

Freshman Convocation

Introduction

It is perhaps appropriate that as one

of my first assignments as the new President of the University I have the opportunity to welcome you to Michigan...

Some traditions...

I suspect that these past few days have been both exciting and confusing...

You've probably been introduced to a great many Michigan traditions...

Well, this evening is another one!

It has been a long tradition for the President to attempt to offer entering freshman some advice...

It has also been a long tradition for our freshman to ignore it...

In full recognition that my words may fall on deaf ears -- or perhaps earphones...

I would nevertheless like to make a few brief observations from my vantage point as chief academic officer of the University as you begin to take the first steps along the exciting journey of your college education.

Let me begin with some good news...

and some bad news...

First, the good news...

Let me congratulate you on the distinguished record each of you has brought to Michigan...

In fact, the Class of 1992 is probably the strongest we have had academically in the history of the University...

We had over 19,000 applications for for the 4,500 positions in your class.

We therefore had the opportunity to build a class drawn from students across the nation with truly extraordinary achievements
...in the classroom...

...in the studio or concert hall...

...on the field...

...as scholars, musicians, artists, athletes...

...as leaders...

Each and everyone of you is something very special
to us...

and I must confess that we are already very proud
of you...

That's the **good news**...

Now for the **bad news**...

Next year's class will be even better!

They'll blow your socks off, if you
don't watch it, so you better not
slow down!

In fact, despite your obvious academic talents, many...

most...probably ALL...of you will find Michigan a
challenging experience.

...to some it will be through formal courses

...to others, the size and complexity of the university

...others of you will face challenges through athletics,
social activities...

...even challenges to your most fundamental beliefs

But, of course, that is what a college education is all
about...

Not to simply learn facts...or prepare for a profession...

But rather, a college education is a time of challenge
and discovery, of curiosity and intellectual growth,
of learning about yourself.

It is a time to learn the art of life...

A Vision of the Future

You are beginning your college education at a most
interesting time.

It is important to realize that while you and your classmates
were born in the 20th Century, you will spend the
majority of your lives in the 21st Century.

Hence it is very important that we look ahead for a moment
to speculate about what the future will be like
and how this will affect your education at Michigan.

i) It will be a future in which our nation becomes a truly
multicultural society, with a cultural,
racial, and ethnic diversity that will be truly extraordinary

ii) It will also be a future in which America will become
"internationalized"...

in which every one of our activities must be viewed from

the broader context of participation in the global community...
as America becomes a "world nation", with ethnic ties
to every part of the globe...

- iii) Finally, it will be a future in which we rapidly evolve from a
resource- and labor-intensive society to a knowledge-intensive
society...in which intellectual capital...educated people and their
ideas...become the keys to our prosperity, security,
and well-being.

Let's explore these themes for a moment to see how they
might impact on your college education...

Theme 1: Diversity and Pluralism

Our nation will face a challenge of diversity and pluralism
in the years ahead that will determine our strength
and vitality .

The demographic changes in our society will be quite profound...

Today minorities comprise 14%...by 2000, 22% will be
Blacks and Hispanics...by 2020, 30%...

By the turn of this century, one-third of college age
students will be underrepresented minorities.

Indeed, by the turn of the century, over 50% of K-12 students
will be children of color (in California, over 50% will be
Hispanic)

Indeed, by the late 21st Century, Hispanics may be the largest
ethnic group in America

There seems little doubt that America of the 21st
century will probably be the most pluralistic,
multicultural nation on earth...

Note: It is important to realize here that 21st Century
America will NOT be a mixing pot in which all
cultures are homogenized into a uniform blend.

Rather, it will be pluralistic...composed of peoples
of vastly different backgrounds, cultures, and
beliefs...peoples who seek to retain their cultural
roots...to maintain their differences.

On this campus many of you will encounter for the first
time in your lives the remarkable diversity and richness
of peoples of different races, cultures, religions,
nationalities, and ideologies.

Many of these people will look different...
many have different backgrounds...
many have different beliefs...

Yet they, like you, bring characteristics of great value to our campus...talent, intelligence, ambition,... and the rich diversity of culture and experience...

One of the most important things you must learn on this campus is to respect others for their differences...as well as to value and respect the worth of each individual.

As both a reflection and leader of society at large, we believe the University has a special challenge and responsibility to develop effective models of multicultural, pluralistic communities.

We seek to build an environment on this campus which is receptive, supportive, and nurturing for all individuals, regardless of race, creed, national origin, gender, or sexual preference.

Yet the goal of diversity is a challenging one, particularly in the face of the prejudice and ignorance which continue to plague our campus and our society.

Racism and bigotry, whether through overt acts or more subtle institutional forms, continue to exist on our campus and throughout American society.

The difficulties we experience even with our rhetoric on this subject is symbolic of many of the challenges we face in moving toward this multicultural community:

For example, the use of the word minority is offensive to many. It is also becoming inaccurate, since underrepresented groups such as Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans will comprise a majority of American population within several decades-- just as they already represent the vast majority of peoples throughout the world.

