

“The Fruits of Graduate Education in the 21st Century”

Graduate Commencement Ceremony

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President, Indiana University

Mellencamp Pavilion

Friday, May 8, 2015

3:00 p.m.

1. GRADUATE EDUCATION: ENSURING OUR CAPACITY TO INNOVATE

Trustees, Executive Vice President and acting Provost Applegate, Dr. Allis, Mr. Baier, honored guests, colleagues, and members of the Class of 2015:

The distinguished Indiana-born physicist, Lee A. DuBridge, who served for many years as president of CalTech and who served as science advisor to three American presidents, once said that “The leadership of the next generation will depend on those one-in-a-hundred young men and women who will be pushing back the frontiers in some field. If the college or university does not discover them, encourage them, guide them into the paths of scholarship,” DuBridge continued, “then it has surely failed, and our civilization will be the poorer.”¹

Members of the Indiana University Class of 2015, having earned an advanced degree at one of the nation’s leading research universities, you are those one-in-a-hundred young men and women, destined to be leaders of your generation. During your time at Indiana University, you have been deeply engaged in research or creative activity that has pushed back the frontiers of your chosen field. Here, faculty mentors have encouraged you and helped guide you into the paths of scholarship. Many of you, I am sure, will go

¹ Lee A. DuBridge, “Companions in Zealous Learning,” address at the annual meeting of the American Council on Education, October 1959, as reprinted in *The Educational Record*, Volume 41, January, 1960, (American Council on Education, 1960), 11-15.

on to make lasting and memorable contributions to the enterprise of research and scholarship, and to enrich our civilization by finding solutions to some of the most pressing problems of the 21st century.

2. THE FRUITS OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

The need for graduates like you with advanced degrees is greater today than ever.

A recent report by the Commission on the Future of Graduate Education in the United States maintained that “Our competitiveness in the global economy hinges on our ability to produce sufficient numbers of graduate-degree holders—people with the advanced knowledge and critical-thinking abilities to devise solutions to grand challenges such as energy independence, affordable health care, climate change and other issues. One of our greatest resources is our human talent,” the report continued, “and as a nation we must invest in educating more of our population at the graduate level to ensure our capacity to innovate and to secure our intellectual leadership into the future.”²

Devising solutions to the grand challenges our society faces—challenges whose solutions have the potential to massively advance a discipline or solve the most vexing problems of humanity—is one of the major ways universities can contribute to society. Increasingly, complex challenges such as these can only be addressed by large multidisciplinary teams of the best researchers.

Many of you, during your time at Indiana University, have worked as part of such teams, and have already made contributions that will be of lasting value to the prosperity and wellbeing of society.

² Council of Graduate Schools and Educational Testing Service. (2010). *The Path Forward: The Future of Graduate Education in the United States. Report from the Commission on the Future of Graduate Education in the United States*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Indiana University's commitment to focusing our future research efforts on the grand challenges to which we can contribute most effectively—building on strengths in the humanities, the professions, and the social, natural, and clinical sciences—is enshrined in our five-year *Bicentennial Strategic Plan*, that will culminate in the 200th anniversary of the university in 2020. This plan will guide our efforts as we build on the foundation for Indiana University's enduring strength and set IU on the course for greatness in its third century.

Evidence of the major contributions made to our society by graduate degree holders is all around us.

We rely daily on prescription drugs designed and tested by scientists with graduate degrees to help alleviate our symptoms, prolong our lives, and prevent disease.

When we attend performances by musicians or actors who have devoted years of graduate study to master their art, and when we visit museums with exhibits curated by graduate degree holders, the quality of our lives is enhanced.

Our children attend schools where growing numbers of teachers have graduate degrees—and those teachers were in turn, trained by people with advanced degrees.

And nearly all of us use mobile devices and technologies designed by information technologists and engineers who have graduate degrees—and Indiana University expects to soon begin training the next generation of those engineers as we launch a program in intelligent systems engineering within our School of Informatics and Computing on this campus.

3. THE CLASS OF 2015: JOINING TRADITIONS OF EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

The more than 2,300 students who receive advanced degrees from IU Bloomington today are outstanding examples of the fruits of graduate education.

They are also among 19,344 students who are graduating from Indiana University campuses around the state this week.

Today's graduates come from all 50 states and the District of Columbia and from 71 different countries.³

Among the 616 international students who earn advanced degrees from today are 181 students from India, 118 students from South Korea, and one student from Trinidad and Tobago.

These students reflect Indiana University's steadfast commitment to international engagement and enhance its profile as one of the world's leading international universities. As part of our commitment to global engagement, we partner with leading institutions in all parts of the world to create more meaningful overseas study opportunities for our students and convince the best students from around the world to bring their valuable global perspectives to our campuses here in Indiana.

Among the international students who are part of the Class of 2015 are 14 graduates from the world's newest country, the Republic of South Sudan. They will complete their master's degrees in education this summer, after which they will return to South Sudan to take on leadership roles in education. The participants in this program embody the resilient spirit of South Sudanese women who have endured enormous hardship during the dreadful years of war and conflict in their country. These graduates will serve as leaders in rebuilding a peaceful and prosperous South Sudan.

³ Country of origin data for IU Bloomington students earning advanced degrees.

On behalf of Indiana University, I want to welcome the Ambassador of the Republic of South Sudan to the United States, Garang Diing Akuong, who is with us today, as well as Counselor Aban Pagan Othow of the Embassy of the Republic of South Sudan in Washington, D.C.

As I invite them and our South Sudanese students to stand, would you join me in recognizing these distinguished guests and in congratulating our graduates from South Sudan?

As you join the distinguished ranks of Indiana University alumni around the globe, each one of you is extending the outstanding traditions of educational excellence that have been a hallmark of this great university for nearly two centuries.

The distinguished alumni who received honorary doctorates today are outstanding examples of the ways in which Indiana University graduate degree holders have made vital and lasting contributions that have enhanced all of our lives—and of the crucial role that faculty mentors play in the success of graduate students.

You heard a few moments ago about the accomplishments of our distinguished Commencement speaker, David Allis, who played a major role in ushering in the modern era of chromatin biology and whose discoveries have reimagined the study of human genetics to open paths to treatments for the most difficult forms of cancer.

As you heard, Dr. Allis credits, in part, the extraordinary mentorship of his IU dissertation supervisor, Anthony Mahowald, who was one of a handful of mentors who helped train him to be an independent rigorous researcher and scholar and who influenced his own laboratory philosophy.

Likewise, today's other honorary degree recipient, Lowell Baier, whose distinguished career as practicing attorney, entrepreneur, and tireless advocate for the preservation of our wilderness is a model for all of us, also credits his faculty mentors for much of his success.

Just as Mr. Allis and Mr. Baier recall the faculty members who had profound influences on them during their time at IU, each of you will recall the professors who have become your mentors and guides: professors who have passed along their own intense and exciting training; professors who responded with enthusiasm and interest to your ideas and provided direction when you needed it.

They have taught and guided you, cajoled and sometimes even prodded, celebrated and encouraged, all with the knowledge that you, their students, are the next generation who will do the same.

4. "A LIFE WHICH IS FRUITFUL AND INHERENTLY SIGNIFICANT"

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.

One of the leading educational theorists of the 20th century, philosopher John Dewey, once wrote: "education is not a means to living, but is identical with the operation of living a life which is fruitful and inherently significant..."⁴

As you continue the great adventure of creation, invention, and discovery in your own lives, may you see in your work and in your lives all that is fruitful and inherently significant.

⁴ John, Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, (the MacMillan Company, 1916), 239.

Congratulations.