

# “The Creation of the Future at Indiana University”

Winter Commencement  
Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie  
President  
Indiana University  
Assembly Hall  
December 15, 2012  
10:00 a.m.

## 1. THE TASK OF A UNIVERSITY

Governor Daniels, Trustees, Provost Robel, honored guests, colleagues, and members of the Class of 2012:

Alfred North Whitehead, one of the most influential mathematicians and philosophers of the last century, claimed that “the task of a university is the creation of the future...”<sup>1</sup>

This capacity of our universities to create the future derives, in turn, from the knowledge and skills they preserve and cultivate.

The graduates assembled here this morning, poised to take their places among the next generation of business leaders, journalists, judges, artists, scientists, public health professionals, teachers, social workers, and government leaders, embody Indiana University’s commitment to help create the future.

Frank Rhodes, the former president of Cornell University, elaborated on this noble aim of universities, writing that “the task in which universities are engaged—the pursuit of

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, “The Aim of Philosophy,” *Modes of Thought*, (Simon and Schuster, 1968), 171.

learning—is not the passive conveyance of information; it is the passing of the torch; the sharing of the flame.”<sup>2</sup>

During your years at Indiana University, you have received an education that has not only prepared you to enter the workforce, but one that has enhanced your critical thinking and problem solving skills. Your Indiana University education has instilled in you the desire to ask—and the capacity to try to seek answers to questions about prosperity and poverty, about energy, globalization, technology, and fundamental questions about right and wrong. 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.

## 2. SHAPING THE FUTURE AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Today, you can take pride in knowing that you graduate from one of the finest universities in the nation, an extraordinary institution that continues to uphold the dignity of thought and learning, and one that is helping to create the future.

One fundamental way in which Indiana University helps to create the future is by educating more students than ever before. Along with your fellow students in Bloomington and around the state, you are part of one of the largest universities in the United States—and you were just inducted into an association that serves the nation’s third largest alumni body.

As a major research institution, our faculty and students help to create the future through the most advanced work in a multitude of disciplines from life sciences to the humanities, and from information technology to the social sciences, and much more. This profusion of outstanding research results in new knowledge that is translated, in

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Harold Trevor Rhodes, *The Creation of the Future: The Role of the American University*, (Cornell University Press, 2001), 244.

turn, into policies—as happens in our two new schools of public health, in our nationally ranked schools of business, public and environmental affairs, education, and law, and in the university’s many research centers, including the Elinor and Vincent Ostrom Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, named in honor of IU’s most recent Nobel Prize winner and her husband. In the IU School of Medicine—the second-largest medical school in the United States—and at the IU Health Neuroscience Center—one of the largest concentrations of neuroscience researchers and clinicians in the country—outstanding research is translated into therapies that have an enormous impact on the health and well-being of hundreds of thousands of Hoosiers.

During your time on this campus, researchers have helped create the future through work that gives us a deeper understanding of the universe in which we live. For example, IU physicists designed and built a critical component of the equipment that led to the confirmation of the existence of the Higgs boson, an infinitesimally small particle that plays a very large role in explaining why everything in the world around us has mass. Another IU researcher helped to design one of the instruments that is currently on board the Curiosity rover, some 203 million miles away, on the surface of Mars. Yet another IU researcher is helping to identify the minerals present in Martian rocks and soil by analyzing data from the rover. This work could revolutionize our understanding of the formation of planets and the solar system.

IU also helps to shape the future by preparing students to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world. Today, you also become graduates of one of the nation’s most international universities. Many of you have spent time studying abroad. In fact, IU ranks 7th in the nation in the number of students who study abroad. Nearly 8,000 of our students come from outside the United States, ranking us 11th in the nation in this regard. We have among the largest number of internationally focused programs of any university in the United States. IU offers courses in more than 70 foreign languages—more than any other university, and we are also a national leader in education and research related to areas of strategic importance to the United States, such as central

Asia and the Middle East. These extensive strengths will form the core of our new School of Global and International Studies.

Eight Nobel Prize winners have ties to your alma mater. We are one of the great arts and cultural hubs of the Midwest, and we serve as a leading engine of economic growth and a creator of jobs for the state of Indiana.

### 3. STUDENTS CREATING THE FUTURE

In this extraordinary environment, you have already begun to help create the future, even during your time as students.

You have excelled in the classroom.

Many among you also have helped to improve the quality of life for members of this community and citizens of the world. You have mentored at-risk school children in Monroe County, worked to provide natural disaster relief in the U.S. and abroad, promoted literacy, helped to build homes for Monroe County families in partnership with Habitat for Humanity, and raised money to help build schools in Uganda.

You have helped to raise money for IU scholarships through your participation in one of our great traditions, Little 500, and you have raised record amounts—more than \$2 million this year 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.

Your years at Indiana University have also included historic events that have touched the lives of people around the world, including the Arab Spring of revolution and independence, the re-election of our nation's first African-American president, the devastating earthquakes in Haiti and Japan, the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, and the

recent impact of Hurricane Sandy. At this historic time, you have steeped yourselves in an intellectual community dedicated to analyzing and understanding such milestones—and their implications for the future.

As you reflect on your years at IU, your lasting memories may also include the achievements of student-athletes who dedicated themselves to excellence in the classroom, on the court, and on the field.

You may have watched this summer's London Olympic games, where IU athletes won the 87th and 88th Olympic medals in IU history.

You may also have celebrated, just last week, the achievements of our men's soccer team, as it won the eighth national championship in the program's history.

Of course, your years at IU also included the resurgence of our storied basketball program, and today, you graduate from the university that is home to the number one team in the nation.

But 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.

#### 4. LEARNING THAT MOLDS A LIFETIME

At Indiana University, you have been engaged in learning that molds a lifetime, learning that shapes the future.

As members of this outstanding class of 2012, you are now ready to make your mark on the world, to make new discoveries, to seek solutions to the challenges we face in the 21st century.

It is to you, and thousands like you graduating all over the country, that the world now looks for your commitment as citizens, for your energy and seriousness of purpose as you grapple with the most formidable problems that confront us, for your commitment to human dignity and freedom, and for all you can do to renew the global economy, to innovate, to invent, to build, to heal and to teach.

Members of the Indiana University Class of 2012, I wish you the very best good fortune as you embark on the next phase of your lives. May you create an even brighter future for yourselves and for us all.