

“Inheriting the Power of Higher Education  
and Investing in the Nation’s Future”

IU Kokomo Commencement

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

Indiana University

Tuesday, May 10, 2011

1. INTRODUCTION: “THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL STUDIES”

Trustees of Indiana University, Chancellor Harris, faculty and staff colleagues, family and friends, and members of the class of 2011:

In his treatise on American universities, Harvard professor Charles Norton wrote that “[t]he highest end of the highest education is not anything which can be directly taught, but is the consummation of all studies-- . . . the final result . . . in the attainment of that complete self-possession which finds expression in character.”<sup>1</sup>

With this Professor Norton describes the power of higher education, which builds character in individuals and prepares them for the great possibilities of life as engaged citizens.

Today as we gather to celebrate the time-honored ceremony of commencement, it is time to imagine those possibilities as you cross the threshold into your future.

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<sup>1</sup> Norton, Charles Eliot. “Harvard.” In *Four American Universities*. New York: Harper and Brothers. Page 32 Google Books Website. <<http://books.google.com>>.

## 2. THE POWER OF A LIBERAL EDUCATION

For many of you, the education that you have gained here has been a liberal education. It is called liberal not because it has a particular political affinity but because it is both wide-ranging and selectively deep. By demonstrating the interconnectedness of all knowledge, it opens you to possibilities that you may never have otherwise imagined.

Such an education in the depth and breadth of human knowledge ranges from the classics in history and literature to the workings of modern government; from the rules of mathematics and logic to the basic laws of physics; from world languages to international affairs. And this is precisely the type of education that our complex, interconnected world requires.

And others of you have focused with great intellectual intensity and rigor on mastering the advanced training in your professional field with an education of the highest quality—one that will enable you to make contributions of lasting value to the prosperity and well-being of our shared world.

This is a world vastly different from the one in which your parents grew up. It is a world where you should expect to change careers multiple times, and, with the increasing globalization of our economic system, you should also be ready to work overseas for a period of your career.

This is a world in which you can blog, tweet, and text from nearly anywhere.

In fact, some of you are probably texting right now.

By virtue of your presence here as graduates, you have inherited the power of a great education, and you now represent an historic educational tradition.

### 3. THE CLASS OF 2011

Your many achievements at IU Kokomo are testimony to the time you have invested and to all that you have learned. Now is the time to take inventory of those achievements.

The regional champions of Students in Free Enterprise can do just that. I understand that they are leaving for national competition in Minneapolis right after this ceremony. And as Chancellor Harris mentioned a moment ago, another group will be leaving tomorrow to study art history and literature in Paris. Hundreds of students have spent the past few years volunteering to make this community a better place. All of these provide a measure of the spirit of achievement and opportunity that pervades this growing campus.

You could ask Cameron Huffman about that spirit. He is graduating today with a degree in English and New Media Communication and was IU Kokomo's first Phoenix Prize award-winner, selected based on merit, academic achievement, and outstanding future potential. Cameron plans to go to law school in the fall.

You could also ask Brandie Davis about that spirit. That name might sound familiar because Brandie's singing opened our ceremony just moments ago. This award-winning singer is graduating today with her degree in Business. For the past two years, she has served as president of Students in Free Enterprise, "working tirelessly to build and manage a terrific team, complete projects for the community, and have a successful year," according to one of her professors. All of this she has done while raising her three children, Jonathan, Jay, and Shelby, who, I believe, are here this afternoon.

Whatever your story, all of you have invested years of your lives to reach this day of celebration, and your families and friends have contributed greatly to this day of achievement.

#### 4. BUILDING THE WORLD'S BEST SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

But as graduates, you are also the beneficiaries of over a century of wise investment in higher education by state and federal governments. That investment has created opportunities and, over many years, has immeasurably strengthened American higher education.

Such investment dates back well over a century. In the years after World War II, it was designed specifically to energize the research and creativity that helped make the American system of higher education the envy of the world.

American investment in higher education helped foster an era of national prosperity and national security with discoveries ranging from the laser to the MRI, from the algorithm for Google searches to GPS, from fetal monitoring to advanced surveying techniques, along with thousands and thousands of other inventions and innovations.<sup>2</sup>

As journalist Fareed Zakaria explained, “[H]igher education is the United States’ best industry. In no other field is the United States’ advantage so overwhelming.”<sup>3</sup>

Among the best evidence of the quality of that system is the fact that countries around the world are now vigorously seeking to emulate it. China, Russia, Germany, Korea, France, and many other countries are pouring billions of dollars into their systems of higher education precisely to replicate and then compete with the American system.

The future will show whether America can maintain the will and confidence to sustain its investment in this country’s great public state research universities when states across the nation are retreating from funding such institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> This series is borrowed from Jonathan Cole’s *The Great American University: Its Rise to Preeminence, Its Indispensable National Role, Why It Must Be Protected*, page 4.

<sup>3</sup> Zakaria, Fareed. “The Future of American Power.” The New York Times Website. 19 May 2008. <<http://travel.nytimes.com>>.

But you, the Class of 2011, in all that you do and accomplish, offer daily testimony to the quality of the American system and to the wisdom of continuing that investment long into the future.

## 5. THE PUBLIC VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Each one of you came to Indiana University to improve your prospects for the future. But the education you have received here, at one of this nation's finest public state universities, has enormous value beyond your own lives. By virtue of your education, you will immeasurably enrich the communities in which you live.

We can see the truth of this statement right here in Indiana where higher education is one foundation upon which this state's prosperity rests. Consider health care in Indiana and the fact that IU trains more than 50 percent of Indiana's physicians, 64 percent of optometrists, 40 percent of nurses, and 90 percent of dentists. And the IU Health hospital system takes the training, research, and expertise of our clinical faculty and researchers to hundreds of thousands of patients across the state.

If we look at our state's legal system, 75 percent of lawyers were trained at Indiana University, and 35 percent of Indiana K-12 teachers were trained at IU.

This is the incalculable and intangible value that your education adds to our society. As graduates, you understand that value and have already invested in your future. Those are investments that will help shape all of our futures.

## 6. CONCLUSION: IMAGINING TOMORROW'S HORIZON

In remarks on the future of the university, former president of MIT Charles Vest said, "There is an infinity of important things to discover, understand, and apply. We, as a

nation, cannot lose our will to continue this great adventure. . . . And we certainly cannot afford to fail to invest in the very activities that will provide for the future . . . .”<sup>4</sup>

At the heart of his words, President Vest is saying that we are all in this together. We share this world and, together, are responsible for it. As graduates of Indiana University, you have been preparing for years to become the next generation to discover, understand, and apply all that you have learned.

Class of 2011:

Imagine the horizons before you;

Imagine what Vannevar Bush, perhaps the father of the modern research university, once called the endless frontiers of knowledge;

and, in your own lives, continue this great adventure of creation, invention, and discovery.

Thank you very much.

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<sup>4</sup> Vest, Charles M. “Not What We Think: What We Haven’t Thought Of.” Keynote Address. The Jerome B. Wiesner Symposium on the Future of the Government/University Partnership. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. 26 Feb. 1996. MIT Website. <<http://web.mit.edu/president/communications/JBWSymp-2-96.html#summary>>.