

Dear Class of 2023,

As the Director of Education at your new university, I'm very much looking forward to welcoming you to University College Roosevelt. You will start your time at UCR on **Friday 21 August**, with "**Orientation**": a program filled with events that mean students can get to know each other, to make the transition to university and to explore what it means to think like a Liberal Arts and Sciences scholar at an International Honors College.

In this letter, I will outline what we expect from new students in order to prepare well for Orientation.

Each year we select one of UCR's strategic themes as the theme of Orientation and several other UCR-wide activities. During the academic year 2020-21, **our theme is 'Cultures and Institutions of Freedom'**. Freedom is one of the ultimate goals of a liberal education, i.e. freeing the mind through knowledge, broadening experiences and different viewpoints. Freedom is also a key issue to reflect upon in tumultuous times such as the world is facing now with the Covid-19 pandemic and effects of climate change. What do these times tell us about the value of freedom, so much at the core of Western culture since Enlightenment, and about alternative values? With the 75th anniversary of the United Nations this coming October - the institution set up 75 years ago to secure Roosevelt's Four Freedoms – we can ask ourselves how such institutions can and should face the challenges of our times. And with the Four Freedom Awards Ceremony due to take place in Middelburg in April 2021 – postponed from 2020 because of Covid-19 – we can ask ourselves how we can together create the conditions for the Four Freedoms to thrive in all our communities.

In order to prepare for your start at UCR and for orientation in particular, please do the following:

1. Read the text 'The Faces of Human Rights' on pages 3-4 of this letter. It is written by Anna Roosevelt, the granddaughter of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and think about the questions she poses there:

So what words will tell the story of dignity and respect best? What stories will be indelibly convincing when we each have to choose one action over another? What are the terms that will trigger those convictions and how do we keep these terms vibrant and meaningful? Is the term 'human rights' becoming a cliché? Is the tension between 'freedom' and 'dignity' occurring because we have failed to communicate – to use the right words, to connect the dots and then cement them with language that is clearly understood?

During Orientation, you will discuss these and other questions further. We would like you to also take **an object that symbolizes freedom for you and share** this object with others during one of the Orientation activities.

2. Watch the video 'BLØF reikt Four Freedoms Award uit aan Malala' on [YouTube](#).

The important part to watch starts at 8.58, but if you haven't heard of BLØF (one of the most famous Dutch bands; they come from Zeeland) it's worth listening to the song they play before Malala's speech.

3. During Orientation, you will meet your tutor and there will be information sessions about the curriculum, study skills and well-being. So the third thing we ask you do is **think about the following questions**: What do you hope to get out of college? Why does learning excite you and what are you curious about discovering? What assumptions do you have about learning? What kind of student are you? What strategies do you have for dealing with challenges?

During your studies you will need to use a computer to write your assignments, access course materials and the electronic library of Utrecht University. At UCR we use an electronic learning environment called Moodle and during Orientation there will be activities to familiarize you with Moodle. For advice on which type of laptop to bring, see the [information on the UCR website](#). There'll be plenty of courses where pen/pencil and paper will be required too though, whether it's for drawing, mind-mapping, taking notes or writing poems, so be sure to stock up on some of those.

A week before Orientation starts, there'll be an overview of the full program on the UCR website, along with a practical information booklet prepared by our Student Office as well as information from RASA, [Roosevelt's All Student Association](#) and the activities they have in store for you during the week.

I look forward to seeing you all on 21 August.

Sincerely,

Anya Luscombe
Director of Education

The Faces of Human Rights

Edited by
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and
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Oxford: Hart Publishing. May 2019

Preface

I am often asked to speak at ‘human rights’ events. I have been interviewed by dozens of 8-year-old girls tasked with writing their first ‘report on a person you admire’. In countries around the world, when I am introduced, women and men will spontaneously pull a well-thumbed copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from a pocket or a pocketbook. I have been stopped on the street virtually all my adult life by people who say: ‘don’t I know you?’ In each case, it is not ME they are looking for! It’s Eleanor Roosevelt.

The global community – those who suffer and those who strive to bring about a just society – begs for the fulfilment of that declaration. That one human community that has acknowledged that our shared humanity bears the highest value of any creature on earth, has insisted that we bear, in our very being, an inherent dignity that should dictate our behaviours towards each other. Across cultures, across politics, across faith systems, across social orders and economic systems, the world still waits for the healing balm of justice and respect.

Yet, what we are talking about at conferences, in classrooms, at roundtables and kitchen tables is the many ways that we are failing our own standard. That standard started with my grandmother and the diverse team designated to write the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A woman bent on living a quiet life in her home in the Hudson Valley stepped forward to wrangle a pledge to dignity that could live in any community in the world. Her calmness, her kindness, her graciousness, her thoughtfulness and her thoroughness, her firmness and her respect were required. Human rights is not about love and certainly not about affection. It is about radical and disciplined respect and it took all those attributes to shape a document about respect.

But a document is just a piece of paper unless it is used to shape our attitudes, our laws, and our public and private behaviours and it’s not just the job of the United Nations or the scores of human rights professionals to get that done – and my grandmother knew it. Her seminal observation on this point is repeated often:

Where, after all, do human rights begin but in the small places close to home...Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere...Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home ... we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

She knew that it was not someone else’s responsibility to promote human rights. It is mine – it is everyone’s.

So what words will tell the story of dignity and respect best? What stories will be indelibly convincing when we each have to choose one action over another? What are the terms that will

trigger those convictions and how do we keep these terms vibrant and meaningful? Is the term ‘human rights’ becoming a cliché? Is the tension between ‘freedom’ and ‘dignity’ occurring because we have failed to communicate – to use the right words, to connect the dots and then cement them with language that is clearly understood?

In my grandfather’s 1941 speech in which he outlined the four fundamental freedoms necessary for democracy to thrive EVERYWHERE in the world, there was no difference between ‘freedom’ and ‘dignity’. In subsequent speeches throughout that year, FDR continued to explain these four freedoms as rights, emphasising their interdependency. He was teaching. He was giving just folks – the lay people, like me – the language to talk about human rights, to ourselves and to our neighbours.

Have we forgotten how to do that: how to talk about human rights in the small places close to home? How often do we use simple, clear words identified with human rights with our children, on the front porch with our neighbours, in our conversation with friends and relatives?

Scholars, diplomats and legislators, like those who gathered in Paris in 1948 to negotiate and write a global declaration, will continue to build the structures, the mechanisms, the law that societies need to function. The people featured in this book tried to talk to people in many different ways, to try to make a difference in the places closest to them and their homes. Some were known internationally and most were simply responding to the injustice around them – all ultimately contributing to the vision of a more just global community. They teach us – and we must listen, because all of us must remember to talk – in real ways – to our children, our children’s children, our neighbours, our friends outside of the academic circle about **human rights** – that everyone, everywhere in the world, has the right to a dignified life. That is really the only way to honour them.

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt
Maine, United States
November 2018