

Freshman Convocation (9/4/90)

Some Questions

Are you all moved in yet?

Have you found where your classes are?

Have you found Michigan Stadium?

How about the Blue Front?

Have you met Shakey Jake?

Have you had your first gourmet experience with dorm food?

Ah, well you still have a few surprises in store for you...

Welcome to Michigan

On behalf of the faculty of the University, I

would like to welcome you to Michigan...

and to our family of the Maize and Blue!

I suspect this has been a hectic and confusing

week for many of you...

And the last thing you probably need at this

point is more advice...particularly from

a University President.

So I won't attempt to give you much advice...

rather I want to convey to you a sense

of the pride we take in your achievements

that brought you to Michigan...

But I would also like to convey a sense of the time of enormous

challenge, opportunity, and responsibility

at which you have entered the University.

A Sense of Pride

Let me first congratulate you on the distinguished records

each of you have brought to Michigan...

In fact, the Class of 1994 is probably the strongest
we have had academically in the history of
the University...

We had over 18,000 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 of you has accomplished something very
special to get into this place...and I must
admit that we are already very proud of
you.

That's the good news...now for the bad news...

The Challenge of a Michigan Education

But, despite your obvious academic talents,
you, like all generations of Michigan students
before, will find this University a very
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 cultural,
athletic, or social activities...

...even challenges to your most fundamental beliefs

Nobody ever said a Michigan education was easy...

....it takes extraordinary effort

the 40 hour week simply doesn't apply when it comes
to studies...in fact, that won't even get you a
B at Michigan!

...it takes perseverance

particularly when your courses aren't going well
or you can't get into the courses you want
or you're homesick or you have boyfriend or
girlfriend troubles...

...and, at times, it takes a sense of humor and humility

But the generations of students who have had the
determination to meet the challenge have demonstrated
the value of this experience through their achievements
later in life and the contributions they make to our
society.

They have found that something quite remarkable
happens during your years on this campus...

...something that we still don't quite understand or
even realize

...yet something of great value and great importance
for the future lives of our students.

Certainly, your education will be a time of challenge
and discovery, of curiosity and intellectual growth,
of learning about yourself.

But It will also be a time to learn the art of life...

A Time of Excitement

You are arriving at the University at a particularly

exciting time...

Of course, things have never been dull at Michigan,

that is one of the most distinctive things about us:

the rich diversity and variety of this remarkable institution...

This was dramatically demonstrated to me earlier this summer by

the events of a single week in late July:

- i) A team of Michigan medical scientists announced they had discovered the gene responsible for neurofibromatosis... the Elephant's Man disease ...incidentally the same team discovered and cloned the gene responsible for cystic fibrosis last fall. (I might note that it was 40 years ago that another Michigan team performed the clinical trials for the Salk vaccine, eliminating that dreaded disease from our society. I should also note that Dr. Jonas Salk, himself, was a former faculty member at Michigan.)
- ii) A team of over 100 Michigan students won the solar car race from Florida to Michigan, thereby earning the right to represent the United States in the world competition in Australia this fall.
- iii) It was announced that two Michigan faculty members had won MacCarther prizes prizes, the key prize used to acknowledge creativity and excellence in our society-- No other University won more than one.
- iv) The major computer network, operated by the University in collaboration with IBM and MCI,

passed the milestone of linking together over one million users in the U.S. and around the world...

(In fact, you can sit down at any of our public computer workstations--or hook your own computer into our network--and communicate with people around the world--even with the President if you wish!)

- v) Michigan scientists announced the development of the world's most powerful laser--with power equivalent to 40 times the electrical generating capacity of the U.S.
(I should note that the science of holography was invented at Michigan!)

- vi) Teams of Michigan business students spent the summer in Poland, Soviet Armenia, and Czechoslovakia helping these rapidly changing nations in their transition to capitalism.
(And the President lent his daughter to Hungary as a Peace Corps volunteer)

- vi) A Michigan paleontologist discovered a fossil demonstrating that whales once had hind legs and feet!

- vii) And while not much happens in athletics during the summer, one of our women engineering students won the American Gladiator competition...
and one of our alumni--and a former Regent--
Bob Nederlander, succeeded George Steinbrenner as managing owner of the New York Yankees.
(The second Michigan contribution to the American

Baseball League this year...we lent Bo to run the
Tigers last spring!!!)

Not a bad week! But then, it was rather typical for this
remarkable university.

Possible Futures

But, beyond the happenings around the University,
there are other reasons why this is a particular
exciting time.

Think about it for a moment...

while you were born and educated in the 20th century,
you will be spending the majority of your life in the 21st century,
...a new milleneum...

You will find a future of great change, challenge, and opportunity

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

...in which we become a nation of minorities,
without a dominant ethnic majority

...in which women take their rightful place as leaders
of America...

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

in which every one of our activities must be viewed within
the broader context of participation in the global community...

...the extraordinary events of 1989...

...the startling political transformation of Eastern Europe
and the Soviet Union

...the new spirit of cooperation among the nation's

superpowers, perhaps no better demonstrated
that in the recent Persian Gulf crisis
...but this is only the beginning!

Whether through travel and communication, the arts and
culture, the internationalization of commerce, capital,
and labor, we are becoming increasingly interdependent on
other nations and other peoples.

Further, as the destination of roughly half the world's
immigrants, the United States is rapidly becoming a "world
nation"
with not simply economic and political but strong ethnic
ties to all parts of the globe.

iii) The Age of Knowledge

But there are even more profound changes underway...

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 Discovery, the Industrial Revolution

There are many who contend that our society is
once again undergoing such a dramatic shift in
fundamental perspective and structure.

