

Farewell Speech of the Former College Masters
Mandy and Klaus Boehnke

[Mandy Boehnke:] Good evening, dear all!

Yes, I know I should be greeting all the celebrities who are here in a more personal way, but this always bears the problem that you forget to mention one or the other person, so I stick with approaching you as ‘dear all’. Predominantly this will be the goodbye speech for our students.

In our first planning of this event, we had thought that I hold the entire speech as I did in the opening ceremony in March 2003, but we changed our mind. When Klaus and I were College Masters, each of us concentrated on the areas he or she liked (I took over personal interaction, Klaus the official speeches as he has always liked to talk). So there he goes and guides you through our fifty months of College Mastering.

Afterwards, I will end the speech with “three things to keep in mind” for Niky and Vik.

[Klaus Boehnke] Well, guidance by a person who loves to hear himself talk. Let’s see what comes out of it?

The president of the United States delivers his state-of-the-union message every year in January, and although the US don’t always serve as the best thinkable example, here comes the State-of-the-College Message.

A look at step ‘zero’ first. Our first college experience came about during the very first orientation week of the then International University Bremen in September 2001. We stayed in the officially yet unnamed Krupp College after no space had been made available for us in the guesthouse, in one of the student suites, windows without blinds, beddings unpacked, pouring rain for an entire week, Mandy in one room, I in the other, and—although Mandy forbade me to tell that anecdote again—9-month-old Philip in the drawer from underneath the bed (pulled out, of course, not in).

At the end of January 2002 we resettled to downtown Bremen. Then came the summer of 2002, and we read an announcement on what would today be the list IUB-Official: College Masters sought for the newly built second college of IUB, the Mercator College, refurbished through a generous donation from the Mercator Foundation. Mandy was very reluctant, but I kept pushing, and there were other people who pulled quite strongly and convincingly, the then College Masters of Alfried Krupp College, Marita Hartnack and Hartmut Wessler. They told us about a job without pay that turned out to be exactly what they told us it would be, challenging and exhausting, a wonderful job so-to-speak. In hindsight, we owe Marita and Hartmut a great thank you for a bit more than four gratifying years.

What did we find in the college after we had finally settled in in late January 2003, after a brief period of commuting from downtown for two nights a week? Well, we found Sammy and Przemek, but I’ll come back to that later. Otherwise, we found an empty building filled with a few second-years from the pioneer class mixing in with about 120 students from the new second batch. No furniture, no pictures on the wall, no college spirit. A lot of work waiting for us! We did not invest much creativity into our furniture, because we bought almost the same IKEA pieces that already Krupp had bought a year before, only buying little red instead of black side-tables, the

furniture by the way being a student choice of the pioneer class in that other college over there.

But from then on we invested into becoming something of its own kind. Country Information Days were ‘invented’, countries presenting themselves to the IUB community, commencing in early May 2003 with the first-ever CID hosted by Nepal, always preceded by a dinner invitation to our apartment, where we tried to reward the students from the hosting country with food I cook from their national cuisine, sometimes successful, sometimes less so. At these dinners we also started the tradition of the so-called biography rounds: Whenever there is a dinner at our apartment (and there were many, the CID count is currently at 23), we have a biography round, in which we and the invited students tell each other our biographies at a self-chosen length. Speaking of self-chosen length, no, I do by no means hold the length record myself, but at one of the instances pioneer student Uroš Urošević spoke about his life for 43 minutes....

Which other groups did we invite? Always the floor reps, the Mercator student parliament mandatees, the college office team, so, eating - not out but - in became one of the main pleasures of our college master years.

A little earlier I spoke of empty walls in the college. This had to be remedied in our view, so the Mercator Art Contest, student art contest, that is, was inaugurated and has meanwhile seen its fourth round, and the walls are not really full yet. Nevertheless some of us take pride in calling Mercator the Art College (not all take pride in that label, of course, but that’s perfectly fine). In fall, we offer our student artists and those interested in art a vernissage with some champagne and the vernissage-like nibblings.

Clearly so, we cannot call ourselves the Sports College, because that label is deservedly reserved for the Sarah and Ryan Richards College (to finally give that one a name), but we attempted to also offer some sports with a Mercator twist by starting (admittedly fairly late in our term of office, namely in November 2005) the Mercator Badminton Challenge Cup. We will continue it as the honorary members of this college that we now are.

A college spirit does, however, not only live from the ‘big,’ often college-master-initiated events, but regularly much more so from the small, low-threshold events. These could never have been organized without the dedication shown by Samuel Johnson and his highly committed college office student team. Let me mention the Mercator cheer-ups in the college office (events well hearable in the College Master apartment), Mercator Spirit Days of all kind, among them the campus-famous Italian nights, pajama parties, midnight breakfasts, St. Patrick’s Day celebrations, and last but not least—organized first-and-foremost by the Mercator College floor reps—the Mercator Strasse fest.

