

# “A Transformative Journey: Freshman Induction 2007”

Freshman Induction 2011

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IU Auditorium

Bloomington, Indiana

August 22, 2007

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is a very great pleasure to welcome the class of 2011 to Indiana University! At more than 7,000 students strong, you are one of the largest and the most academically distinguished freshman classes in recent memory. You are also one of the most multicultural classes in our history. You hail from every Indiana county, from 45 states, and 45 different nations. The youngest of you is 16 years of age. The oldest is 22. You include 37 sets of twins and one set of triplets. More than a third of you have Facebook profiles.

Many of you have parents and grandparents who are IU alumni. Others will be among the first generation in your families to earn a university degree, as I was when I graduated from college in Australia some thirty-five years ago. I like to say that I am an Australian by birth, but a Hoosier by choice.

I congratulate each member of the Class of 2011 on your choice to become IU Hoosiers. You could not have made a better choice!

## 2. AN ANCIENT INSTITUTION

Despite your rich diversity of origins and experience, today you are united in a common rite of passage: you are about to become part of one of the most ancient institutions in the world. A university like IU can trace its roots back to 400 BC, when a stonecutter named Socrates stood in the Athenian marketplace engaging his fellow citizens in dialogue. He questioned them about the nature of truth, virtue, wisdom, and what constitutes a well-lived life.

Socrates' student, Plato, moved these philosophical debates into a whole new realm when he founded the Academy a mile or so outside of Athens. Plato believed that "philosophy begins in wonder." And the same is true of education. His Academy—which offered a curriculum in geometry, logic, and astronomy—cultivated that sense of wonder in its students for more than a thousand years.

IU can also trace its roots back to such ancient antecedents as the library at Alexandria. Euclid wrote geometry there. Archimedes studied math there and calculated the earth's circumference with amazing accuracy. It is where the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek.

You will find that same spirit of discovery, that same determination to push forward the frontiers of knowledge everywhere on this campus. IU is a 21st-century community of scholars with national leadership in information technology and one of the best research libraries in the country. Our faculty investigate causes and cures for our deadliest diseases and create art that stretches the boundaries of the imagination.

As a truly international university, IU will help you flourish in the global marketplace of the future. Here, you will have classmates from 136 countries who come from nearly every possible racial, religious, and ethnic background. You will have the opportunity to study any one of 70 foreign languages and to choose from more than 80 overseas study programs.

Your IU education will provide a new understanding of what it means to be a citizen of the world.

### 3. AN EPIC JOURNEY

Students who enrolled in ancient institutions of learning embarked on transformative journeys of epic proportions. Today, such a journey lies before each of you.

The classical poet Homer described the essence of this journey when he told the story of Telemachus in *The Odyssey*. Telemachus, a young prince about the age of our new freshmen, leaves home in a quest to know more about his heritage.

He is motivated to undertake this quest by the goddess Athena. In the words of the poet, Athena inspires Telemachus to venture forth and “win his own renown in the world.” She does so disguised as a friend of his father’s named Mentor.

Here at IU, you will also encounter many mentors—artists and researchers the best in their fields—who will help you learn how to win your own renown in the world. You will have an opportunity to study with a chemistry professor heralded as one of the scientific visionaries of the century, to take lessons from a Grammy-Award-winning soprano in the Jacobs School of Music, to learn from one of the world’s foremost experts on artificial intelligence, and perhaps to conduct research with a biologist investigating how new plant species develop and evolve.

I urge you to get to know your professors. Doing so will enrich and illuminate your experience here at IU. Doing so will feed your understanding not only of astronomy, psychology, literature, or finance but also of life.

#### 4. CHARTING UNKNOWN TERRITORY

The journey on which Telemachus embarks is his first venture alone out of his hometown into unknown territory. Such journeys are not without anxiety. As the parent of six young adults, I am well aware of the mixed emotions that our new students and their families are experiencing at this moment.

Now and then the Office of the President receives letters from parents expressing those emotions with great poignancy. One father from Illinois wrote describing the experience of helping his daughter move into McNutt center. It was her first time away from home.

He said that watching her crying in his rear view mirror as he drove away was one of the hardest things he had ever done. But four years later, she also cried at her commencement ceremony. She was sad to be leaving a campus, with professors and staff members, classmates and friends who had shaped the direction her life would take.

#### 5. A COVENANT

As you commence your education at IU, we enter into a covenant with you that entails mutual obligations of the greatest seriousness.

Our part of the covenant is to provide a rich environment for learning. Your part in it is to take the best possible advantage of this environment. This year you will have the opportunity to attend over 1,100 concerts, operas, ballets, and other musical performances. Over the course of the year, you will choose among 400 different lectures, films, and plays. You can participate in more than 100 recreational sports events and attend 150 varsity athletics games. You will have the opportunity to get involved in one of the 500 student organizations on campus.

Drink deeply of all this community has to offer you.

Our part of this covenant is to work tirelessly to ensure that an IU degree continues to grow in value and prestige around the world. Your part is to deepen your understanding of what it means to become a truly educated person.

That means not only gaining well-honed career skills, but also acquiring broad, deep knowledge that provides insight into the human condition. It means developing analytical reasoning abilities that enable you to derive conclusions from masses of complex information.

Your ability to do so is crucial not only to your success as IU students, but to the future of our state, our nation, and our world. More unique, new information will be generated this year than was generated in the last 5,000 years.

Never before have such vast amounts of data been available literally at our fingertips. Never before has the ability to consider complicated issues from a variety of perspectives been more necessary. Never before has a talent for processing information, for thinking well, and thinking critically been more important. Never before have the words of the great Roman philosopher Seneca been more relevant. He said: "It is one thing to remember, another to know." Echoing the fundamental tenets of Socrates, knowing how to ask the right questions is just as important as having the right answers.

And finally, our part of the covenant is to foster a community that is truly a marketplace of ideas. Your part is to remember that we often learn the most from those who are least like us. Here you will encounter a broad diversity of perspectives and opinions. In the words of one of the great philosophers of higher education, John Henry Cardinal Newman, universities are ". . . place[s] for the communication and circulation of thought, places where inquiry is pushed forward, discoveries verified and perfected, rashness

rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge.”

At IU, we place a high value on vigorous, but civil debate, on the collision of mind with mind, both inside and beyond the classroom. At a time when public discourse is increasingly polarized, I urge you to embrace the spirit of debate with enthusiasm, to engage in it with courtesy, and to recognize it as an essential part of the educational process.

## 6. CONCLUSION

At the end of his journey, Telemachus returns home, having grown in stature and wisdom. His father is grateful that he has acquired the maturity to help strengthen and defend their kingdom. Likewise, we all look forward to the day when we gather at graduation to celebrate the new knowledge and perspectives you have all acquired.

As you embark on this odyssey through time and knowledge that so many IU alumni have traveled before you, keep in mind Aristotle’s advice to maximize your full potential. Set your sights high and pursue your goals with the fullness of your hearts and minds. Broaden your horizons. Give your best to this great university, and draw the best out of it.

Once again, welcome to IU, members of the class of 2011!