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## CONVOCATION 1999

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Welcome, all of you, to this historic gathering of our community at the opening of a new academic year. It gives me great pleasure to greet faculty and administrators and returning students, as well as transfer students and those on exchange from other universities. And a hearty welcome to the parents and family members of first year students who are joining us electronically from Page Auditorium.

This morning our particular focus is on the Class of 2003, our first year students on their first full day at Duke, and these welcoming remarks are therefore especially directed to members of that Class.

As you enter Duke, we are all preparing to enter a new decade, a new century, a new millennium. This fall, while you are exploring your new university and getting accustomed to college life, countless articles and tv shows will appear commenting on the greatest, the biggest, the most important people, events, scientific developments, of the past century, the past millennium. Other articles will focus on what we can look forward to, or dread, in the century, the millennium, just ahead of us.

As I'm sure you know, predictions about the future are really quite shaky in most respects, even predictions about what's going to happen in the next few years. When experts cannot forecast tomorrow's stock market or even the weekend weather, trying to say what the world will be like in the twenty-first century is a really big challenge.

People like H. G. Wells at the beginning of our own century tried hard to predict what our lives would be like today. They got some things right--flying machines and man on the moon, for example--but got much of it wrong, such as anti-gravity paint that would let us travel in space. Twenty years ago, lots of people thought discoveries by scientists at Duke elsewhere would mean that by now we would have conquered all the dread diseases. It never occurred to them that new diseases like AIDS were already quietly gathering strength. Even ten years ago, who would have predicted the place of the Internet and the world wide web in our lives?

At about that same time, the Cold War ended, and some people said there would be no more wars, that we were entering an unprecedented era of peace and prosperity. So far, they were partly right about prosperity for the U.S., although surely not for the whole world -- and don't talk about prosperity to the 44 million Americans who lack basic health insurance. And peace has proved sadly elusive, with war in Kosovo and threats of war in several other parts of the world.

In 1968, the chairman of Duke's own electrical engineering department imagined an average day in the life of student in the year 2000, beginning with a breakfast of reconstituted bacon squares and rehydrated peaches. The students would stop at a fax machine to pick up data requested the day before, and then step onto a moving sidewalk from East to West Campus. They would see a professor only once a week, and most of their learning would occur on TV. I hasten to reassure both you and your parents that both the reconstituted bacon squares and the courses-by-TV turned out to be way off the mark; but it would be nice to have that moving sidewalk!

So what does all this have to do with your first year at Duke? You are taking your place in the context of history, joining a long line of men and women who have preceded you and who will follow you at Duke. As first year undergraduates, you are at once the children and the parents of history, its most beautiful flower and the raw material of the future. You are the product of everything and everyone that has come before; and the choices you make will determine what happens next. Don't lose sight of that, and don't believe other people's

crystal balls too much.

For you, all these speculations and retrospectives are likely to be much less salient than the things that happen to you every day, since the first year of college is, for most people, an unusually intense and important period in life.

Quite a few things about college will turn out to be quite different from what you now expect---better in some ways, worse in others. This should encourage you to be open to new experiences, to be prepared to recognize interesting opportunities for friendship, learning and discovery in unexpected places, rather than being blinkered by looking for your life only in the places you already have planned to find it. Teachers are everywhere, from the most distinguished professor to the homeless child you may encounter on the street. Keep your eyes and ears open.

Building on this insight, in the rest of my talk today I'd like to make your future at Duke seem a bit less abstract, a bit more real, by directing your attention to some of the places you may expect to have such experiences in the next few years.

D.H. Lawrence, in his essay 'The Spirit of Place,' wrote, Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality. The Nile Valley produced not only the corn, but the terrific religions of Egypt.

And this place we call Duke produces those terrific people we affectionately call Dukies. Let me tell you, then, a little about the spirit of this wonderful place.

### *East Campus*

When you leave the Chapel today and head back home -- to your new home, not the home you left yesterday or a few days ago -- you'll head down Chapel Drive around the Circle to Campus Drive and over to East Campus. The banners of your class, 2003, proudly hanging on the lampposts for the first time in history, will guide your way.

For slightly more than a college generation now, all first-year students have lived together on East Campus. Your campus began in 1892, when Trinity College moved to Durham from Randolph County, in central North Carolina. (Note for those of you who live in Randolph -- that's why your dorm has that name; it was our original home as an institution). Only a couple of buildings remain from that early period; most of the campus was built at the same time West Campus took shape in the 1920s.

