“The Promises and Challenges of an Era of Change”

IU Bloomington Undergraduate Commencement
Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie
President
Indiana University
Assembly Hall
Saturday, May 4, 2013
10:00 a.m.
3:00 p.m.

1. INTRODUCTION: AN ERA OF “PERSONAL AND PARTICIPATORY CHANGE”

Trustees, Provost Robel, honored guests, colleagues, and members of the Class of 2013:

Google executive chairman Eric Schmidt writes in his book, *The New Digital Age*, that “as we look into the future—its promises and challenges—we are facing a brave new world, the most fast-paced and exciting period in human history. We will experience more change at a quicker rate than any previous generation, and this change, driven in part by the devices in our own hands, will be more personal and participatory than we can even imagine.”[1]

There is no question that the world we share has become more globally interconnected and complex than ever. Powerful technologies have allowed us to overcome the challenges of geography, language barriers, and have given people the world over greater access to information. And as Schmidt also notes, “mass adoption of the

[1] Eric Schmidt, Jared Cohen, *The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations, and Business,* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 253.

Internet is driving one of the most exciting social, cultural, and political transformations in history, and unlike earlier periods of change, this time the effects are fully global."[2]

This "brave new world," then—marked by rapid, personal, and participatory change—is the world into which you, the members of the Class of 2013, are graduating.

Moreover, you are the first generation born into and raised in this new digital age. You have grown up with the presence of the Internet and have never known life without it. This is a world vastly different from the one in which your parents grew up and one that your great grand parents likely would not even recognize. This is a world in which instant access to information is literally at your fingertips. 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.

2. AN EDUCATION FOR THE 21st CENTURY

During your years at Indiana University, you have received an education that has prepared you to succeed in this new world.

Your Indiana University education has enhanced your critical thinking and problem solving skills. It has instilled in you the desire to ask—and the capacity to seek answers to questions about globalization, about prosperity and poverty, about energy, technology, and fundamental questions about right and wrong.

As we celebrate the time-honored tradition of Commencement, you are poised to take your places among the next generation of business leaders, journalists, judges, artists, scientists, public health professionals, teachers, social workers, and government leaders.

[2] Ibid. 4.

No matter what degree you have earned, you and your fellow graduates are now the torchbearers, poised to respond to and help shape our future.

3. CELEBRATING THE CLASS OF 2013

Your many achievements at Indiana University are testimony to the time you have invested and to all that you have learned.

Your class—the IU Bloomington class of 2013—includes graduates from 85 different countries, from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and from 90 of Indiana's 92 counties. Our oldest graduate is 64, our youngest 17, and among this weekend's graduates are 17 sets of twins, two sets of triplets, and one set of quadruplets.

This extraordinarily accomplished class includes Wells Scholars, a Churchill Scholar, a Truman Scholar, and two Goldwater Scholars.

A quarter of you have travelled around the world for your studies, and many of you have dedicated yourselves to civic engagement and public service at home and around the globe.

Your class includes one student who developed a mentoring program to help international students acclimate to life at IU. It includes others who have helped to lead Books and Beyond, a project of IU's Global Village Living-Learning Center, in which students work to provide high-quality reading material for school children in Rwanda. Still others have participated in community service projects that helped to provide clean and reliable water sources in Honduran villages.

Many members of the Class of 2013 have helped to raise money for IU scholarships by participating in one of our great traditions, Little 500, and you have raised record

amounts—more than $2 million last fall alone—in support of Riley Hospital for Children through your participation in the IU Dance Marathon, IU's largest student philanthropic event and one of the largest events of its kind at any university.

The Class of 2013 also includes two student-athletes who, between them, have won five individual NCAA championships in track and field, one of whom is among the most decorated IU student-athletes of all time, with four NCAA championships, six Big Ten championships, four Big Ten Field Athlete of the Year honors, and an Olympic bronze medal.

And, of course, your class includes the senior members of the men's basketball team, who helped to revitalize our great program and to lead the team to its first outright Big Ten Championship in two decades.

In all sports at Indiana University, our athletes are, and always will be, students as well as athletes. And we pledge to you and to all of our alumni that we will honor this great university by never pursuing athletic achievement at the expense of academic excellence. The student-athletes to whom I have referred—and the many others who graduate today—exemplify that commitment to academic excellence.

4. CONCLUSION: NOBLE GOALS AND BRIGHTER DAYS

As graduates of Indiana University, you have been preparing for years to become the next generation to discover, to understand, and to apply all that you have learned.

Just over a century ago, well 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.”[3]

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 2013!

[3] Winston Churchill, “Unemployment.” Speech delivered at Kinnaird Hall, Dundee, Scotland. Oct. 10, 1908. Reprinted in *Liberalism and the Social Problem: A Collection of Early Speeches as a Member of Parliament*. 1909. Rockville, Maryland: Arc Manor, 2007. Page 87.