

The Power of Ideas

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I am honored to join you today, and to have the opportunity, on behalf of the faculty, to welcome you to Ohio State.

I understand that there are a lot of reasons you've come to OSU. You've come here because you know that getting your college degree will improve your chances of finding a good job in a difficult time. You've come here for the social life: to meet other people, to make new friends, to attend a party or two. You've come here so that you can move out of your parents' house. You've come here to have a better shot at football tickets. And it's true; Ohio State can offer you all of those things. But there's one thing – one critical thing – the university has to offer above all else: the extraordinary power of ideas.

It's easy to wander around this vast campus and to see it as nothing more than a collection of buildings: classrooms here, offices there, a hospital somewhere off in the distance. What pulls those disparate pieces together, though, is a single mission. Ohio State is a vast laboratory for the creation of human knowledge. Out in those offices, those lecture halls, those seminar rooms, that hospital, we are trying to understand the nature of the universe, the nature of the body, the nature of human societies, the nature of technical systems, the nature of artistic expression. It's astounding, really, to think of this place pulsing with the limitless energy of the human imagination grappling with a staggering array of ideas. And over the next few years, whenever you go to a class or a performance or a presentation, we're going to take those ideas and we're going to offer them to you.

But all we can do is offer them. It's up to you to accept our offer, to grab hold of those ideas, pull them in, and make them your own.

Let me take this opportunity—right here, right now—to say to you, to plead with you: please accept our offer. Take a class in a subject you know nothing about. Read a book you'd never thought of reading before. Write an essay or do a problem set not because the professor requires it but because putting something on paper forces you to refine your thinking. Go to a lecture just because it sounds interesting. Go to a movie or a play or a concert that will challenge you, even if none of your friends is going. In short, allow yourself to embrace the world of ideas, to experience the amazing sense that discovery brings, to think in ways you've never thought before. And whatever else you do, never, ever be ashamed to show that you care about your education; that you think ideas matter; that you want to be engaged with the life of the mind.

I'll make you a promise. If you find the courage to accept our offer, if you embrace the world of ideas, the concepts you'll encounter will change you; when you walk across the stage four years from now to be handed your diploma, you won't be the same person you are right now. And maybe, just maybe, one of you will go on from here to change the world.

Again, it is my great honor to be among the first faculty members to welcome you to Ohio State. May your time here be everything you want it to be—and a few things you never imagined it would be.

Good luck.