

“Finding a Place at Indiana University”

Freshman Induction

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

Indiana University

Indiana University Auditorium

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3:00 and 5:00 p.m.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a great pleasure to welcome the class of 2012 to Indiana University.

I am here today not only as president of Indiana University but also as a parent. My wife Laurie and I join you in the excitement and pride of this day for our son Lucien is also beginning his freshman year here at IU. He follows in his sister Josephine's footsteps, who graduated last year.

We understand the years of support and hard work that have brought you and your children to this day. We understand the investment of time and love it took to reach this threshold into the future. We understand the courage and trust it takes to see your children walk towards that future.

You can be sure that they are still in good hands.

2. SAVING AND LOSING TIME

In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous treatise on education, *Emile*, he wrote, "Dare I expose the greatest, the most important, the most useful rule of all education? It is not to save time, but to lose it."¹

This bold—and surprising—statement by this great philosopher captures the freedom and possibility the next few years hold for you as students. These years offer you the precious gift of time. They offer a wide expanse that stretches toward the horizon upon which you will be able to cultivate a new, enormously exciting, and challenging intellectual landscape of vast scale and complexity.

3. THE LUXURY OF TIME

For many of you, today marks the first time you have lived away from home. Just this morning, I joined the many parents who were moving their children into IU's various residence halls.

Time is a key factor in this new chapter in your lives. In fact, the only other time in your lives that you will have this much time to completely immerse yourselves in hours of reading and study—is retirement. And for most of you, that period of your life is some years off. Now you have the luxury to lose track of time as you read broadly and deeply. Now you can lose yourselves in your studies as you hone your skills in argument and reasoning.

By losing yourselves in reading and study, you will find constellations of knowledge you had never imagined. These discoveries will expand your understanding of the world around you, and they hold the promise of wisdom.

¹ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile or On Education*. Trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1979. Page 93. Access through Google Books <<http://books.google.com>>.

But never lose sight of the fact that you must also take responsibility for your actions and make important decisions about how to spend your time.

4. CULTIVATING INSIGHT

Losing time in reading and study is quite different from wasting time, of course.

I recall the famous mathematician Henri Poincaré whose experience illustrates this very point. He had been trying to solve an extremely complicated geometry problem for weeks and decided to take a trip and forget the problem.

The moment he stepped onto the bus, the solution came to him.

He later explained that when working on a hard question, one must often take a break from the task, and return to it later. Then, suddenly and with clarity, the solution will come to mind.² Poincaré's moment of insight demanded deep concentration on the problem balanced against moments of relaxation away from his studies.

The same could be said of your time here at Indiana University.

5. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TREASURES

You too will be working to answer hard questions about the nature of the universe, about the meaning of beauty, about the structure of language. But in order to achieve your own moments of insight, you will have to lose time in your own way.

² Poincaré, Henri. "Mathematical Creation." Trans. George Bruce Halsted. *The Monist: A Quarterly Magazine Devoted to the Philosophy of Science* 20.3 (July 1910): 321-35. Page 328. Accessed through *Google Book Search* <<http://books.google.com/>>.

Immerse yourself in the richness that the campus has to offer. Just last year, the IU Jacobs School of Music staged well over a thousand performances across campus. Students could attend well over four hundred lectures on subjects ranging from a celebration of America's waterways to Japanese textile design. Or they could join one of over four hundred student groups on campus.

6. FINDING YOUR OWN PLACE AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY

As you have seen, the beauty of the campus landscape reflects this cultural and social richness.

Paul Weatherwax, an IU alumnus and faculty member, wrote of that landscape some years ago. He said, "There are few places in the world where great laboratories, classrooms, libraries, auditoriums, and other such centers of intellectual and artistic creativity are located in an environment which retains its primeval character—few places where one may so quickly and so completely cast off the tensions and anxieties of this complex modern world in quiet meditation."³

Walk among the trees in Dunn Woods and you are walking through Indiana University history. Wylie and Owen Halls were the first two buildings to be erected on this new campus site in 1884. Just west of the Wells Library, you can wander through the arboretum, an ideal location for an afternoon of rest or study. This was originally home to IU's Memorial Stadium and Little 500 bicycle races.

Wander across campus to find your own place at Indiana University. Find your own place for meditation, contemplation, and reflection.

³ Weatherwax, Paul. *The Woodland Campus of Indiana University*. Bloomington: IU Foundation, 1974. Page 8.

As a member of the largest freshmen class in the history of Indiana University and the most academically talented in recent history, this is your world. Whether you are the youngest freshman—at 15—or the oldest—at 25—this is your world. Whether you are among the over 200 international freshmen coming from 23 different countries, or among the over 4000 students from right here in Indiana, this is your world. Whether you are among the 31 sets of twins or 1 set of quadruplets beginning your studies, you have a place here.

You are entering a magnificent world of tradition and scholarship, and you all have a place here.

7. LOOKING BEYOND CAMPUS WALLS

This is a world rich with history, but it is not stuck in the past. Here eyes are firmly focused on a future made better through excellence in education and research.

American poet Robinson Jeffers asserts that “The future is a misted landscape, no man sees clearly.”⁴ But we can predict the certainty of change and the increasingly global nature of our world.

Whether you want to major in music, marketing, or mathematics, you must understand and function in a global community. As legendary IU chancellor Herman B Wells explained, “The campus of the university is not just in Bloomington, or even the state of Indiana, but [is,] indeed, the world.”⁵ Take time to immerse yourself in another culture, to deepen your understanding, and to find your place in that world.

⁴ Jeffers, Robinson. “Prescription of Painful Ends.” *The Oxford Book of American Verse*. Ed. F.O. Matthiessen. NY: Oxford UP, 1950. 796-7.

⁵ *Herman Wells Stories: As Told by his Friends on his 90th Birthday*. Ed. John Gallman, Rosann Greene, Jim Weigand, and Doug Wilson. Bloomington: Indiana University P, 1992. Page 9.

Your college years may seem infinite right now, but before you realize it, you will be donning your robes for graduation.

8. CONCLUSION

As you are inducted into the Class of 2012, you are becoming part of Indiana University's magnificent traditions of history, inquiry, and global engagement.

Now is the time for you to cultivate your best selves, for you to prepare for the global future, and for you to find your place in this world.

Thank you very much.