

## University Senate President's reflection January 2022

### New Horizons

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Last week in Faculty Council, we spoke about New Beginnings. This week in the University Senate, I would like to discuss about New Horizons.

With every passing calendar year, we start the month of January with recharged energies and renewed resolutions, looking forward with hope, into the distance, to new frontiers or what we may call New Horizons.

It turns out that the word horizon derives etymologically from the Greek "ὀρίζων κύκλος" (horízōn kýklos), "separating circle", where "ὀρίζω" is from the verb [ὀρίζω](#) (horízō), "to divide", "to separate", which in turn derives from "ὄρος" (hóros), "boundary or landmark".

Beyond the beautiful etymological journey offered to us by the Old Greek language, what is horizon for us? In a more technical way, Merriam Webster dictionary defines it as a noun with three major meanings:

1. the line where the earth or the sea surface and the sky appear to meet

Horizon is a hybrid between reality and an illusion, between subjective and objective entities, and sometimes a life-saving reference. For example, the distance to the visible horizon has been vital to successful navigation, especially at sea, determining one's maximum range of vision and thus of communication, with all the obvious implications for safety and exchange of information. While its importance lessened with the development of the radio or the telegraph, even today, when flying an aircraft under visual flight rules, a pilot may use an aircraft-controlling technique called altitude flying, referencing the visual relationship between the aircraft's nose and the horizon. Pilots also describe at times their spatial orientation by referring to the horizon. In astronomy, the horizon is the horizontal plane (sic!) through the eyes of the observer, in fact the fundamental plane of the coordinate system, the locus of points that have an altitude of zero degrees, a plane in space rather than a line on a plane.

2. the limit of a person's mental perception, experience or interest

Taking the meaning from the physical space to our thought processes, horizon relates to our capacity to visualize, conceptualize, dare to conquer, or dream to cross the border of our senses. Isn't this what the New Year resolutions should be about? How to become better at what we do in our personal and professional lives? Or how to garner our creative capacities to do better, get farther away from where we are now?

3. the limit of what is possible in a particular field or activity

Is there such a thing as limit to a particular field or activity? Yes - unless we stretch ourselves, unless we try harder and unless we dare to touch beyond the visible line of the horizon.

But haven't we all felt in the past two years sometimes lost in unfamiliar territory? Sometimes sick and scared? Sometimes stressed and overwhelmed? When we feel as if we cannot take one more step forward, it's sometimes a family member, a co-worker or a friend who reaches for our hand. We all know how much that helps! And sometimes it is purely intrinsic, endogenous, from the inside that takes us beyond the line of the horizon. Let's keep this mechanism alive, too.

Since the start of the pandemic, people have been hoping for an endpoint—a specific moment in time, a definitive place on the horizon when and where the switch is to be flipped, so we can declare 'Pandemic is over, life goes back to 2019 ways'. Not surprisingly, those hopes tend to intensify with the start of every New Year—as if a change in the calendar could also mark a finish line being crossed. Unfortunately, that's a setup for disappointment and resentment because life doesn't always follow our wishful plan. If we find ourselves in this mode, maybe it's time for a reset, to recalibrate our expectations by focusing on the reality of today—with appreciation for just how far we've come and just how much more capable we have become. Then, we can elevate our plane of sight to the horizon ahead of us, with a perspective on how to weather the rest of the journey.

So let's funnel the gratitude and joy we felt with our families during the holiday season into a new start and towards new horizons in the New Year 2022, with re-energized hope, with vigor and desire to move into a post-COVID pandemic stronger, better and more resilient.

Thank you.