In a similar fashion, the word racism becomes a substitute for thoughtful and constructive criticism when it becomes an emotion-laden or indiscriminately-applied epithet.

The challenge of pluralism and diversity is based on the notion that different races, cultures, and nationalities can peacefully and productively exist side-by-side by celebrating their differences.

Our challenge is not to make one group from many,

to blend together all cultures into a homogeneous mixture...but to build from many varying cultural, racial, and ethnic groups a truly multicultural community in which we share those common beliefs and values which bind us together.

All of us--faculty, staff, and students--must recognize that the challenge of diversity is our personal challenge and our responsibility. Each one of us must recognize and accept this as individuals and as members of the University community so that we can realize our ideals and achieve high purposes.

My college generation of the 1960s was ignited by the spirit and leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his effort to blaze a new path of opportunity for all peoples. Indeed, at my commencement in 1964, Dr. King received an honorary degree. Dr. King conveyed a sense of love and appreciation for one another, regardless of our differences. He taught us to replace confrontation with cooperation...to replace distrust with respect...to replace ignorance with understanding. He also taught us that we can only make progress toward his dream if we move forward together.

We believe that this commitment to diversity is key to the quality and distinction of this University--and to the quality of the education you will receive.

For that reason, it is absolutely paramount that you demonstrate the sensitivity and tolerance toward others of differing races, cultures, and nationalities. This will be an essential component of your education.

Theme 2: The Internationalization of America

Some signs...

The ease of international travel and communication

International security

Particularly in the nuclear age...

Internationalization of commerce and industry...

70% of goods we produce now must compete against merchandise from abroad

In slightly more than 5 years, US trade deficit has taken us from the world's largest creditor to its largest debtor nation.

The "shrinking globe" phenomenon suggests that understanding cultures other than our own is necessary not only for good citizenship in the global community...but, indeed, for our very national survival.

US is the destination of about half the world's immigrants
Probably 10 million this decade alone...

Indeed, now that native fertility rates have stood since mid-1970s at 1.8 (below replacement level of 2.0), immigration promises to become the main determinant of future population variability

America is evolving into the first true "world nation", shifting rapidly away from Eurocentricity into a society with strong ethnic ties to all parts of the globe-- with a growing focus on the nations of the Pacific Rim.

US is no longer self-sufficient or self-sustaining. We are not immune to the shocks of the world society. We have never been more dependent on other nations and peoples.

This University is a truly international center of learning... and it is important that you take advantage of this during your education...

whether through formal studies of other cultures
whether through studies at one of our overseas campuses
or simply by going out of your way to get to know students and faculty from other nations...

Theme 3: The Age of Knowledge

Looking back over history, one can identify certain abrupt changes, discontinuities, in the nature, the very fabric of our civilization...

The Renaissance, the Age of Reason, the Age of Discovery, the Industrial Revolution

You are entering college today at a time when our civilization is going through yet another such dramatic change...

Our traditional industry economy is shifting to a new knowledge-based economy, just as our industrial economy evolved from an agrarian society at the turn of the century.

A transition in which..

Intellectual capital--brainpower-- is replacing financial and physical capital as key to our strength, prosperity, and well-being

Some examples:

Industrial production is steadily switching away from material and labor intensive products and processes to knowledge intensive processes:

Our nation's future has probably never been less constrained by the cost of natural resources.

Throughout the world, industrialized nations are making a transition from resource-intensive to knowledge-intensive societies...

In all developed countries, "knowledge" workers have already become the center of gravity of the labor force.

As Erich Bloch, Director of the National Science Foundation puts it, we have entered a new age, an "Age of Knowledge in a Global Economy"

The Knowledge Explosion...

New ideas and concepts are exploding forth at ever increasing rates...

Concepts which have shaken apart the classical foundations of knowledge...
the theory of relativity
the uncertainty principle
the molecular foundations of life...
genetic engineering...

Radical critiques of fundamental premises, scholarship, and culture by feminists, minorities, and third world scholars.

Obscure, yet profound, new ways to approach knowledge such as
Deconstructionism
Knowledge Engineering

In many fields, the knowledge base is doubling every few years...

Furthermore, the typical college graduate of today will likely change careers several times during a lifetime...

It will be a future in which permanence and stability are less valued than flexibility and creativity... in which the only certainty will be the presence of continual change...

Hence a college education today will only serve as the stepping stone to a process of lifelong education... and the ability to adapt to...indeed, to manage

change...will become the most valuable skill of all.

Enough for futuring...

Let me now turn instead to a few more specific words of advice about an education at Michigan... acknowledging that like any free advice, you will probably get what you paid for...

Piece of Advice 1: Michigan is not a small liberal arts college... it is a great research university.