All of East Campus is now your home; you will find that it feels good to share that space with other freshmen, to recognize just about everybody, before too long, and to realize that almost everybody you see is just as new to Duke as you are, and is wrestling with the same kinds of experiences.

But you are not just a freshman, you are part of an undergraduate student body of more than 6000 students; and in addition to the special place of East Campus in your life, the rest of Duke University is also yours from Day One to explore, to make your own.

### *West Campus*

Although West Campus was built in the 1920s, it looks ancient, timeless -- and that's on purpose. It's in the

collegiate Gothic style, and it's one of the purest and most beautiful examples of that style. People come from all over the world to admire your university campus; perhaps when you see them taking photos you'll stop and remind yourself how beautiful this place is, so that you actually enjoy it while you are here.

As Emily Dickinson put it,

Eden is that old-fashioned House

We dwell in every day

Without suspecting our abode

Until we drive away.

Don't wait till you drive away.

A portrait of Julian Abele, who designed our campus, hangs in the front hall of the main administration building, Allen Building; when you come in to visit one of the offices, take a look at that striking portrait. And stop to think about the fact that this gifted architect, who gave us all this wonderful space, never actually saw the magnificent campus he designed. He was an African American, and in the 1920s, it was hard and demeaning for an African American to travel in the South; so he never came to Duke. That situation changed only very slowly, and only within the working life of some faculty and staff here. It's well to remember this, when you and your classmates ponder and debate issues of diversity and inclusiveness at Duke. We've come a long way since the 1920s; but we can still do much better in understanding and celebrating our diversity; and with your help, we will.

Things seem to happen with special intensity on West Campus: people study and party hard. West Campus is home to Perkins Library, a splendid place to read, to explore, to lose yourself in the collections of one of the best university libraries anywhere--*and* there's a great coffee shop on the second floor, The Perk. Most of your classes, except in science and engineering, will be on West Campus.

West Campus has also two unique places of refuge. It's home to Duke Gardens, a marvelous place to wander about in any season, glorying in all those many different kinds of flowers and trees, refreshing your spirit. Be sure you find time soon to spend an hour or two lying on the grass, feeding the ducks. West Campus is also home to Duke Chapel, one of the finest examples of an English Gothic cathedral anywhere, including England - - just look around you at the completeness of the glass, the harmony of the space, and make a mental note to come back and learn more about it, to use it for inspiration and solace in the years ahead, as many Dukies do.

The Bryan Center is your student center, a hub of activities and events; along with the dining spots in West Union -- Alpine Bagel, the Pits, and all the rest. West Campus also provides space for great events: Oktoberfest and Springfest, last day of classes, celebration bonfires, cookouts and parties every weekend, proms and homecoming. And for more serious events: demonstrations in support of major political and social causes, speak-outs on the Chapel steps.

And of course, West Campus is also home to the sports complex: our hallowed Cameron Indoor Stadium, where very tall men and women play the best basketball in the world; K'ville, ready to receive your tents for the first camping out; the spacious new Wilson Rec Center, which you will help inaugurate this fall; the new indoor tennis stadium, and our renovated Wallace Wade Football Stadium, where Duke's new airborne offense takes off in a few weeks.

Over all this, the characteristic Duke gargoyles preside benignly, inscrutably. Look for these mischief-makers; get to know and enjoy them; they are all over the place, especially around West Union.

### ***Science Drive ... and beyond***

As you'll soon discover, there's a lot of Duke's campus that's neither East nor West. Some of it lies along Campus Drive, including several little houses that have international themes and fly international flags, and our brand-new Center for Jewish life. Some of it is on North or Central Campus, where many upperclassmen live in Trent Hall or one of the apartments.

And much of it is on Science Drive, beyond the Bryan Center and the Chapel, where you'll find buildings for all of the sciences and engineering. Many of you will take classes in the Nicholas School of the Environment; others will develop a strong interest in public policy and leadership, and spend time in the new Sanford Institute of Public Policy, a building that has been called, by its academic neighbors across the street, "neo-Gothic on acid."

