

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 18,000 applications 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**...

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...

Possible Futures

You are beginning your college education at a most

Possible Futures

If my experience is any guide, your future will be a time of greater change and transformation than any experienced before in our nation's history.

You are graduating at a truly extraordinary 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...

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 those groups we refer to today as minorities will become the majority population of our nation in the century ahead...

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...

Whether through travel and communication, the arts and culture, the internationalization of commerce, capital, and labor, we will become 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.

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The Challenge of Change

There is yet a fourth theme that I can predict with some
 certainty, and that is a future of ever-accelerating
 change...that indeed, the future will never again be what it used to be...
 New ideas and concepts are exploding forth
 at ever increasing rates...

We have ceased to accept that there is any single
 coherent or unique core of wisdom that serves
 as the common organizing principle for our
 scholarship or, indeed, our society.

We've seen simply too many instances in which
 a new concept has blown apart our traditional
 views of a field...

Einstein's theory of relativity
 quantum mechanics
 the molecular foundations of life...

Indeed, in many fields, the knowledge base is doubling every
 few years... in more and more fields the knowledge
 taught undergraduates becomes obsolete even
 before they graduate!

As the pace of the creation of new knowledge accelerates,
 it seems apparent that we are entering a period in
 which permanence and stability become less
 valued than flexibility and creativity...
 in which the only certainty will be the presence of
 continual change...
 and the capacity to relish, stimulate, and manage
 change will be one of the most critical abilities 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: 35,000 (Ann Arbor) (47,000 total)

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

We also run the largest health care system in
the Midwest, treating over 750,000 patients each year...

We conduct events in the performing arts which rival
New York and London...

whether it be Leonard Bernstein performing his 70th
birthday concert with the Vienna Philharmonic
or, God-forbid, the Grateful Dead....

And, speaking of entertainment, we also have the
Boyz n the City show...the Michigan Wolverines...

playing in the fall to 105,000 every Saturday afternoon

Or, in the winter and spring, to every household in America...
...at least if we make the Final Four....

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.

Furthermore, In many fields, the knowledge base is doubling
every five years...hence an undergraduate education only
serves as the stepping stone to a process of lifelong
education

Moreover, save for the most basic information, it is no longer
necessary at the college level to commit vast amounts
of knowledge to memory. Indeed, we now live in a
world where knowledge and information can literally
be plucked out of the air...or off your computer terminal.

Hence, of more lasting value are the broadly applicable
skills and wide-ranging perspective that is
characteristic of a liberal education .

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. Importance of diversity to this campus

UM has made a very deep commitment to the achievement of an environment which seeks, nourishes, and sustains racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity.

We believe it essential to develop an environment of mutual understanding and sensitivity on this campus that not only tolerates diversity, but moreover seeks and embraces it as one of our most cherished characteristics.

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

It will be a nation of peoples of vastly different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs...peoples seeking to retain their cultural roots...to maintain their identities

On this campus your sons and daughters will encounter for the first time in their lives the remarkable diversity and richness of peoples of different races, cultures, religions, nationalities, and beliefs.

One of the most important things our students must learn on this campus is to respect others for their differences...as well as their similarities...

To learn how to resist the great pressures of separatism, fear, and bigotry which push us apart...
...and instead commit themselves to a university...
...indeed, to a nation, committed to working together, united by a common set of beliefs and visions.

Michigan is first and foremost a "UNI" versity.

Hence view our challenge...and the challenge before your sons and daughters...as learning how to weave together these dual objectives of diversity and unity in a way that strengthens our fundamental goal of academic excellence and serves our society.

In a very real sense, we believe that Michigan has a mandate to serve as both a microcosm and leader of society at large..

We believe in and we are committed to a diversity in our people, in our activities, in our intellectual endeavors, which mirrors the great diversity of our nation and the world...

But we also believe that our university has a special responsibility to develop effective models of multicultural communities, in which peoples from vastly different backgrounds study together and learn together.

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

For that reason, it is absolutely paramount that our students, just as our faculty and staff, demonstrate the sensitivity and tolerance toward others of differing races, cultures, and nationalities... and seek to learn from this remarkable diversity of people and ideas on this campus.

This will be an essential component of their education.

And we hope you will support your son's and daughter's growth in understanding and commitment.

Piece of Advice 4: Pride in Place

The University of Michigan is a very special place

This campus represents the investment...

the sweat and tears...or over 8 generations of Michigan citizens.

Each of us, as students, faculty, or staff will benefit from this heritage of excellence and commitment...

But each of us has, as well, a personal responsibility to sustain and improve this university so that future generations can benefit as we did.

In particular, over the past several years we have made some extraordinary investments aimed at providing you, as undergraduates, with some truly spectacular facilities.

Examples:

i) This month we are opening up the new Dow Laboratories... a \$60 million facility...much of which is dedicated to undergraduate instruction

ii) This summer we opened up the largest computer cluster in the nation...the Computer Cathedral... with millions of dollars of the most sophisticated computer equipment for you to use...
...which adds to what has become the largest computer network in the world designed primarily for student use...
Incidentally, as recognition of the fact that UM is now regarded as the world leader in the application of computer technology in education, EDUCOM, the international organization of computer manufacturers and research universities, has chosen Ann Arbor as the site of its 25th anniversary conference this October...
...involving over 3,000 visitors and the leaders of every major computer company in the world...

iii) We are finishing a major renovation of the UGLI

iii) We are methodically going through the Central Campus and renovating all classroom space...
...as evidenced by the 4 new auditoriums in Angell Hall

iv) And we are making a very major effort to clean up the grounds of the campus...

Yet, without your help, this is all for naught...

We really need your help...

...not only in making certain that you take care of this campus...

...but that you assume some responsibility for the way it looks

...if you spot something on the ground...pick it up...

...if you spot posters taped where they do not belong...

...tear them down

...in limiting trash and graffiti

...in

Incidentally, this is not just another one of those

"Clean up your rooms" talks.

Picking up after folks costs you, as students, real money...

...for example, we are forced to spend almost \$2.3 M per year in graffiti removal and grounds maintenance...

...that's about \$65 for each of you

...in addition, we must spend over \$9.6 M in building maintenance...

...and that's about \$340 for each of you

Hence, showing a bit of pride in this place...and encouraging others

to do the same...will not only keep the campus looking like it should

...but it will also save you big bucks!!!

Piece of Advice 5: 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 6: 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.

The Importance of Fundamental Values

While change and renewal will be important themes of your future, they need to be based upon a foundation of fundamental values.

Our values give us direction, meaning, and purpose.

Without these all of our accomplishments count for nothing...

...or indeed, could turn against us.

But with them, we are capable of any greatness as individuals and as a society.

Of course, in institutions such as this University we have focused primarily on intellectual values...values of the mind....

The seeking of wisdom

Freedom of inquiry

Intellectual integrity
Discipline of the mind
Respect for reasoned conclusions

But there are other values that will be of great importance
in your future...

Values of moral character:

Honesty
Integrity
Courage
Tolerance and mutual respect

So too, we must bear in mind those all-important
values which characterize civilized societies:

Caring and concern and compassion
Cooperation and civility and sacrifice.

In a future characterized by rapid and unpredictable
change...

It seems clear that it will be our fundamental values...
that will hold us together as communities...
that will provide us with the foundation...the
reference point that will allow us to shape and
control change.

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.

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...
Ignite the intellectual fires within each of
our students

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

**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!!!**