This makes it a very large, complex, and exciting place. To give you a sense of this, consider the following...

Parameters:

Enrollment: 34,000

Faculty: 2,600 (14,000 employees)

Budget: \$1.5 billion

Academic Units

17 Schools and Colleges

Hundreds of research centers, institutes, and other types of interdisciplinary programs

Mission:

- i) Provides instruction, research, service
- ii) Spans all intellectual disciplines and professional areas
- iii) Attempts to sustain programs that rank among the nation's best in all areas (and succeeds...)

On this campus, we provide one of the most incredible intellectual smorgasbords in the world--a fascinating cornucopia of ideas supported by some of the finest facilities in the world -- one of the nation's great libraries, museums, laboratories, computers, concert halls, athletic facilities -- and most important, one of the world's great faculties.

Our philosophy is to use these extraordinary resources not simply to teach facts...indeed, students of your ability can learn facts, content, pretty much on your own.

Thus our goal is to expose you to the world's

leading scholars, people who are struggling every day with creating new knowledge and interpreting and transmitted the accumulated knowledge of the past

Our goal is to teach you methods of inquiry...methods of critical analysis and thought...and beyond that, to expose you to the most fundamental of human values which are essential to our civilization.

This style of education can be frustrating at times, but we are convinced as are the other great research universities of this nation...that you will be far better prepared to assume the role of leadership in society with this type of an education.

Piece of Advice 2: From this perspective, it is critical that you recognize that you will probably be learning more OUTSIDE of the classroom than in it!

This University is designed to provide a rich environment of intellectual experiences...

Whether it be through the wealth of formal instruction we provide, or through the array of cultural, social, athletic activities.

In fact, I suspect that most of you will end up learning more from your interaction with other students than you will from faculty!

Take advantage of this environment...

Get out and meet people and make new friends...
...broaden your horizons and become involved

Piece of Advice 3: Let me stress that your education at Michigan will not be a passive process.

While you will probably have more opportunities to learn on this campus than any other university in the nation, it is also true that they will not be presented to you on a silver platter.

We expect you to play an active role in your education!
To explore, to discover, even to challenge yourself
After all, life is one of those do-it-yourself experiences...

As the saying goes...

"At Michigan you will be given unusual freedom and responsibility..."

The freedom to do what you want...
And the responsibility to choose the right things..."

Piece of Advice 4: Preparation for Leadership

As I noted earlier, you are an extraordinarily talented
group of individuals...

It is likely that regardless of what happens
during your college education, you will go on to
become leaders of our society...

Hence, we believe it important that you prepare for
this life of leadership now by taking advantage of
all that this University has to offer.

You are probably aware of the debate over the importance
and nature of a liberal education...the importance of
moral education...

or "Allen Bloom vs. Bloom County"...

Is Allen Bloom correct when he states

that we must return to a classical education...
that without a knowledge of the great tradition
and philosophy of our civilization, students
cannot help to understand the order of nature
and their place in it

Bloom Country

Are our students indeed characterized
by the philosophy of "literalism", first
stated so succinctly by Opus...

"You're born...

You live...

You go on a some diets...

You die."

Of course, key in this debate is a suggestion that we
must move beyond focusing simply on intellectual
values in the education we provide...

The seeking of wisdom

Discipline of the mind

Respect for reasoned conclusions

Intellectual integrity

Freedom of inquiry

We must also stress values of character such as...

Honesty

Integrity

Truthfulness

Nonviolence

Tolerance

As well as social values...

Compassion, Caring, Kindness

Tolerance and respect

Collegiality, civility, and community

These core values that are so essential to Michigan students because of the special role you will play as the future leaders of our society.

What are we trying to do at Michigan?

Prepare you for a career?...

As doctors, lawyers, engineers,

...investment bankers???

Well, we will do our best, but that is not our real mission...

These challenges suggest that the principal focus of an undergraduate education appropriate for the 21st Century will be the goal of liberal learning... that is, a liberal education as the preparation for a lifetime of learning.

We must take heed from T.S. Eliot's haunting passage:

"Where is the life we have lost in living?"

"Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?"

"Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

While you might view your education at Michigan as one aimed at extracting knowledge from the vast information characterizing our society, let me suggest that our real goal was something far beyond that.

Alfred North Whitehead, in

his "Aims of Education", puts it best:

"Though knowledge is one chief aim of intellectual education, there is another ingredient, vaguer but greater and more dominating in its importance.

It is wisdom. You cannot be wise without some basis of knowledge, but you may easily acquire knowledge and remain bare of wisdom."

Our goal, indeed, the goal of any liberal education, was to help you learn how to seek wisdom from knowledge -- and through that wisdom, prepare you to learn the art of life itself...

Michigan is an exciting, challenging...sometimes

frustrating...but always rewarding place.

Let me wish you the best as you start the fascinating
and rewarding process of a Michigan education!

And may the force be with you...

the force of the maize and blue!!!