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“Celebrating the Bicentennial Class of 2020:  
Sharing in Indiana University’s Essential Work”  
2020 Virtual Commencement  
Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie  
President, Indiana University  
To be recorded at IU Auditorium  
Tuesday, December 8, 2020  
9:30 a.m.  
For December 19, 2020 Virtual Ceremony

## 1. HONORING INDIANA UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY’S BICENTENNIAL CLASS

Trustees, Provost Robel, colleagues, and members of the Class of 2020:

Today, we celebrate the nearly 11,000 members of Indiana University’s 2020 Bicentennial Class.

In the process of earning your degrees in the university’s Bicentennial Year, you remained dedicated to your studies in spite of the enormous challenges presented by the COVID-19 global pandemic. You brought spirit and life to the Bloomington campus, even though the last weeks and months of your time at IU were very different from the traditional IU experience. And you embraced your new responsibilities with a combination of courage, resilience, kindness, and an unwavering concern for others, making us all enormously proud.

As members of the Bicentennial Class, you been preparing for years to become the next generation to discover, to understand, and to apply all that you have learned.

Indiana University was founded 200 years ago in 1820 in the trackless forest wilderness of southern Indiana. From the original campus with its single classroom building, one faculty member, and a first class of just a dozen students, IU has grown to become one

of the world's leading research universities—one that is an engine of prosperity and opportunity for the citizens of Indiana and the nation.

## 2. SHARING IN INDIANA UNIVERSITY'S ESSENTIAL WORK

Just over a century ago, the university's 10th president, William Lowe Bryan, wrote that the one thing he would have alumni of Indiana University fully understand is the “incalculable value ... to the furthest corner of the state” of the university's first-rate scholars. Moreover, Bryan wrote, he would have IU alumni realize that they themselves “are bound to help make that kind of first-rateness a living fact in (their) own communities. The alumni who do this,” Bryan continued, “are not simply (people) who once took a degree. (They are) living members of the university, sharers in its essential work...”<sup>1</sup>

Members of the Indiana University Bicentennial Class of 2020, you are the next generation to become living members of the university and sharers in IU's essential work.

## 3. MAKING IU'S GREATNESS A LIVING FACT IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITIES

Our university's essential work—as it has been for two centuries—is to provide students with the best, most contemporary, and broadest education possible—one that is accessible to all the citizens of Indiana and elsewhere no matter what their means or from where they come; it is to pursue transformative research and scholarship at the highest level of excellence; and it is to serve our state and its regions, our nation, and the world in myriad ways. We aspire to learn, to know, to teach, to heal, to build, and to guide, as our forebears have done for 200 years.

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<sup>1</sup> William Lowe Bryan, “On the University Ideal,” *Indiana Alumni Quarterly*, (Alumni Association of Indiana University, January 1914), 34.

Many of you, during your time as students, have already made contributions of a kind and level of importance that make you sharers in IU's essential work.

Thousands of IU students, including many of you, have been engaged through IU's hugely successful Center for Rural Engagement and through IU Corps, in bringing to bear the formidable resources of this campus to improve the quality of life and address challenges in the areas of health, education, housing, the environment, business, innovation, and the arts in dozens of less-advantaged counties and communities in Indiana. From this, you have learned how the resources of a great research university can play a vital role as partners in improving the quality of life in counties and communities like these with similar challenges across the nation and around the world.

Many of you who are receiving advanced degrees today—as well as many receiving your first degrees—have been deeply engaged in research or creative activity that has defined new vistas of understanding and knowledge in your chosen field. Some of you have been part of IU's Grand Challenge projects, in which IU has invested over \$200 million aimed at improving the health and well-being of Hoosiers through programs to curb opioid addiction, to address and provide tools to mitigate the impact of climate change, and to develop precision cures for cancers and neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's.

Many more of you, I am sure, will go on to make lasting and memorable contributions to the enterprise of research and scholarship, and to improve our civilization by finding solutions to some of the most pressing and difficult problems of the 21st century.

#### 4. A LEADING INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

In addition to its essential work that focuses on the state and nation, IU has also grown to become one of the world's leading international universities.

We work with others around the world on some of the defining challenges of our time—conquering disease, responding to the effects of climate change, alleviating poverty, building prosperity, and reducing conflict. Many of you have been partners in this great global enterprise. You leave Indiana University with the knowledge and the skills to apply this knowledge that will enable you to address some of the most pressing problems of the 21st century—and to seek answers to questions that have not yet even begun to be formulated.

Many of you have taken advantage of IU's longstanding and formidable strength in language studies—we annually teach over 70 foreign languages, more than any other university in the nation. The language proficiencies you have gained allow you to hear and understand more, to more deeply appreciate other cultures, and to better develop stronger global friendships and business partnerships.

More than a third of you have traveled the world for your studies—a number that ranks IU Bloomington fifth in the nation out of over a thousand ranked universities. You have embraced the world in all its diversity, not shunning it or closing it off. Your commitment to understanding and learning about the world in this way has helped make IU one of the nation's most internationally engaged universities.

And the more than 1,500 international students whose graduation we celebrate today have brought diversity in thought and culture to the Bloomington campus and have provided windows into their own countries and cultures—which has greatly enriched Indiana University.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This has been a year at IU like no other in Indiana University's 200-year history. But it has brought out—and continues to bring out--the absolute best in the IU community.

Our campuses looked different this year.

But the strength and resilience you displayed while completing your degrees ensured that we continued to advance our core missions of teaching and research excellence, while keeping Indiana's flagship public university firmly on the path of greatness.

Members of the Indiana University Bicentennial Class of 2020, your IU education has prepared you to contribute in transformative and innovative ways to the prosperity and progress of this nation and the world.

As you take your places among the next generation of business leaders, teachers, journalists, judges, artists, scientists, public health professionals, teachers, social workers, and government leaders, may you take what you have learned at Indiana University and make the quality of your alma mater known not only in every corner of the state and nation, but also around the world.

Congratulations and best wishes to the Class of 2020!