Today we are evolving rapidly to a new post-industrial,
knowledge-based society, just as a century ago our
agrarian society evolved through the Industrial Revolution.

In a sense, we are entering a new age, an age of knowledge,
in which the key strategic resource necessary for our
prosperity, security, and social well-being has become

knowledge--educated people and their ideas.

And, of course, that means people such as you!!!

And, of course, you should begin to prepare for

this future of challenge, this future of change, in your
education at Michigan:

Preparation for Diversity:

As America increasingly becomes a multicultural society,
we believe it essential that this University--and
your education--reflect the rich ethnic and cultural
diversity of our society.

We must do this because it is right and also because
we will need the talents, experiences and skills of all our people
if we want a prosperous and fulfilling future for all.

You have already heard about the Michigan Mandate
--our agenda for creating a truly diverse community.

I hope during your years here you will do your part
to help us achieve our goals.

For many of you, this will be your first experience
in living and working with people who are different from yourselves.

It is a sad fact of life today that too many of our communities
are separate and homogeneous offering too little opportunity
for people from different backgrounds to know one another.

Look upon your years here as an opportunity to learn
from those different from yourselves.

And do your part to build a better community
--one with strong common bonds of common values
but that draws its strength from the contributions
of the rich cosmopolitan mix of religions, races, nationalities,

ages, economic backgrounds, and political beliefs.

Preparation for Globalization:

The events of recent weeks and months are a reminder of the way our world is becoming internationalized into one global village.

The internationalization of all aspects of life means that it is more important than ever that the University reflect international and comparative perspectives in its education and research.

For you, it means that you should seek at every opportunity to learn about other countries and people in your classwork, in learning foreign languages, in making friends among our international students and in seeking opportunities to travel, study, and work in other countries.

Just about all of you will eventually work in careers in which knowledge of the international environment and skills in working with others will be highly valued assets.

These will also be important to your responsibilities as citizens of the world community.

Preparation for an Age of Knowledge:

The fundamental transformation of our society as we become ever more knowledge-intensive also has important implications for your education.

This revolution is increasingly reflected in our teaching and research, and you will find this one of the most "wired" campuses in the world.

We have invested heavily in computers so that every one of you has the opportunity to use cutting edge technology to study, do research, communicate, collaborate, and for creative expression.

These are tools that will extend your intellectual reach,
and I hope you will seize every opportunity to explore
the countless ways they can serve you.

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: The University of Michigan is not a

small liberal arts college.

Rather it is one of the world's great research universities...

...that is, it attempts not simply to teach
...but to advance knowledge itself through
the research of its faculty
...and to apply that knowledge to serve
society through its professional schools

As such, the University is a very large,
very complex, and sometimes very
bewildering and challenging place

You may find this multiplicity of missions very
confusing...

Indeed, you may even find yourself questioning whether
you would have been better off going to a
small institution, where you could have
received more individual attention
where the faculty concentrated on teaching.

Yet, for students of your ability, we believe that
something more than simply teaching facts

is important...

Instead we seek to immerse you in an environment of learning...

...a rich, complex, and sometimes bewildering world of fascinating people, ideas, and activities.

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.

And it may interest you to know that this particular approach seems to work.

An Aside:

I chair a major national committee that has just completed a major study aimed at determining the education "value added" of various types of universities.

To ascertain this, we took a set of 53,000 matched pairs of SAT and GRE scores...that is, the

scores of entering freshpersons...and then of seniors as they were applying to graduate school, and attempted to determine which type of colleges were characterized by the highest scores of seniors for a given entry SAT.

The results were rather surprising:

1. The top 20 research universities scored far higher in the “value added” than any other institutional type...even better than the small, prestigious liberal arts colleges to renown for their teaching focus.
2. The educational value added was highest in those institutions doing the most research.
3. It was also highest in the largest institutions.

Incidentally, there is preliminary evidence that the same holds true when comparing the scores of the other senior level examinations--for law school, medical school, business school, and so forth.

Hence, it seems clear that both the size and intellectual excitement of major research universities such as Michigan, Berkeley, Harvard, and Stanford create the most effective learning environment--at least for students such as yours.

For that reason, there is no reason to be apologetic about the research performed by our faculty--or the services performed by our professional schools. They all add to the educational experience of our undergraduates.

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.

In a sense, you not only have an obligation to yourself...but to your nation and the world to prepare for the mantle of leadership you will be asked to assume following your graduation.

Sorry to lay such a heavy burden on you, particularly during your first week on campus.

But I felt it important to stress what an extraordinary future of opportunity, responsibility, and excitement you will have ahead of you.

What are we trying to do at Michigan?

Prepare you for a career?...

As doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers
...investment bankers???

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

In fact, there is really no point for such a "preprofessional education.

Since our studies now indicate that the typical college graduate of the 1990s will find himself or herself changing not just jobs but entire careers many times during their lives.

In this sense, a college education represents only the first step down a long road of learning...
...a lifetime of education.

Instead it is our belief 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.

Perhaps Emerson put it best 150 years ago in his famous Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard when he noted...

"Colleges have their indispensable office, to teach elements. But they can only serve us when they aim not to drill but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and by the concentrated fires, set the hearts of their youth aflame..."

And, that perhaps is the simplest and best statement of what we are trying to do at Michigan...

We are aiming to ignite the intellectual fires within each of our students

We want to stimulate in each of you a spirit of liberal learning...a spirit that will be a part of them for the rest of your lives...

In short, we want you to become leaders who will use their knowledge to serve humanity!

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!

Good luck!

Oh, and one more thing...

Go Blue!!!