

Matriculation Speech, 31. august 2012. By Rector Ralf Hemmingsen.

Check against delivery

Dear new students. Welcome to the University of Copenhagen. Welcome to the city of

Copenhagen. Welcome to Denmark.

I am sure, that you already know and might have enjoyed some of the things that Denmark is famous for: Tivoli, Hans Christian Andersen, The royal family, Christiania, ...and beer!

But we also have another celebrity: Tintin. Tintin is a series of comic albums about Tintin, a snubnosed teenage reporter who travels the world with his trusty dog, Snowy, doing good deeds and foiling bad men. Always finding himself in the middle of exciting and dangerous situations with elements of fantasy, mysteries, political thrillers and science fiction.

Now those of you familiar with Tintin might want to object. And you would be right – Tintin is not from Denmark. But it is said, that the inspiration for the Tintin-stories came from a young Danish man named Palle Huld.

Let me tell you the story: In 1928 Palle Huld was 15 years old. He worked at a car company. But one day he decided to participate in a contest held by the Danish newspaper Politiken. The contest was to honor Jules Vernes, who wrote the classic "Around the world in 80 days" where the excentric Phileas Fogg circumnavigates the world. The winner would re-enact Phileas Fogg's voyage.

But Politiken wanted to do it much faster. They wanted a young man - at that time it was always a man – They wanted a young man to circle the globe in only 44 days using only busses, ships and trains. The winner of the competition was supposed to write articles about his adventures on the way. From several hundred applicants, the newspaper chose Palle. Mainly because he was courageous, open-minded and skilled enough to take on the task. And because he was very good at languages. So Palle travelled and wrote a book about his many adventures in countries such as China, the Soviet and Latin America – thus becoming the inspiration for the stories about Tintin.

And why am I bringing this up today? First of all because what you are facing today in many ways is similar to what Palle Huld faced some 85 years ago. You might have settled for travelling to "just" one country. But as Palle did it, you have chosen to face the unknown. You have taken a courageous and open-minded decision in coming to Copenhagen. Thank you for that! We need talented students who are not afraid of new experiences. I am sure that your stay in Copenhagen will give you a very good platform for your future life and career. Just as Palle's travels gave him a very good platform for his career and

life: Palles travels made him new friends and a strong network all over the world. He got to practice his language skills. And he even wrote a bestseller book about it!

Well, here we do not expect you to write a whole book. But you are going to work quite hard. You will have the experience of trying to learn a new language. I warn you – Danish is not an easy language but it can be learned! You will be making new friends from other countries. And you will experience a new culture and maybe even a new way of learning that might be quite different from what you know.

As was the case for Palle Huld, the Danish Tintin, it will be up to you get the most out of your foreign experience. Academically as well as socially. But here at the University of Copenhagen, we do however provide you with some short cuts: You can, for instance, become a member of our alumni association KUBULUS. This will give you a great network of current and former students at this university. You can also join one of our many other associations: The Erasmus Student Network, University Sports, The Student House where you can even try to work at the international café, practice your political skills at the Student Council, or join one of the many music groups. The options are there. The choice to use them is yours. But whatever you choose, I am sure you are going to have a great time here in Copenhagen.

While I have been speaking, you may have wondered: Who on earth are the people standing there in front of you? Well, it is the University management. They are standing there because they are responsible for safeguarding what I have just underlined as the original purpose of our University. And they are dressed like that because it symbolises the traditional autonomy of the faculties. I will present them one by one. And it is custom for students to cheer when I call the dean of your faculty. But you are also very welcome to cheer for the others!

From the left, we have:

Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Thomas Bjørnholm

Dean at the Faculty of Theology, Steffen Kjeldgaard-Pedersen

Dean at the Faculty of Law, Henrik Dam

Dean at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Troels Østergaard Sørensen

Dean at the Faculty of Health Sciences, Ulla Wewer

Dean at the Faculty of Humanities, Ulf Hedetoft

Dean at the Faculty of Sciences, John Renner Hansen

And at the far right, University Director Jørgen Honoré.

Dear students

When Palle Huld travelled the world he met a lot of different cultures: Russian, Chinese, Indian, and American. He learned to welcome new impressions and traditions. And he learned about the importance of being properly welcomed,

when you arrive in an unknown country. Those are skills which are greatly needed. And maybe even more today where we all live in a globalized world. I sincerely hope that you will all have your own "Palle Huld experience" here in Copenhagen and at this university. That you will feel welcome and that you will be open to new impressions and traditions.

At least I hope, that you will be open to the tradition that I will present to you now: Before you go, you are going to give me a symbolic handshake. By doing so, you promise that you will obey the University laws from 1479. The laws are mostly about all the power the professors have over their students and how misbehaving students will be thrown in prison. Luckily that is one tradition we have not kept.

Therefore I suggest we add something to the handshake. I hope we can shake hands on the importance of sharing knowledge in a globalized world. On being open minded. And on you having the time of your life here in Denmark.

Welcome to the University of Copenhagen.