The neighbors across the street are the Law School and the Business School, and some of you will venture there for seminars or special lectures. The biggest portion of Duke by far is the Duke University Medical Center, a huge world-class collection of hospitals, clinics, research labs, that involves more than two-thirds of the people at Duke. You may only be aware of it when you see one of our life-flight helicopters, Duke's airforce, flying low over campus carrying somebody from far away to our hospital for emergency treatment. But you should be aware that behind the door that opens off West Campus at the far end from Clocktower Quad is one of the largest and finest medical centers in the whole world.

And then beyond that, 12 square miles of Duke Forest to explore, one of the places on the crowded east coast that shows up from space and is used as a reference point in maps. It's full of good paths and sophisticated scientific experiments. One of the best parts of the Forest belongs to the lemurs in Duke's Primate Center; the lemurs turn up in cartoons and student jokes all the time, a special type of Duke mascot along with the Blue Devil; get to know them both.

### ***Durham, RTP and North Carolina***

In addition to the places on Duke's far-flung campuses that will matter to you, so will our city of Durham. You will quickly discover Ninth Street, our very own college drag, if you've not already done so. Beyond that, Durham offers a lot of other attractions, including the incomparable Durham Bulls, at one of the most fun ballparks in the world, where the bull still blows smoke from his nostrils and flashes his eyes red when somebody hits a home run.

Durham, like most cities, also has some areas that are not so upbeat or fun, areas where people live in a high degree of poverty and struggle to keep their lives and families together. During your time at Duke, I hope each of you will find ways to volunteer in these parts of our community. You can tutor a bright school kid, help an elderly person or working mother, support the schools and churches and shelters in these areas, build new houses through Habitat for Humanity. Several of you have already done this through Project Build over the last couple of weeks, and I urge you to share with your classmates some of the insights you gained through this experience. Duke has a series of special partnerships with these neighborhoods and their schools. Find out about these and get involved. Leaving some time on your busy schedule for helping others is part of living an ethical life, and reaching out in such ways can be part of your education, too.

Over the past few years, Durham has become home to more and more Spanish-speaking people, as workers and

families from Mexico and elsewhere are attracted by the many job opportunities in the Research Triangle area. Hispanics have joined African Americans and Anglos as a major population group almost overnight, and support services are scrambling to catch up with this change. If you speak any Spanish, you'll have many volunteer opportunities to be helpful to some of these families trying to find their way in a new home. Even more than you may feel at the moment, they are strangers in a strange land.

Beyond Durham, there is a town about a dozen miles to the west, the home of our fiercest sports rivals, but also the home of Franklin Street, another great place to hang out. And some of you may even find yourself taking a class at UNC. You can actually do this, take advantage of two of the finest universities in the world, and it won't stop you from chanting "Go to Hell, Carolina, Go to Hell" in Cameron; you just compartmentalize the different parts of your mind and move on ahead.

And beyond that, the special attractions of this wonderful state of North Carolina, with some of the most beautiful beaches and mountains in the world. And just south of the state border, that state of mind called Myrtle Beach which swells each spring with the influx of a huge proportion of the Duke student body, especially the senior class.

### *Study Abroad and Cyberspace*

For many of you, some of your fondest memories of this university will be of places far from here if, like many Duke students, you choose to take advantage of study programs away from campus at some point. This can mean a semester in New York or Australia, a summer in Oxford or Senegal or Sao Paolo, an integral portion of your Duke education that happens somewhere else.

For all of you, a fairly large proportion of your time over the next few years will be spent in a different kind of place called cyberspace, while you are logged onto your computer, for class purposes, research, email, games, surfing the web. Cyberspace is a funny kind of place, and you should stop sometimes and think about how you use it. There are some pitfalls here, as well as mind-blowing opportunities.

You can look up almost anything or anybody on the world-wide web these days, and get incredible quantities of information about almost any subject. But you don't have any guarantee that the information is accurate. Anybody can post anything they want on the web: that's the beauty of it, but also the danger.

When you go to the library and do more conventional research in books or articles, you have the assurance that somebody vetted this information for you: somebody checked the facts, edited it to catch inaccurate or misleading statements, ran it by their critical professional peers. That doesn't mean books and articles never contain inaccuracies; but it does mean that you can count on an extra layer of scrutiny before the information reaches you, to weed out some of the more obvious mistakes.

