

Honors Convocation-1991

Introduction

Thank you, Provost Whitaker.

It is my great pleasure to join with you today
to recognize the exceptional academic achievements of
of our undergraduate and graduate Honors students.

This convocation is a very special moment in the
cycle of the academic year since it celebrates
that spirit that is at the core of this University's
distinction...

the aspiration, the will, the determination to
achieve excellence in learning, teaching,
and scholarship...

Each student we honor today
has demonstrated unusual intellectual talent,
many are brilliantly gifted.

A Broad Range of Talents

Michigan is a very challenging institution...but it is
also an institution characterized by an
extraordinary diversity of opportunities.

The students we honor this afternoon have not only
met these academic challenges, but they have
excelled as well in a broad range of extracurricular
activities...the performing arts, athletics, student
organizations, leadership.

As proud as we all are
of the grades the students here today have
received, their achievements go far beyond this.

After all, grades are just a shorthand, a symbol, that
reflect not only your intelligence, discipline,
and willingness to work hard--
all important traits, to be sure...

But they also symbolize a set of values and characteristics

that reflect the essence of what a university is all about:
A commitment to intellectual discovery and rigor...
...the excitement of acquiring knowledge and
discovering new ideas and new ways of thinking...
..of participating in the quest to better understand
ourselves and the world around us.

The greatest rewards of teaching come from nurturing
and witnessing this kind of development and
commitment in our students...
...of reading your papers and exams and lab reports...
...of sensing the great excitement and involvement
in your learning and thinking.

Our pleasure and pride thus
is not only for your individual achievements,
but as well for your collective role in reflecting and
sustaining the values and goals upon which the
University of Michigan is based.

Setting the Pace

The talents we honor today are truly the lifeforce
that animates our academic life
and, ultimately, such talents renew and enrich
our entire society with the vitality and creativity.
we need to progress and prevail.

In this hall this afternoon, our assembled Honors students
bring together a breathtaking wealth and breadth of talents.

It is you who make University community
the uniquely exciting and challenging place it is today.

Indeed, it is you who set the pace...

...and a mighty tough pace at that.

You challenge the faculty and your fellow students
.... much more importantly, you inspire them.

You push, you pull and you even drag us
to the frontiers of learning and understanding.

You electrify our classrooms and dormrooms,
our labs and stages and studios
with the sheer joy of your hard work
and intellectual achievement
of your striving for that highest standard of all
--your personal best.

This is what really sets you Honors students apart.
I like to think it is what sets our Michigan students apart.
You have a quality even more valuable than your talent.
For talent without purpose and direction
without discipline and dedication
without plain old hard work
is no guarantee of accomplishment
or contribution to your family or society.

Character

What you Honors students have demonstrated
in addition to talent--- is character.
You show the willingness to use your talents
to the fullest, to have the highest expectations
for yourselves, to go all out.
We will shortly sing the song that says it all---
you Honors students are "the leaders and the best"
Our faculty will testify that it is a privilege
to teach students such as you.
We learn as much from you
as we can ever possibly teach you.
So long as we keep attracting
students who bring us such great gifts of talent,
we can never grow stale or tire of our mission.
In the final analysis,
it is great students who make a university great.
Great faculty are certainly important.
Great teachers are essential.

But I think our Thurnow professors
recognized today for their teaching gifts
will attest to the fact that
they will not develop to the peak of their form
unless continually challenged in the classroom
by the best and brightest young minds
the world can produce.

The Role of the University

Of course, the University can't take credit
for student's talents,
We can brag about recognizing their talent
and luring them to us.
But students bring talent with them when they come.
And we can't honestly claim
to have formed their character, either.
But I think a Michigan education helps mold
and develop talent and character
in much the same way that light and nourishment
help a flower to reach full and glorious bloom.
I think Michigan can also take credit
for instilling a special "spirit" in our students
--an energy and enthusiasm and will
to achieve that comes from our public mission.
Perhaps it is because our students
must constantly choose from so many options--
educationally, socially, culturally.
Because they must learn to navigate
through our academic labyrinths
and overcome fearsome bureaucratic obstacles.
A University of Michigan education
is the beginning of a lifelong quest for learning.
This is a place for students who think
and act for themselves.

It is a place that rewards independence
and discipline more than most.
Our students learn to fend for themselves, to cope.
They learn from each other
and they flourish on the tremendous human diversity
that makes ours such a rich cosmopolitan community.
This experience will stick with them and serve them well.
This Michigan "spirit" will make them stand out
and take charge in any crowd.

Michigan's Role: Leadership

Many of you have probably heard me speak often
about the challenges of change
that are sweeping over the world today.
as we approach a new century.
I have been talking about changes
that are transforming our University,
our people, our economy and society.
At such times in human history
humanity cries out for extraordinary leadership.
It is to education that society looks
to help identify and prepare our leaders.
In particular, history shows that society
looks to the University of Michigan for leadership.
Probably no other University in the world
has a reach that extends so far--
some 370,000 living graduates.
Wherever I go across America or around the world,
I am sure to find a Michigan alum in leadership
whether in government or media, or education,
health, law, in every walk of life.
Looking out on our students today,
I know you will soon be taking up your place as leaders.
It is to prepare you for this role of leadership

that society has created universities such as Michigan.
If all our citizens could be with us today,
they could catch a glimpse of the true value
of their investment in your education.
Even if they can't see it today,
they will certainly reap the benefits in the years ahead.
as your many future contributions to society
begin to mount and multiply.

Honoring Parents

When I reflect on who you are
and what you have already accomplished,
I know our future is in fine hands.
It's a good feeling to know that you will soon
be out there in charge of things.
I speak for the entire University
when I say that we are proud to be
a part of your education
.....part of your preparation
for the tasks of leadership.
We are grateful for all that you bring
to our collective life
We look forward eagerly to applauding
the many more awards and achievements
that are sure follow throughout your life.
Well, by now I have heaped praise on our Honors students
and given plenty of credit, too, to the University for its role
in making this celebration possible.
But the people I have not yet acknowledged
are the ones who I believe deserve to feel the most pride
and to hear the most praise of all.
The real heroes of this occasion are the parents,
----the families --of our Honors students.
You are the ones who have cared and worked and provided,

you have loved and hoped, helped and sacrificed
to bring these students to this moment.

These have not been years in which such selflessness
that parenthood requires is fully value or recognized.

Indeed, recently, as a society,

we have seemed almost heedless of our future,
tragically wasteful of our precious children.

But all the while families like you have ignored
such trends and fashions.

You have just been giving, struggling and striving
to give your children, and through them, our society, a better future.

And just look at the wonders you have performed.

I hope you feel proud today.

You have earned the gratitude and respect
of everyone in this auditorium.

I would like at this point

to ask all the parents and family members in the
audience to stand so that we may acknowledge your
contributions...while acknowledging
as well the very special pleasure and pride
that you are justifiably feeling today.

Conclusions

Once more congratulations to all of the students
and the faculty we honor today.

Now let's all stand now to sing together
the Alma Mater of the University
"The Yellow and Blue".