

“Architects of a Global Future:
Knowledge and the Cardinal Virtues”

2007 Winter Commencement

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

Indiana University

Assembly Hall

December 15, 2007

10:00 procession

1. THE NATURE OF WISDOM: PAST AND PRESENT

In his epic work, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Marcel Proust wrote, “We are not provided with wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can take for us, an effort which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world. The lives that you admire. . . .represent a struggle and a victory.”

On this day of celebration, what is clear is that the years leading up to this remarkable moment have been a journey towards wisdom, a journey of personal and intellectual discovery through a vast and exciting wilderness of knowledge. They have been years of struggle leading to this hour of victory. You embarked on this journey with a keen hope for—and belief in—the future. Upon strong foundations of character and virtue, you have soared towards achievement.

2. WHO IS THE GRADUATING CLASS?

Those of you whom we honor today have dedicated yourselves to the pursuit of excellence in your chosen fields. You have gathered the knowledge and skills and developed the wisdom you will need to face a future of increasingly global challenges.

In fact, our graduates have gathered from across Indiana, throughout the nation, and around the world. All told, you represent 54 different countries and have added your own stories to the glorious traditions of Indiana University.

You are, indeed, the global future.

3. KNOWLEDGE IN THE MODERN AGE

Of course, when you came to IU, you expected to gain the knowledge and skills that would better prepare you for your future. No doubt, many of your parents expected that as well. And you have achieved that aim. You will be teachers, lawyers, doctors, musicians, computer scientists, artists, and so much more. You are ready to sing and heal, educate and adjudicate. But what is the nature of the knowledge you have gained? What does knowledge mean in a world so rapidly changing?

Look around this great hall and consider what knowledge would have been important to you a hundred years ago. The year 1907 was thirteen years before the first commercial radio broadcast, twenty years before the first motion picture with sound, and thirty-six years before the first computer was invented.

3.1 WILLIAM C. KING AND THE WELCH FAMILY

To say that this was a different world that required different knowledge and different skills may be one of the greatest understatements. If we go back even further, toward the founding of Indiana University, we would encounter William C. King whose great-great-grandson is graduating this morning. In the mid 1800s Mr. King attended Indiana Seminary, which later became Indiana University. He was ordained a Methodist minister and was a local circuit rider. King's daughter graduated from IU in 1909 with a degree in education. His grandson graduated from IU in the early 1950s with a degree in business. His great-grandson earned degrees in English and Political Science from IU in the 1970s. And David Welch II, King's great-great grandson, is graduating today.

4. FROM KNOWLEDGE TO WISDOM AND BEYOND

Many of the degrees you are receiving today did not even exist when William King, his daughter, or even his grandson attended Indiana University.

For the Welches—and so many other families here today—tracing their IU histories back generations, knowledge is a river ever flowing and constantly changing. What remains unwavering and steadfast are the traditions of excellence out of which that knowledge flows. Those traditions of teaching and learning at Indiana University lead to wisdom from knowledge that transcends time. It was Alfred North Whitehead who once said, “As knowledge shrinks, wisdom grows.”

When we have transformed our knowledge about the human genome into cures for deadly diseases; when science and society have fulfilled the promise to end hunger, pollution, and human poverty; when our skills, knowledge, and leadership bring about a period of peace not seen for nearly two thousand years; then can we address even more fully the fundamental questions that remain for those on the journey towards wisdom: What is good? What is beautiful? What, as I asked before, is the nature of

knowledge and the meaning of wisdom? These are questions that some of the greatest minds have wrestled with since the dawn of civilization.

But your education has led to more than wisdom. It has led to the courage to reach out and help friends and strangers in need or in trouble. Remember Hurricane Katrina and the courage many of you showed in helping? Remember the courage and skill it took to sit with a young child who was learning to read? Remember those moments of fear and trepidation that you went through with your friends whom you have grown to love and respect over your years here. Those, too, are moments of courage.

Your education has also helped you cultivate prudence that grants time for thoughtful reflection and sound judgment. You may not always exercise prudence, but at least you know it is an option.

And that education has enabled you to realize that all of this—without justice— is meaningless. Yours has, indeed, been an education in other virtues.

As Winston Churchill said, the first duty of a university is to teach wisdom as well as character.

5. CONCLUSION: THE CHARGE

Your graduation today marks the fulfillment of that duty. But today is certainly not the end of your journey of discovery. Equipped with knowledge, armed with courage, and tempered by prudence, may you continue to search for wisdom and battle for justice. May you carry on the traditions of excellence that have brought you to this moment. And may you work together to create a future ever brighter and more glorious than today.