

New Student Induction Ceremony; Fall 2011

President Eli Capilouto

August 20, 2011

Thank you, Everett, for your kind introduction.

Good afternoon students and families. It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you as the University of Kentucky, Class of 2015.

You may not know this, but it's my freshman year at the University, too.

Last June, I uprooted myself from Birmingham, Alabama because I wanted to be a part of something special. I wanted to be in a place with special people working in service to their fellow human being ...working to create a better place for people ... a place that educates our best and brightest and prepares them for lives of meaning and purpose..

And I saw that opportunity at the University of Kentucky. Every day that I am here reaffirms for me that it was the right decision.

Today -- as I look out across this auditorium ... I see the future of our Commonwealth and our country ... I see affirmation again about what a special place -- this place -- truly is.

For nearly a century and a half, we have been committed to educating and preparing students to lead and to serve. We will ask much of you over the next few years. And we owe you much in return.

We will ask you to seek greatness during a time of challenge and uncertainty ... challenge and uncertainty that confronts not simply our community and our state ... but our nation and our world.

Today, as you are inducted into the UK Family, we will ask you to begin to move from the world of potential and promise to reality.

But what about our promise to you -- our students? What do we owe you?

What lies ahead? How do we educate our students to compete and succeed in a 21st century economy when we don't know what that world will look like next week, much less next year?

Your time at the University of Kentucky will have a profound impact on the person you will be on the day you walk across the Commencement stage and your name is called out in Rupp Arena.

In the course of the next several years, your interests may change, you may change your major, you might pick up a new hobby – your intended career choice today may be entirely different from your choice at your sophomore or junior year.

It is our job to help you along the way – to support you in your journey of self discovery, academic achievement and social maturation.

And, early in your college career, that's Okay – the University's General Education Curriculum – our new UK Core – is designed to expose you to different schools of thought and study, because a broad education – one grounded in theory, science, critical thinking and the liberal arts is the surest recipe for a well-rounded graduate.

Apple CEO, Steve Jobs, during the launch of the iPad 2 said, "It's in Apple's DNA that technology alone is not enough – it's technology married with liberal arts, married with humanities, that yields us the result that makes our heart sing."

He goes on to describe his experience auditing a calligraphy course after dropping out of school that inspired him to develop multiple typefaces for word processors in the earliest personal computers.

Today's his company's inventions and applications help define and shape our world and the very essence of how we communicate and learn.

It is important to blend experiences and ideas because, with that interaction, a more developed, diverse and curious, probing mind – one that is open to new ideas and thinks critically and creatively about approaching challenges – is created. With these minds you will best serve yourself, our state, and our country.

We live in a world where a college degree remains the entry point for most measures of success. Nevertheless, the jobs and growth sectors of today will be different than those 10 years from now.

If we simply teach you to find your next job, we fail you. Instead, we must, as a columnist I admire recently pointed out; we prepare students "not so much to find their next job as to invent their next job."

And that means that, together, we must provide you an education that is not limited to one department or one major or even one campus. We must provide you an education that prepares you for an economy that is complex, diverse and increasingly interdependent.

But so many of you already know that. And you thirst for that challenge. It's what makes you special. It's why you are here ... at the University of Kentucky.

I recently finished a book by a colleague of mine, the Chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Here's what he said about your generation, that you are,

“undaunted when solutions to great challenges are not obvious, [your] mindset, driven by unprecedented access to information and to one another, makes [you] willing to tackle enormous problems with optimism and resolve.”

You have fully integrated technology into your lives in creative ways that were never imagined. A 2007 study found: 97 percent own a computer. 94 percent own a cell phone. 75 percent of those in college have a Facebook account.

Research from one of UK's own, Nathan DeWall, a Psychology Professor in the College of Arts and Sciences, has been cited in the New York Times and number of other newspapers and journals which further probes how we can best understand how you learn, and how to best teach you.

I want to finish by thanking a very important group of people in today's audience – the parents and families of the Class of 2015.

Walt Disney once said, “Our greatest natural resource is the minds of our children.”

I remember when my wife, Mary Lynne, and I dropped our daughter, Emily, off for her first day of college. As we carried in the last box, I felt the void that existed in our home and in our heart.

Many years later, Mary Lynne would tell a story about seeing Emily in the rearview mirror of our car holding a bouquet of flowers as we drove away. It was a bittersweet day, so I understand how you must feel right now and when you drive home this weekend.

However, Mary Lynne and I both knew that we would hear and share in Emily's college experiences that ultimately shaped her into the incredible woman she is today – and she continues to inspire us and teach us new things.

Today, you are entrusting us with your most precious gift. A responsibility that we hold dearly. Your most precious gift is now our most precious asset. My pledge to you is that we will work every day to deserve that with which you have entrusted us -- your children ... our future.

We have a proud history as Kentucky's flagship, land-grant institution.

150 years ago, a man by the name of John Bowman, imagined a way to create a better future for Kentucky.

It was his self-appointed mission was to launch a university in Kentucky where the public could receive a quality education. Clearly, he succeeded.

In its first year, 1866, the Agricultural and Mechanical College, later named the University of Kentucky, enrolled 190 students. That, too, was a time of great turbulence

for our state and country as it was just emerging from the throes of our bloodiest conflict -- the Civil War.

But since our beginning, in the midst of challenging times, our graduates have gone on to accomplish incredible things.

They are our poets, conductors, actors and novelists.

They are our Pulitzer Prize winning journalists and reporters.

They are computer scientists revolutionizing the way we integrate technology into our daily lives.

They are civic leaders, Governors, Senators and Congressmen.

They are the CEOs of Fortune 500 Companies, small business entrepreneurs and venture capitalists.

They are inventors of life saving medical devices and procedures and Nobel Prize winning scientists.

They are ordinary students who as exemplary parents, civic leaders, and volunteers who hold together their families and communities.

What is your dream? What do you dream today?

Who among you will be our next poet laureate, transformative entrepreneur, groundbreaking inventor, or influential artist?

Who among you will achieve greatness in pursuit of a better world?

Who among you will lead your local community, your school board, your city and your state?

For those of us in the stands and on the platform, YOUR dreams are our greatest hopes.

You are the ones who will create and nurture the changes that will move Kentucky, our nation and the entire world toward a better tomorrow.

And it is the mission of the University of Kentucky to help you unleash your greatest potential.

Welcome to the Big Blue Nation. And, remember, to always, always See Blue.