

804 words/ 5.5 minutes

Honoring Indiana University's 2016 Founders Scholars and Mueller Scholars

2016 Honors Convocation

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

Indiana University

IU Auditorium

Sunday, April 10, 2016

2:00 p.m.

1. CULTIVATING INDEPENDENT THINKING AND JUDGMENT

In a 1936 speech commemorating the 300th anniversary of higher education in America, the legendary theoretical physicist Albert Einstein said “The development of general ability for independent thinking and judgment should always be placed foremost” in the university. “A person (who) masters the fundamentals of his (or her) subject,” Einstein continued, “and has learned to think independently, ...will surely find his (or her) way and besides will better be able to adapt to progress and change...”¹

Eighty years later, the essential truth of Einstein’s words remains.

Given the increasingly rapid pace of progress and change that we have seen over those eight decades since Einstein said these words—and given the dangerous predicaments and seemingly insurmountable challenges the world faces in the 21st century—the need for well-educated citizens who have developed an ability for independent thinking and judgment is perhaps greater than ever.

¹ Albert Einstein, “On Education,” Remarks delivered on October 15, 1936 in Albany, New York on the occasion of the tercentenary of higher education in America, reprinted in Albert Einstein, Sonja Bargmann (trans.), *Ideas and Opinions*, (Crown Publishers, 1954), 64.

2. ABILITY AND SOUND EDUCATION

During your time at Indiana University, you have been receiving an education that will not only prepare you to enter the workforce and embark on satisfying and rewarding careers, but one that enhances your skills of analysis and builds surety of judgment.

Your Indiana University education is providing you with the flexibility to look to new areas of study and exploration. It is instilling in you the desire to ask—and the capacity to try to seek answers to questions about prosperity and poverty, about energy, globalization, technology, and fundamental questions about right and wrong.

As outstanding students in one of the greatest American universities of the 21st century, it is you, and others like you at America's other foremost universities, that will help generate the great ideas that will address the paramount challenges we face.

It is to you, and thousands like you all over the country, that the world will look for your commitment as citizens, for your energy and seriousness of purpose as you grapple with the most formidable problems that confront us, for your commitment to human dignity and freedom, and for all you can do to renew the global economy, to innovate, to invent, to build, to heal, and to teach.

Our society will always need skills in analysis and discernment. We will always need broad and deep knowledge that provides insight into the human condition, and into the world around us in all its vast variety.

3. EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING, LEARNING, AND RESEARCH

As I mentioned earlier, this Honors Convocation ceremony has long been part of Founders Day, a celebration of the establishment of our university. You may also know that we are preparing to celebrate Indiana University's Bicentennial in the 2019-2020

Academic Year. This ceremony reminds us—as former IU President Elvis Stahr remarked in 1968, “that [the enterprises] the university prizes most are fine teaching and persistent learning.”²

Today, Indiana University still very much values, and still dedicates itself to, these same enterprises.

Across the entire university you will find “fine teachers” and “persistent learners” engaged in a myriad of activities which, together, form the basis of academic excellence at our institution.

In our laboratories, students employ the scientific method to advance their understanding of how the world works. In the humanities, students absorb and analyze the great works of world literature and wrestle with the great problems of philosophy. In the social sciences, students engage in work which furthers their understanding of human society and of individual relationships in and to society. In the arts, students immerse themselves in studying the works, theories, and teachings of the world’s great artists, musicians, and performers and apply what they learn to their own works in the visual and performing arts. Today’s honorary degree recipient, Jonathan Banks, is one of many outstanding examples of IU alumni in the arts who, through their work, give all of us important insight into the human experience.

Each of these endeavors is equally important. The breadth that comes with interdisciplinary study and participation in a variety of extra- and co-curricular activities is of great value, but so is the depth of knowledge that a student develops through devotion to a particular field, through fascination with a particular range of problems, through long hours in the laboratory, the library, or in rehearsal and performance spaces.

² Elvis J. Stahr, 1968 Founders Day Address, reprinted in Thomas D. Clark, Indiana University: Midwestern Pioneer, Vol. IV/Historical Documents Since 1816. (Indiana University Press, 1977), 757.

In all of these areas, students not only gain knowledge of specific disciplines, but they also develop important qualities such as creativity, openness to new experiences, improved judgment, and an enhanced sense of their intellectual and moral responsibilities.

You, our Founders Scholars and Meuller (MILLER) Scholars, are, without question, students of remarkable talent, filled with the potential to make fundamental and lasting contributions to society.

The critical qualities of mind and the durable qualities of character that you are developing during your years at Indiana University will serve you well as you become a generation of torchbearers, poised to respond to and help shape our future.

May you create an even brighter future for yourselves and for all of us.