You can't do the same in cyberspace; you get information raw, unfiltered, just as somebody fed it in -- and the somebody could be a reliable source like a government document collection or a university syllabus, or could be just some crank pursuing his or her hobby and constructing the world the way they want it to be. In between, there are lots of web pages offering information that is mostly accurate, but at a fairly superficial level, and without the deep attachment to careful research that marks most of the scholarly material you will use.

So be savvy about cyberspace: know how to use it, and learn to develop the kinds of critical tools that allow you to differentiate between useful material and cybergarbage. Knowledge may be power, but information is not necessarily knowledge.

And you also need to be wary of the temptation to conduct your life too much in cyberspace and not enough in

person. We all hear stories about a student in one dorm room perpetually sending email to the student in the next, rather than getting up and walking next door to have a real conversation. There are some great things about electronic communication, but it's an imperfect substitute for face-to-face discussions, interactions, intimacy. Don't hide in cyberspace, or get so carried away by its fascinations that you forget to get a life.

### *The Back Room of Your Mind*

Finally, a bit of advice about a "place" you may never have thought about before.

Over the decades of your life you will spend a lot of time with many different people -- family, friends, colleagues -- but the person you will spend most time with is yourself. One of your major purposes at Duke should be preparing yourself to be an interesting person to spend time with. This has a double advantage: first, that you will enjoy your own company in solitude, when you either choose to be alone or find yourself in circumstances where you are alone. And secondly, that you will be a more interesting person for other people to spend time with, so that friends will seek you out for your wit and conversation, not avoid you as an airhead or a pompous bore.

This brings me to the last kind of space I want to explore with you, an unusual form of space, like cyberspace, but one that will be even more important to you in the coming months and years.

One of my favorite authors, one I hope many of you will discover for yourself, is Michel de Montaigne, a sixteenth-century Frenchman who wrote a book for which he coined a new title that has become a common noun: Essais. The French root of this word means to try, to experiment, to give things a chance and see what happens. And this is what he did in his book, providing accounts of his explorations of the world, both the world outside (he was an inveterate traveler) and the world within himself.

Montaigne's favorite place to write was the tower library on his estate, to which he climbed by a series of narrow stairs reaching the very top of his domain, with a view of the vineyards and grainfields, a ceiling carved with some of his favorite quotations, and lines of books around the shelves. When you go to France you can still see that library and understand vividly what his life was like more than four hundred years ago. Here Montaigne would retreat each day he was at home to think and write his essays.

Montaigne hit upon a lovely image that I commend to you: the image of the "back room of the mind." He thought of his own mind as a kind of tower library to which he could retreat even when he was far away from home, filled with quotations from wise people and experimental thoughts and jokes and anecdotes, where he could keep company with himself. He suggested that we all have such back rooms in our minds, and that the most valuable and attractive people we know tend to be people who have rich and fascinating intellectual furniture in those spaces rather than a void between their ears.

You might think of your education as a way of furnishing that back room of your mind. Fortunately, you don't have to complete the job by the time you get your baccalaureate degree. In fact, the most wonderful thing about a worthwhile education is that, unlike most consumer goods, it tends to get better the more you use it. It improves rather than depreciates with age. If you use your time at Duke wisely, you will not just complete the required number of courses, but you will prepare yourself for a lifelong odyssey in which you will keep learning, keep experimenting, remain mentally adventurous and continually update and redecorate the back room of your mind -- perhaps the most important space of all.

### *Conclusion*

Last month, I got a letter from the father of a Duke graduate of the Class of 1999, with warm praise for the commencement ceremonies his family had enjoyed in May. I wanted to quote a paragraph from his letter, both for your benefit and as reassurance to your parents that they can expect some significant return for the investment they are making in your education. Here's what he said about his daughter:

I do not need to wonder what she received for the \$120,000 we sent to Duke for her undergraduate experience. It was multifaceted-- intellectual curiosity (honors in her major), spirit (a blue colored face in Cameron), spirituality (a renewed sense of the importance of God), fellowship (new friends for life), and finally a compassion for others (she is off to Mali, Africa as Peace Corps volunteer in August for two years). Thank you for ... a university that instills a system of core values -- service, excellence, respect and enthusiasm -- into its student body. Keep it up!

We intend to keep it up, beginning this morning, as all of us embark on this journey that is your Duke education. Best wishes to each and every one of you; we look forward to getting to know you, watching your progress, and sharing the journey with you in the years ahead.