

“Investing in Excellence and Imagining the Next Horizon”

Graduate Commencement Ceremony

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

Indiana University

Assembly Hall

Friday, May 6, 2011

1. INTRODUCTION: THE HEART OF THE MODERN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

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

Former Chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley and retiring president of the Association of American Universities Robert M. Berdahl said, “A great strength of the American research university is the joining of research with graduate education. . . . [G]raduate education is enriched by the direct conduct of research, and the research is invigorated by the energy and creativity of these students. Other nations increasingly recognize that this is the best system for educating the next generation of scientists and scholars.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, as we gather to celebrate the time-honored ceremony of commencement, every graduate here offers an example of the great strength that President Berdahl mentions. That joining of research and education has been, for over half a century, at the very heart of the modern American research university.

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<sup>1</sup> Berdahl, Robert, M. “Research Universities: Their Value to Society Extends Well Beyond Research.” American Association of Universities Website. April 2009 <[www.aau.edu/WorkArea/showcontent.aspx?id=8738](http://www.aau.edu/WorkArea/showcontent.aspx?id=8738)>, Page 2.

You are all heir to the ingenuity and innovation that arise from that vital connection.

## 2. PARTNERS IN THE RESEARCH ENTERPRISE

Regardless of your discipline, you have all experienced the deep sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, and achievement—that sense of exhilaration—that comes from extending yourselves to ever-higher limits in new areas and making new contributions to human knowledge.

Some of you have been partners in the enterprise of research and scholarship to which so many of you, I am certain, will make lasting and memorable contributions. And others 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 society.

### 2.A. LINDA PEARSE: FOUNDER OF SACABUCHE!

And many of you are already making such contributions. For instance, Linda Pearse is receiving her doctoral degree in modern trombone from the IU Jacobs School of Music today. Among her many other achievements, she is the founder and artistic director of the award-winning ¡Sacabuche! early brass ensemble, which has travelled across the country and around the world, recently performing in the magnificent new National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, China.

### 2.B. JEREMY LIVINGSTON: MBA CANDIDATE

Jeremy Livingston is graduating with his Master's in Business Administration from the

Kelley School this afternoon. During his years here, he served as president of the MBA Association and worked with the Kelley School's Graduate Career Services team to ensure that all of his classmates received an internship last summer.

This follows an early career with Fifth Third Bank in Cincinnati where Jeremy founded the Diversity Leadership Symposium, served on Fifth Third's Diversity Board and coached boys basketball. One of his professors describes him as "a transformative student leader . . . who leaves a legacy of a stronger MBA culture of collaboration and support."

## 2.C. PAYAL SHAH

Payal Shah has made a difference both here at IU and around the world as a researcher. She is a Fulbright recipient and a Wells Fellow receiving her doctoral degree from the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Comparative and International Education Program. Her dissertation advisor describes her work on girls' education and empowerment in India as exceptional in its methodology and her research in general as international in its impact.

## 2.D. ADRIAN DESHAUN LAND

Adrian Land is graduating today with his doctorate in microbiology. During his time at IU, he performed the first studies of the proteins that organize cell wall construction in the bacterium that causes pneumonia and ear infections. His research excellence was recognized by support through an NIH Training Grant. He has also been very active in the community and received the prestigious Outstanding Black Male Leader of Tomorrow Award from the City of Bloomington. His faculty advisor describes him as "an outstanding young investigator with a promising future."

### 3. A PERSONAL INVESTMENT

These outstanding students are four among over two thousand students receiving graduate degrees in the Class of 2011. Your accomplishments and contributions to society will be a return, in a myriad of ways, on the personal investment you have made over many years.

You have invested years of your lives to reach this day of celebration, and your families and friends have also made their own contributions to this day of achievement. All of you know of both the tangible and intangible benefits that can be derived from postgraduate work in many different fields.

### 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 to 1862 when the U.S. Congress passed legislation to establish land-grant colleges. That investment continued, and, especially in the years after World War II, was designed expressly to energize the research and creativity that went on to make the American system of higher education the envy of the world.

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>2</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup>Zakaria, Fareed. “The Future of American Power.” The New York Times Website. 19 May 2008. <<http://travel.nytimes.com>>.

for Google searches to GPS, from fetal monitoring to advanced surveying techniques, along with thousands and thousands of other inventions and innovations.<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 literally 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 continue to sustain its investment in this country's great public state research universities in an era that is seeing states all across the nation retreating from funding such institutions.

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 in some way. But the education you have received here at one of this nation's finest public state universities has enormous value beyond the boundaries of your own lives. By virtue of your education, you will enrich the communities in which you live, and you will strengthen the American nation.

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.

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<sup>3</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.

Consider one of this state's largest industries—pharmaceuticals—and the ideas and skills that have built that industry, ideas and skills that have arisen from university education and research.

Consider medical 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. The American people understand that value and have always invested in their future and the future of their children. Those are also investments in the future of this nation.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In remarks on the future of university partnerships, then 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. We cannot deprive the next generation of its opportunity to contribute to this advance. And we certainly cannot afford to fail to invest in the very activities that will provide for the future: the quality of its life, the vitality of its economy, and the purity of its environment."<sup>4</sup>

At the heart of his words, President Vest is saying that we are all in this together.

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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>>.

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, to understand, and to apply all that you have learned.

Imagine the horizons before you;

Imagine what Vannevar Bush once called the endless frontiers;

and,

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

Thank you very much.