

Dear Alumni,  
Dear parents,  
Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

First and foremost, allow me to sincerely congratulate our new graduates on the excellent results that they have achieved.

At the same time, I would also like to welcome all parents, and address a few words of thanks to them. Because, dear parents, you have always supported your son or daughter during his or her study time and have inspired your son or daughter to achieve good results. Thanks for this.

Moreover, I would also like to thank you for the trust you placed in VECO and the VUB. A trust that I hope we have not disappointed – a trust that was justified ...

In addition, as rector, I would like to thank all professors, assistants and administrative staff for their efforts. “But that’s their job”, I can hear you thinking. That’s true, but I know that they carry out this job with great enthusiasm and that, today, they are also very proud of our new generation of graduates.

And, last but not least, I would like to thank the faculty for inviting me to address you here this afternoon.

Personally speaking, I always enjoy attending a “graduation ceremony”. For me, it’s one of these moments when you can look back with satisfaction on what has been achieved on the one hand, and already look ahead to what’s in store on the other.

36 years ago, in 1976, I graduated myself, full of dreams and expectations. When I look back on these past 36 years now, I can see that the world has changed significantly. And this will also be the case for you when you look back on this ceremony in 36 years time.

We didn’t have Graduation Ceremonies in 1976. And computers, Internet and mobile phones were also still a long way in the future. In those days, people who studied at the university depended heavily on paper documents and bits of paper that were stuck to notice boards. The university programmes consisted of Candidate years and Licentiate years, with two exam periods. The mother tongue of the lecturers was mainly French, and the opinion of the lecturer was almighty. The lectures mainly took place on the ULB premises, because the

VUB had only just been founded as an autonomous Dutch-speaking university. The global strategy of this brand new university was therefore inspired by the wish to separate from the ULB, and to develop an independent, Dutch-language university in Brussels.

Today, 36 years later, the VUB is a fully-fledged Dutch-language university in Brussels, and we easily achieve the milestone of 11,000 students. The time of paper notes posted on notice boards is now largely behind us, because information today is distributed via the electronic newsletter, or via the Pointcarré learning platform. The 2 Candidate years have been replaced by 3 Bachelor years in the meantime, and the 2 Licentiate years have been replaced by 1 or, in some cases, 2 Master years. All Master programmes will soon be standardised as 2 years in any case. Students now have more flexibility in their educational programme, while the traditional annual programme is slowly disappearing into the background.

The official language of the lecturers today is undeniably Dutch, but English is increasingly taking on a more important position in the various programmes. And even though not everyone is equally inclined towards this idea, we will not be able to stop this evolution. The world is globalising – and higher education will not escape this.

The lecturer ceased to be almighty in his opinion for a long time now. Today, evaluations by the students themselves and by various other internal and external control mechanisms determine the requirements with which a good lecturer must comply. Quality assurance is certainly a key word within the VUB, in terms of education, research and the global organisation of our university.

The VUB is no longer situated in a small corner of the ULB campus, but has two campuses, in Etterbeek and Jette. And, as a result of our strong growth, even these two campuses are no longer sufficient, with the result that a new building was put into use in the spring, the Karel Van Miert building.

Nowadays, our strategy no longer mainly consists of achieving as much separation from the ULB as possible, but rather in looking for more cooperation, taking the strengths and USPs of each partner into account. In this way, the idea of a Brussels University Alliance is slowly taking shape. Working together will help us to cope with the challenges that the internationalisation of the higher education landscape entails.

I cannot predict what the world will look like in 36 years - in 2048. But I do have a vision, and an idea about this.

It could well be that the timetables as we know them today no longer exist in 2048. By then, the technological evolution will probably have advanced to the extent that we are able to

work a lot more with distance learning. The first successful initiatives are, in fact, already in existence at the VUB.

The Bachelors and Masters will still be around in 2048, but I expect that students might take on their first job after finishing their Bachelor programme, and will only start a Master programme later, based on this job situation. Lifelong learning will become even more significant than it is today.

In my opinion, English will definitely have made its appearance in the higher education scene, and multilingualism will be increasingly deployed within education.

The VUB will have extended its campuses by 2048. All engineering curriculums in Brussels will have merged, and will have their own buildings at the Campus La Plaine, where they will be working in close cooperation with the ULB. I expect and hope that the cooperation between both universities will have developed into a strong partnership with an international name and reputation. The old State Police barracks across the road here will have evolved into an international district with a strong reputation abroad. The campus itself will house a hotel, as well as a state-of-the-art Brussels Library & Learning Centre”, which will have become a true centre of knowledge for the economy of Brussels. The VUB Career Centre powered by Randstad will continue to ensure the “match” between supply and demand at the employment market for our alumni and fresh graduates, and will have set an example that has been copied by all Belgian and European university campuses.

Dear guests, before I finish, I would like to specifically address a few words to our new graduates.

I would like to pass a few thoughts on to you, which, just for fun, I have linked to the first 7 letters of the alphabet:

- **A** is for **ambition**. Always remain ambitious in everything you do. Always try to set the bar a little higher, like a high jumper.
- With the letter **B** for **bye-bye**, I would like to make you aware that you have now completed one of the most exciting periods of your life. I'm not trying to say that there will be no more fun times ahead, but, I'm convinced that you will always remember your time as a student as a very special period in your life.
- **C** stands for **criticism**. Continue to be critical of everything that happens around you, and of yourself. Do not get caught up in dogmas, but always come to your own opinion on the basis of rational arguments. That's what your professors have taught you to do, and that's what the VUB stands for!

- With **D**, I refer to your **debt of honour** and gratitude towards your parents for having given you the chance to take up your university studies – but also towards your lecturers, who have always given 100%.
- **E** means **enthusiasm**. *“If you are not fired with enthusiasm, you will soon be fired with enthusiasm”* is a sentence I often use. Enthusiasm may just be the difference between a project that is successful and one that fails. Or, to put it in the words of Steve Jobs: “stay hungry, stay foolish”.
- With **F**, I come to **free expression**. Be proud of the fact that you have graduated in an academic curriculum in the capital of Europe, at a university that’s “conventionally unconventional” in every aspect. Stick to this motto for the rest of your lives.
- And, finally, the **G** stands for **Good Luck**. And I wish all of you plenty of that in your further life.

I wish you well, and may our paths often cross again ... And if not, let's make an appointment in 2048.