

Dear President, dear representatives of Mercator Stiftung, dear colleagues and fellow college masters, guests and last but not least, dear Mercatorians!

Sean O'Casey, the famous Irish playwright, once said: **"All the world's a stage, and most of us are desperately unrehearsed."** This is rather how I feel speaking tonight in front of this audience.

My husband Vikram and I are delighted to have been chosen as College Masters of Mercator. This is a great challenge for both of us, but one we are looking forward to.

I'd like to start by introducing ourselves a little: Vikram was born in India to a Dutch mother and an Indian father. After spending his youth in India, he received his education in the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland. After a brief interlude as Staff Geophysicist at an Oil Consultancy in the UK he joined Jacobs University –then still IUB- in April 2004 as Assistant Professor of Geosciences in the School of Engineering and Science.

I am – as most of you will be able to tell – am German and from the South, namely from the Pfalz (or Palatinate in English), a place probably most famous for its people's enormous interest in food and the production of wine, a sample of which you might have tried tonight. I am a historian with a Master's degree from the University of Heidelberg, and am currently writing up my doctoral thesis in heritage studies. Both Vikram and I have shared the experience of living abroad in various countries, and we do believe that this as well as our multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural backgrounds will help us in our new job.

We are also aided by the fact that we have taken over the college from such able predecessors, Mandy and Klaus Boehnke, whose enthusiasm and love for their work can be felt everywhere in Mercator College and who have, together with our other college master colleagues, made this transition such a smooth one.

[We are also very happy indeed that they have agreed tonight to stay closely involved with college life by accepting the honorary membership proposed by the student representatives.]

Vikram and I are quite excited about our new assignment. We do see our role mainly in making life in Mercator a positive and enriching experience for the students. Studying at Jacobs University and living in such a diverse community is a great chance and opportunity, and we do hope that we can help you -the students- to make the most of this. We would like Mercator College to be a place where you feel at home and free to find out about your own potential, maybe by discovering new talents or ideas you could share with your fellow students. You are all asked to get involved, to actively help shaping the college community we live in.

Living together at close quarters though is not without its pitfalls. Regard and consideration for others is something we consider vital and an active contribution to the well-being of everyone here in Mercator and everyone else you might be dealing with in the future. To illustrate this point, I'd like to quote a short Talmudic story:

**"In a boat at sea one of the men began to bore a hole in the bottom of the boat. On being remonstrated with, he answered, "I am only boring under my own seat." "Yes," said his companions, "but when the sea rushes in we shall all be drowned with you."**

Or like Oliver Wendell Holmes, US Supreme Court judge, put it:

**"The right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins."**

Working together we can all make sure that Mercator College is a pleasant and safe place to live in, to make friends and enjoy life, because university life is not only about studying, although at times it might feel like that to you.

We would also like to encourage you to come to us with any issues, complaints or suggestions you might have. You may find that we are more open-minded if you don't wake us up in the middle of the night, but that of course does not apply to real emergencies.

Finally we would like to thank the Mercator Stiftung for their donation which made this celebration possible, our college team and student representatives with our inimitable Office Manager Samuel Johnson for their hard work in preparing this event, in which they were aided by the colleagues from the facilities department.

I'd like to end this speech with one last quote by Austrian poet Robert Musil who said:

**"It is, all in all, a historic error to believe that the master makes the school; the students make it!"**

If you replace "school" with "college", you'll get an idea what we hope for the future!

Thank you.