Dear Rector Magnificus,
Dear Professors,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Students,

Today, we are taking part in the official inauguration of a new academic year. It is a grand ceremony of great importance, especially for first-year students, who are only just beginning their academic journey. That is why, as President of the Student Parliament and a fifth-year student, I am delighted to have the honour of welcoming on its behalf the new members of the academic community of our University. I would like to congratulate you on passing the Matura and choosing Cracow University of Economics as your Alma Mater. I sincerely hope that today will mark the beginning of a wonderful adventure, which you will remember for years to come with a smile on your face. As Napoleon Hill said, "Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve." With this in mind, I wish you to have the courage to dream, because it is your dreams combined with hard work, patience and humility that will allow you to reach your goals, including a university degree as well as the knowledge and skills to achieve excellence in your chosen field.

Remember, however, that studying also means being active in many areas. Our University offers you great opportunities for development. I can say that as a freshman I would never have thought that I would be addressing you five years later. That is why I would like to encourage and invite you to participate in the Academic Clubs and student organisations, such as the Student Parliament, the Independent Students' Association, the Erasmus Student Network, or AIESEC which operate at our University.

It is thanks to these activities that **we students** have a real impact on what is going on at our University. From my own experience, I can tell you it can give you a lot of joy and satisfaction.

At this point, I would like to emphasise that as the Student Parliament, we are there for you – you can always come to us if you need help or just to talk – whether through our social media or by visiting us in our office, which is located in Pavilion S, room 226.

Please also bear in mind that studying is not only about learning, but also about making new and wonderful friends – often for life, which can also pay off in professional life. As Alessandro Manzoni said, "One of the greatest consolations of this life is friendship; and one of the consolations of friendship is having someone to confide a secret to." This is why I urge you to be open to new friendships. Returning to full-time education offers incredible opportunities in this area. You will finally be able to see your peers face to face instead of staring at a computer screen all day. I can say for myself that it was at university that I made many wonderful friends and I have no doubt that they will stay with me for life.

Studying is also a chance to get to know other cultures. Thanks to the Erasmus+ programme, in which our University is involved, students may choose to travel and study in other European universities. This is an amazing opportunity not only to improve their foreign language skills but also to visit other parts of the world.

Today's inauguration of the academic year marks the beginning of an extremely important, difficult year. A year in which, in the age of the pandemic, after a long break we are returning to face-to-face classes. I hope that this form of teaching will continue for as long as possible. I would therefore like to appeal to everyone to behave responsibly as an academic community. Let us observe the safety precautions and sanitary regulations. Let us wear masks, let us keep our distance for the sake of one another. It is also up to us whether or not we will be able to spend the entire academic year in class.

For the past three semesters, we have had to deal with being locked in our homes and moving to virtual reality. But surely, as a community, we have passed this difficult test. I would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to all the academic staff for whom the forced change in the way classes were taught was not an easy experience, at least initially. Thank you for your commitment and effort in adapting to the new reality.

I think most of us have been longing to return to our Alma Mater and to be able to meet friends in person on its premises. When we were away, major upgrades were made to our campus. You will be able to appreciate the scale of changes for yourselves. One example is the ZaUEK student

club, which has gained extra space to accommodate even more of us in than before. I hope to see you there for a cup of delicious coffee and toast.

One final word, dear Colleagues, wherever you are from and whatever values you bring to the university, remember that we are one big academic family. And both we, your senior colleagues, and all the staff of the University are here for you, to support and guide you, so that you are able to realise your plans and fulfil your dreams.

Unity is not uniformity, but reconciled diversity.

And this is what I wish for you and the whole community: that we may be able to persevere and function in such unity both in the coming academic year and in the future.