

"The Imperative of Change"

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1. INTRODUCTION

In one of the most famous books ever written on the idea of the university, Cardinal John Henry Newman, in speaking of the development of universities and education in ages past, wrote, "The past never returns; the course of events, old in its texture, is ever new in its colouring and fashion."

It is often said of universities by their critics, both those external and at times, by those internal to them, that universities are impervious to change.

But nothing could be further from the truth.

The university is the longest-lived human institution in the world apart from the Catholic church. Oxford University has been in existence longer than most of the empires of human history and all the royal houses of Europe. Yet the medieval European university is as much like the modern American research university as basketball is like sumo wrestling.

The genius of the university lies in its ability to change, to adapt, while nevertheless, through the centuries, preserving as its fundamental core, teaching and learning. It lies

in tenaciously preserving principles that are at its very essence such as academic freedom while discarding those that are of fleeting importance.

Sometimes this change is slow, frustratingly slow. But then sometimes almost without herald, a wave of change can sweep over an institution as new ideas and thought thrust into the sunlight to grow in profusion and abundance. As Cardinal Newman says in another great work, his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, “Growth is the only evidence of life.”

And so it has been with Indiana University.

2. THE EVOLVING UNIVERSITY

As students, especially those of you close to graduation, you intuitively understand Cardinal Newman’s ideas not only about the changing university but about your changing selves within that intellectual environment.

Just as students change as individuals, so too must the university change to meet their evolving needs. Sometimes, we can actually see the changes as they occur. Such as Simon Hall, the new multidisciplinary science building nearing completion on the Bloomington campus and the new Campus Center under construction at IUPUI. These new spaces for scientific and social endeavors will sustain the spirit of community and inquiry that marks a great university.

Other changes are less tangible like the increased attention to student wellness. What used to be dorms are now integrated living and learning environments. Not just places to live, but environments to nurture every aspect of students’ lives. No longer cinderblock boxes, they win cool rooms contests. These are neighborhoods that have become homes. At Indiana University, taking care of the student body means taking care of student bodies.

It also means taking care of student minds, a complicated process in the swiftly changing era of digitization. A century ago, the Victrola record player was a technological marvel, and there were no radio stations on the air. Today, students are downloading to their IPODS every night and routing their e-mail to cell phones, pagers, and Blackberries. They used to go to the library to check out books. Now virtually every library resource can be digitized and made available on-line. As a lover and collector of books myself, this change gives me pause to think about the future of the traditional library.

Tomorrow's library must meet students' ever-changing needs. Technology rich, student-centered, and preparing you for your future every hour of every day: the new Information Commons at the Wells Library is now your library and the classroom of tomorrow. Actual and virtual worlds unite at your fingertips and allow our campus community to reach, beyond the state, beyond the nation, to embrace the world.

3. INDIVIDUAL STUDENT LIVES

Our ever-evolving university challenges traditional boundaries and encourages not only a free flow of ideas but also a spirit of intellectual adventure that the students we honor today exemplify. Few of you arrived here determined that you would stay the same. Few of you went to class and hoped that you would not learn and grow. No, this "people's university," as IU President Joseph Swain called it over a century ago, brings students together from all over the world so that they can learn from each other, change themselves, and change the world.

And the parents of the students we honor today, have watched with overwhelming pride these changes in their sons and daughters. To the parents of these students let me say I share your pride, especially as my daughter Josephine is among them.

Following the great tradition at IU of international engagement for students, you have taken your achievements to places like Costa Rica, Denmark, Ghana, Kazakhstan,

even Australia. You have become ambassadors for Indiana University, reaching new heights of knowledge and awareness in the process. Your challenge as Indiana University's highest achievers is to continue your ascent towards ever-greater accomplishments.

4. CONCLUSION

The honors you receive today demonstrate your dedication to intellectual and civic progress. They show that you are enthusiastically and energetically engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, not only in the classroom but in your lives outside of class. Your roles as leaders on this campus cannot be contained within rigid, unchanging structures. Indeed, many of you strive for achievements unimaginable a century ago; unimaginable perhaps even a decade ago; unimaginable until you, yourselves, imagined them.

You have created opportunities for your own success and opened doors for others. Your honors today are not the end, but the beginning of a continuing journey.

In the words of Winston Churchill,

Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.

Our history is built on stone and mortar, but it rises far above that strong foundation. At the same time as we honor tradition and glory in the accomplishments of the past, we should keep our eyes toward the future and always be open to change.