bachelor, Master, and PhD.

Later, four TUM Student Clubs will present themselves on stage:

- Katharine Somerville and Tim Buttkus will present “TUfast Eco Team”. Four weeks ago, they broke the Guinness World Record for the world’s longest-range electric car engineered for extreme electrical and aerodynamic efficiency. They drove more than 2,573 kilometers on a single battery charge.
- We have the iGEM Munich Team with us as well. Students from TUM and LMU join forces in the annual iGEM competition in synthetic biology. Finn-Haye Lüth will present it. Last year, they won a gold medal in Paris for their project on increasing specificity of the CAR T-cell therapy and received the best software award.
- The student team DASH was just founded in 2021. They develop lower-limb exoskeletons and plan to attend the CYBATHLON competition in 2024.
- Our last team for today is LEVITUM. Their goal is to develop and build a hydrogen-powered drone for payload transportation. Konstantin Unterhuber will give you more details later.

They stand as models for what you can achieve here at TUM.

Believe me, once you have their passion in your blood, it will carry you on to top-performances everywhere — in research, innovation and your entire professional life.

I am sure that there is something that sparks your curiosity. If not, start up a new student club — this will enrich your experience even further.

Your passion creates excitement amongst our TUM Association of Alumni and Friends — students, staff, alumni, and friends — they support such initiatives intellectually, financially and by opening doors to partners.

One of these proud alumni is Samantha Cristoforetti. She is a TUM alumna, ESA astronaut, and last year, she was the first European female commander on the International Space Station ISS.

250 miles above Munich — she sent greetings down to our students on Twitter and posted a photo, which you can see on the posters at the fence, with the TUM logo floating next to her in zero gravity.

She is a fantastic example that our alumni have blue blood.

Connecting such alumni with you is immensely fruitful — it is a win-win. I encourage you to become a student member of this network of friends.

Just scan the QR-Code on the posters to find out more.

This brings me to my third point: Make our *can-do*-culture your own.

Our world is seriously challenged by the impact of the unbroken climate change and its impacts on resources and biodiversity, food security, energy and infrastructure, and human health.

These challenges transcend borders, countries, and continents. They are global — and put our own future at risk.

Over the last few years, our TUM faculty across the various schools has made tremendous efforts in researching climate change and developing greener technologies.

However, let us be honest with ourselves, the scale and the time frame of the climate challenge demands more. And we can do more — together.

Last year, we launched the TUM Sustainable Futures Strategy with concrete goals and effective measures helping us to reinforce our firm ambition for sustainable change.

Your fellow students have contributed to this strategy and have established many initiatives like the Green Offices in Straubing and Weihenstephan. I want to invite you all to make our campuses greener.

Climate activists, gluing themselves to the highway, will not solve the climate challenge — but entrepreneurial doers may do.

I, again, invite you to connect our sustainability ambitions with our entrepreneurial *can-do*-culture.

Make TUM your laboratory, develop effective solutions, scalable innovations and contribute to make our world more sustainable.

You can draw on TUM's unique ecosystem of entrepreneurship and value creation. We support you in developing a business idea, transforming it into a successful enterprise and pushing for sustainable change.

We give you access to our entrepreneurial support, like the Maker Space workshop to develop and construct prototypes, or the new TUM Venture Labs — a joint venture of TUM and UnternehmerTUM with the ambition to boost startups in deep tech domains. They offer technical and social infrastructure, venture training and support all the way up to our top-class industry and investor networks.

TUM offers plenty of unique opportunities for you to combine your studies with sustainable thinking, entrepreneurial ambition and responsible value creation.

For example, our two-week course THINK.MAKE.START. There you will work in diverse teams to develop solutions to real life problems, pitch your game-changing projects on a demo day — this has frequently led to the founding of new startups.

Or the TUM Entrepreneurial Masterclass where you can create your scientific thesis and, at the same time, are able to pursue your entrepreneurial ambitions and create real benefit to society.

So, adopt this can-do-culture.

If you have further ideas on how we can make things better here at TUM, feel encouraged to apply for the TUM Presidential Student Lunch.

These lunches are offered regularly on our TUM campuses to enable a direct dialogue between you and me.

Please allow me to introduce you to some members of the TUM Board of Management and the deans.

I also want to introduce you to Marius Wagener — student representative in our TUM Senate. He will give you a warm welcome in a minute.

First, let your student colleagues take you on a campus tour.

It is great having you here — enjoy your time.

Welcome at TUM.