

“The Currency of Knowledge at Indiana University and Beyond”

IU Bloomington Commencement Ceremony

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

Indiana University

Saturday, May 8, 2010

10:00 a.m.

and

3:00 p.m.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: KNOWLEDGE AS CURRENCY

Just over a decade ago, President Emeritus of Cornell University Frank Rhodes compared knowledge to currency. He wrote that “[u]nlike other natural resources, [knowledge] is [not] depleted by use; it is endlessly renewable, autocatalytic in its influence, undiminished by its application. It is multiplied even as it is shared; it is refined and perfected even as it is challenged and tested.” Ultimately, he continued, “the university is the creator, the conservator, and the mediator of knowledge.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, as we gather to celebrate the time-honored ceremony of commencement, you, our graduates, are far more even than the keepers of such knowledge.

Indeed, each of you has entered—and helped shape—different worlds of knowledge as you have made your own great investments in your future here at Indiana University.

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<sup>1</sup> Rhodes, Frank. “The Art of the Presidency.” *Presidency*, Vol.1, No. 1 (Spring 1998). Pages12-18.

## 2. THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION

That future holds the promise of continual change, and in the course of your lives alone, the pace and scope of such change has already been truly astounding. The world we share has become more globally interconnected and complex than ever, with the constant generation of new knowledge and innovations sometimes posing economic, political, social, and cultural challenges but also promising enormous opportunities.

In the space of your lifetimes, Google has become a household word, and the Internet has made—and broken—many fortunes.

In the space of your lifetimes, scientists have mapped the human genome, paving the way for personalized medicine but opening up complex ethical arguments about discriminatory genetics.

In the space of your lifetimes, China and India have become global economic powers, but the forces that have led to this have, in part, also led to the economic crisis from which countries around the world are only now recovering.

In the space of your lifetimes, the growth of 24-hour news coverage and reality television have connected all of us to events taking place around the world, even as they have blurred the once-clear boundaries between public and private behavior.

In the course of your lives alone, globalization and technology have transformed our world, bringing about unprecedented progress but raising complicated questions and difficult problems, as progress always does.

### 3. THE VALUE OF AN IU EDUCATION

As graduates of one of America's greatest universities, you have been preparing for years to answer those questions and to solve those problems. Your education here at IU has prepared you to contribute in transformative and innovative ways to the prosperity and progress of this nation and the world.

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 and biology; from world languages to international affairs. And this is precisely the type of education that our complex, interconnected world requires.

It will enable you to remain flexible and creative, open to unexpected directions of thought and action. It will enable you to work collaboratively with people from diverse backgrounds, responding with speed and knowledge to changing circumstances. It will enable you to think analytically, synthesizing information from many different areas to generate solutions to unforeseen and challenging problems. It will encourage you to pursue every avenue to continue your education in both formal and informal settings so as to remain ready for and responsive to the change that surrounds you.

An education of such depth and breadth takes time: time to completely immerse yourselves in hours of reading and study; time to develop the skills of argument and reasoning, of analysis and discernment, of leadership and cooperation; and time to explore many different worlds of knowledge that will lead you towards your passion and your life's work.

#### 4. CELEBRATING THE CLASS OF 2010

Your many achievements at Indiana University are testimony to the time you have invested and to all that you have learned. Your class—the class of 2010—includes graduates from 53 different countries, from 42 different states, and from 89 different Indiana counties. Our oldest graduate is 60, our youngest 19, and we have 33 sets of twins graduating today.

This accomplished class includes the founder of the IU Debate Team, the President of Kelley Student Government, and the creator of the Punch Energy Drink.

It includes the winner of the Palmer-Brandon Prize, a member of the Kuttner Quartet, who has performed with IU's own Joshua Bell, and IU's first marine biology major.

It includes Mitte Scholars, Wells Scholars, a Rhodes Scholar, a Truman Scholar, and a Ruth Mary Griswold Scholar.

It includes students who have travelled around the world for their studies, including one who taught English to orphans in Cambodia, and another who conducted research in Guatemalan and Pakistani childbirth clinics in addition to travelling to India, Ghana, Spain, Cuba, Honduras, Panama, and Costa Rica.

#### 5. CONCLUSION: NOBLE GOALS AND BRIGHTER DAYS

Such global experiences reflect our new 21<sup>st</sup> century world and also reflect the noble goals towards which many of you are already striving. Take your skills and talents, your diligence and determination, your intelligence and effort, and be the creators of tomorrow.

Yours will be the classrooms, the clinics, and the laboratories of the future. And yours, the arts, ideas, and industries of a new emerging world where success is measured in how well you transform knowledge and ideas into helping people.

Just over a century ago, before he became the Prime Minister of Great Britain, the great statesman Sir Winston Churchill called upon his fellow citizens of Dundee, Scotland, to be diligent and daring, and this call I pass along to you.

He asked them “What is the use of living, if it be not to strive for noble causes and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone? . . . I avow my faith,” he continued, “that we are marching towards better days. Humanity will not be cast down. We are going on swinging bravely forward along the grand high road and already behind the distant mountains is the promise of the sun.”<sup>2</sup>

As you leave this commencement ceremony, and stride boldly towards your future, you too will be marching towards better days and gazing towards the promise of the sun.

Congratulations, Class of 2010!

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<sup>2</sup> “Unemployment.” Speech delivered at Kinnaird Hall, Dundee, Scotland. 10 Oct. 1908. *Liberalism and the Social Problem: A Collection of Early Speeches as a Member of Parliament*. 1909. Rockville, Maryland: Arc Manor, 2007. Page 87.