Well, some of you may by now wonder, how long is he going to go on talking. Those who know me a bit better will acknowledge that I can for hours once given the rostrum, but I won’t, although the end is not there yet. Others may wonder why the heck did they not prolong their contract if all was so wonderful. Well, not all was! Repeatedly acts of vandalism got us into confrontation with larger groups of students. Not only these repeated acts of vandalism and of irresponsible behavior by some students, or the carelessness of some others that made us feel we are the janitors of the college, or student thefts of college property or thefts committed by outsiders, almost non-hidden dealing of soft drugs ten meters away from campus plus the enjoyment of consuming these very drugs in college rooms that were not even smokers rooms. All this sometimes made college mastering tough and prone to produce burnout.

Particularly if you hear about a student asking another student who the college masters are and what they are good for after he had lived in the college for about 6 ½ months.

Well, now onto the last round of the State-of-the College Message: A final group of incidences that made college mastering challenging but at the same time gratifying, namely health problems of students, academic problems of students, financial problems of students. When brought to our attention by Mercatorians calling on us, coming to the CM apartment, such incidences always demanded hard work, but when this work was successful, which often it turned out to be, this indeed became an intrinsic reward.

Before I close my part of the final message from the Boehnkes, let me come to a delightful part of such a speech, namely to thank some of the people who helped to keep our life and that of Mercator students happy in all our years of office, first and foremost ... das Reinigungspersonal der Firma Vöbel. Sie glauben gar nicht, wie dreckig so ein College aussehen würde, wenn diese Dienste nicht zur Verfügung stünden. Danke! Then, of course, there is what Jacobs jargon calls ‘the porters.’ If we had to name the number in this university we dialed most frequently during our college master years, it surely was 4800. Ganz herzlichen Dank an das Sicherheitspersonal für die Bereitschaft, uns immer nach Kräften zu unterstützen. Also internally, of course, we owe thanks to two departments in particular, the department of Marita Hartnack, Sigrid Jürgens, for example, always having an open ear for our concerns, and the department of formerly Andrea Noske, now Christian Ludwig, with Andreas Pape organizing the needed technical assistance. Admittedly, however, there is—beyond the many dedicated college team students who I cannot mention here name by name, because there were too many in our more than 50 months of college mastering; alumnus Przemek Borkowski may stand here for all of them—one person without whom this college would not be what it is, must be thanked above all: Sammy could you briefly come on stage, please! [Giving a present to College Office Manager Samuel Johnson]

Well, relief is in sight now, I am done with my part and I hand the microphone back to Mandy for her closing words...

[Mandy Boehnke] Well, as said before, we did have fairly distinct roles over the more than four years. Klaus was often the functionary and authority, I more the human being. So here I go again; let me give you, Níky and Vik, three bits of advice from that position:

Don't be surprised

Emotions matter

Don't expect too much appreciation

Don't be surprised! There is always something unexpected that's going to happen next, a thing not surprising as you live with young people from up to 50 nations. Let me give you a few examples: Our first experience in that direction was a room change request where a student expressed that her roommate not only had a very active sex life, but also was bragging with her dominatrix accessories (whips and the like). Or, when we found anonymous Valentine roses in front of what was then our apartment, or, when Philip received anonymous Christmas presents for the last two years. Or, one of these days a student urgently wanted to talk to us: I had my first-ever sexual intercourse this morning, and I think I am pregnant; do you have the pill after? The good thing is: you will live up to any surprises that come, even if you are not convinced of this when you hear about it the first time.

Emotions matter! Emotions of all members of the college are valuable and valid. What you will often hear from students is, oh, this and that is unfair, but that is not what I mean, what I mean is, emotions matter. Sometimes emotional moments will overwhelm you (e.g. when you see the twinkling in the eyes of students at Country Information Days), sometimes emotional moments will unsettle you (e.g. when you are involved in an unpleasant issue with students and you cannot get away from it as you all live together in one house). Tip here is: A few days later, issues aren't that hot anymore and keeping a positive attitude helps a lot. Oh, and a concrete advice: Don't read email before breakfast!

Don't expect too much appreciation. Now, I come to the final and most tricky point. Yes, college masters get an apartment for free, they get it cleaned for free, and they can eat for free in the serveries of the university and that's it. Otherwise they are mostly ignored by the university. Nobody cares about them if life in the colleges runs smoothly, and they must have done something wrong if things 'over there' do not. This has a simple reason: The majority of all non-student members of Jacobs University have never been to a college on any other occasion than when they get their stomachs filled. But there are rewards after all (and I am not speaking about money). They come from the students who experience what you do for them. A present brought from home after Christmas, the smile you get when you meet students in the elevator, the appreciation you encounter when you have solved an emergency case, or when you have had an open ear for someone's lovesickness at the student bar.

Well, let me stop here. Let me express together with Klaus that we are 100% sure that with you 'our' college is in perfect hands, not the least, because we feel that you—as did we—fully subscribe to our college's mission statement:

- Make diversity an asset
- Foster personal growth
- Care for emotions
- Experience the community