

Dr. Jernej Zupanc, on behalf of Mlada akademija

Address at the 10th anniversary of the Doctoral school of University of Ljubljana

Dear scientists, researchers. Dear pursuers of understanding – lovers of reason.

The Young Academy builds on 21 years of experience of the DMRS, Društvo mladih raziskovalcev Slovenije. In 2016 we changed our name and broadened our scope of action with the goal to represent not only doctoral students but also early career researchers.

It is my privilege to address this distinguished audience and share some of my thoughts at this anniversary.

Studying is like riding a bicycle. If you stop, you fall. It's like this today, and it will be even more so tomorrow. There are few people who understand this better than you, professors ... the doctoral students who never stopped studying.

If we consider that up to the point of starting a doctorate, one has undergone almost two decades of institutionalized studying and after receiving a doctorate his or her professional path will demand decades more of studying ... then ... is there anything special about the 4 years when we do our doctorates?

What is special is that on the one hand, it is the last step of Bologna studies ... on the other hand, for many of us, it is the first step of our professional careers. It is a period when we form beliefs and habits that will influence all our future work results and (even more importantly) relationships.

And although the period is called “doctoral studies”, it is really about much more than just studies.

I will address three aspects of doctoral studies that deserve ... more ... attention.

1. **FIRST: Doctoral research is a full time job and should be a paid employment.**
Government subsidized tuition ... stipends ... all these are half-baked efforts.
Doctoral students can only focus on their research if they don't need to bartend to survive.
2. **SECOND: More attention should be paid to the professional development of doctoral students**
Academic path towards professorship used to be the default career. Now, it is the alternative career. Consequently once these young adults face the world outside academia, they are in many ways unprepared for it.

Communication skills, career planning, time and people management skills, connection with the work out-of-academia all these should be paid more attention to.

3. **THIRD: Mentoring**
I've read, that just like your parents define your personal life, your first boss defines your professional life. There are some mentors who can jump start a career and there are others who will slow it down. Even if unintentionally. We have to strive to find the best mentors and the best mentoring practices and promote them so others can learn from them and grow.

In the Young Academy, we care deeply about promoting best mentoring practices. For nine consecutive years, we have been presenting the "Mentor of the year" award. This year, out of more than 100

mentors who were nominated by their doctoral students, the mentor, whose nominations especially stood out, was prof. Mario Poljak.

He is highly respected by his students not only for his scientific expertise and professional competence but also his devotion to mentoring. He has been a mentor to more than 24 doctoral students.

Despite spending a majority of the year on the road or in the air he stays in constant touch with his team through modern means of communication.

On a final note.

A doctoral student is not only a student. He or she is a young adult starting a many decades long career.

It is extremely important to acknowledge this and help the doctoral students develop not only in to lifelong scientists and researchers, but also into young professionals.