



university of
 groningen

campus fryslân

Opening Academic Year 2023-2024 September 2023 - Campus Fryslân, The Beurs, Leeuwarden

**prof. dr. C.F. (Caspar) van den Berg -
Dean of Faculty Campus Fryslân and Professor in Global
and Local Governance**

Dear distinguished guests, dear students, dear colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to speak at this year's opening of our academic year. One of the perks of serving as the dean of our Faculty Campus Fryslân this year. It makes me realize even more than normally what a great place the University, and particular our great Faculty is, to be part of. The new year is truly a new beginning for all of us, but perhaps mostly for those new students that we have welcomed into our Leeuwarden academic community during the past week, our so-called intro-week. Young people filled with curiosity and excitement, not really knowing what to think of everything they see happening around them, but determined to make the most out of the time they'll have here with us.

One can feel that new energy in the building. For many of us, it is a reminder of the time we started our studies ourselves. The curiosity, the excitement but also the insecurity inherent to that stage in life. As

lecturers and professional staff we are so lucky to have the chance to work with these young people who inject unexpected perspectives, original ideas, critical views, tough questions, in other words, new life, to our community. A new batch of students makes us grow each year, at least as much as we help them grow.

We're starting this new academic year as a community that has done some necessary self-searching over the past six months. Amidst everything this community has achieved in just a few years, some questions needed to be addressed before being able to embark on a next growth cycle. Who are we, really? Who do we want to be in the future? What more can we be if we set our minds to it and work together? Who will we join forces with in order to further push our quality and impact? These questions have been high on our agenda in the past months and have led to our new development agenda that we are excited to launch this fall.

We're also starting the new academic year as a community that knows what it is like to grow. Over the past years we as a group have grown collectively, for one in the sense of becoming more numerous, but also in the sense of learning, developing, reaching a higher level of understanding of one another. And we have also learned that growing can be painful at times. As we grow, are we still the same group as we used to be? Are the things that bound us together in the beginning still as strong, or watering down? What new ideas, values and experiences bind us together as we become larger and more diverse? Will we still be able to speak each other's language, both literally and figuratively? Any organisation that grows, and particularly one that is young, that is filled with eager and committed people, that is full of critical thinkers and that

has just come out of a disruptive pandemic, will have to deal with such questions, and so have we during the past year.

We have talked long and hard, formed groups, organized meetings small and large, inspired each other with our ideas, vented our hearts and raised uneasy questions. And all of this while the shop remained open: we continued to deliver top-notch education, carry out world-class research, deliver a great set of excellent PhD's, and acquire an impressive amount of prestigious research funding. That has not been a small feat.

And while some conversations will require our ongoing attention, and some questions require permanent maintenance, we have made serious progress together. We experienced once more how important openness and trust are in an organization, how fundamental our own sense of social safety is and how crucial it is to look out for everyone's sense of social safety. And we also realized perhaps more deeply than before that growing individually and growing together requires a willingness to expose ourselves to views other than our own, views contrary to our own, because that exposure is the beginning of learning, sharpening our ideas and beliefs, and seeing things in a broader perspective. That our challenge, our job is to marry our legitimate desire to feel safe, with the necessity to seek uneasy confrontations with different people and with diverging ideas. This is what helps us move forward and become better and more rounded versions of ourselves.

Even though we still have more work to do, I am proud of the progress we have already made. And I want to thank everyone who has contributed to this journey so far. We are proving that our own motto: global challenges, local solutions can also apply to ourselves, and we are letting our teaching, research, and societal impact benefit from that.

If we look at the world around us, it becomes clear that a Faculty like ours is more needed than ever. The need

- to address our changing climate,
- to make our economy drastically more sustainable,
- to use technological innovations to carry through transitions in a wide range of aspects of our lives,
- The need to invent and mainstream systems of regenerative food production,
- to ensure justice for all in our societies,
- to prepare for demographic changes,
- to be wise with data,
- The need to lead more healthy lives,
- to defend the rule of law and make our democracy more resilient,
- to level up regions, and
- to include people of all shapes, sizes and backgrounds in doing all of that,

seems to be becoming clearer and more urgent almost every day. And we're working on all of those things here, together, under this roof. We do this with the support of our University's Board, in collaboration with our colleagues in other faculties, with interdisciplinary schools, our friends in Fryslân, the wider University of the North, as well as our partners around the globe. In a world of increasing scarcity in many respects, we see and we seize opportunities to make the future better. Let's continue to remind ourselves how privileged we really are to be in that position.

Dear guests, dear students, dear colleagues, let's make this academic year our best year ever to date. And let's not forget to have fun and make each other laugh while doing that. Thank you.