

## Charge to the Class of 1998

### Baccalaureate Service

#### Nannerl O. Keohane

In my charge today, I want to focus first on the years we have spent together at Duke. I will speak especially to the graduating seniors, but I also want to acknowledge and welcome those of you who are receiving graduate and professional degrees, and parents, family members and friends.

For the seniors, think back on your freshman year: you came with all the belongings you had assembled, and settled in to find out what college was all about -- roommates, orientation, food service, making friends. As one of you put it in an essay on her Duke years called *The Adventures of Alice in a Gothic Wonderland*, "in an instant the stability of home had vanished, and a new world lay before her, filled with old stone buildings and the greenest grass she had ever seen."

You lived all across the campus, on East, West, and North campus -- in Hastings and Southgate, Hanes and Trent. The closeness of your freshman dorms meant a lot to you, and many of you who were the last class to live in historic Hanes House feel particularly nostalgic about that, even with the helicopters overhead and the trains next door at all hours of the night.

That fall, the Board of Trustees accepted the recommendation to house all first-year students on East Campus and create a new quad-based residential system on West. Both the IFC and the university made some significant changes in alcohol policy that spring.

At some point during that year, many of you pulled your first all-nighter to study for an exam or complete a paper, and either that night or another one when you never made it to bed, you fortified yourself with a trip to Honey's. Some of you pitched your tents in Krzyzewskiville. Some of you fell in love for the first time; some of you for the last.

The football team went 8-4, and took a trip to the Hall of Fame Bowl. But men's basketball was 2-14 in the ACC; Coach K was out with a back injury and a large part of Duke seemed to be out with him. Women's basketball defeated Carolina and went to the NCAAs, but lost to Alabama in quadruple overtime early in the tournament.

In many ways, your freshman year, 1994-95, was not typical of Duke: there were some fundamental changes that don't happen that often in a university's history, in housing and in alcohol policy; football was on top and men's basketball was in the cellar.

The next year the big events were memorable in a different way. The blizzard of '96, just as you returned from winter break, dumped eight inches of snow on the university, delaying sorority rush but providing excellent cross-country skiing on the golf course. Then an unknown stomach virus sidelined many of you and baffled the doctors. Good Morning America filmed its 25th anniversary program on campus and many of you woke up at an ungodly early hour to wave to your parents and friends.

In your junior year, Hurricane Fran hit North Carolina, causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damages and taking 20 lives. Many of you responded by volunteering to help with the community clean-up. One of the big topics was grade inflation and the achievement index as an alternative to the GPA. University dining services earned a number one ranking for healthiest campus food. The men's basketball team won the ACC regular season title only to get upset early both in the ACCs and the NAAs. Football suffered through an 0-11 season.

Several incidents on campus in the spring of that year caused a great deal of soul-searching on campus about treatment of minority students and faculty, particularly males.

In your senior year, there have been no hurricanes or blizzards, although El Nino sure brought a lot of rain. But the weather often smiled when it needed to, including great sunny days for OctoberFest, SpringFest and the last day of classes -- and, it seems, Commencement too. And Duke advanced to a tie for #3 with Yale in US News and World Report.

The student protest in the fall commemorating the sit-in 30 years ago to press for more black faculty and students led to serious conversations with the provost and the deans. The whitewashing of the East Campus bridge raised some crucial issues about free speech and gay rights. The task force on residential life made its proposals, with a lot of community input, including a good deal of useful perspective from members of your class. We started planning for a possible new residence hall on West Campus, and reaffirmed the place of selective and elective housing at Duke.

It was a year of some tension in student government, and of considerable tension around celebrations, culminating in the great bonfire controversy. The tributes to President Emeritus Terry Sanford reminded all of us of how extraordinary a leader he had been, and how much he loved Duke, and cared about Duke students.

The men's basketball team opened the season with Midnight Madness and Dick Vitale, beat Carolina in Cameron, went to the final game of the ACC and almost made the Final Four. The women's team beat Carolina, too, and went to the Elite Eight for the first time in Duke history. Both teams were regular season ACC champions. Football had another disappointing season, although there were some splendid moments when the team showed what it was truly capable of doing.

And now, amazingly, here we are at Baccalaureate. Each of you has experienced the past four years in a slightly different way, and each of you, in looking back, will make a different assessment of what really mattered, what happened to you and to Duke, and where we are all headed. Let me speak personally for a few minutes to give you my own take on all this.

Like you, I came to Duke because this is a unique and exceptional university -- with an unbeatable combination of academic quality, high spirits, good community involvement, unmatched athletic loyalty, a benign climate, wonderfully bright, creative and interesting students, a willingness to be insouciant and take risks, and some great and deep traditions.

Like you, I worry that social life at Duke isn't always the stellar experience that you expected. I

promise you that we'll keep trying, working with students who care, to make social life at Duke as good as it should be -- not centering only on alcohol, but with alcohol as part of it, and with lots of other good things going on.

Like you, I take pride in the quality of the academic experience here. Yet even here, we can make Duke better for more students, with more small classes taught by top professors, more opportunities to engage in research and independent study, more exciting new interdisciplinary programs, and more classrooms that have computer hookups rather than old-fashioned benches bolted to the floor.

Like most of you, I don't focus too much on those rankings. Sure, it's nice to be listed among the very best, but we know that we belong there. Whether Duke is number three or number seven matters very little, and will surely go up and down over time. The important thing is to continue to do what we do best, and to do it as well as we can. Perhaps this is what is truly meant by the phrase "let Duke be Duke."

Duke has, deliberately, become a more diverse institution over the past few decades, and this trend has, deliberately, continued during your life at Duke. We have more students and faculty members from more different kinds of backgrounds at Duke than ever before in our history. At its best, this means a richly varied community where people share many cultural experiences. But, as Race Day reminded us, integrating diversity is also a challenge. In this challenge, we are no different from society in general; but Duke should aspire to be better than that.

Your classmate Alice noted with some bewilderment that buildings in the Gothic Wonderland are constantly changing their names. The Blue and White Room, the Great Hall, or the Pits? The Multi-Purpose Center, Kudzu Tavern, or the Devils Den? The changes reflect different uses as we all try to get it right, and as what it means to "get it right" keeps changing with student preferences and administrative bright ideas. At Duke, change is rarely imposed simply from above, or purely determined by broad student initiative, although both those things do sometimes happen. As Alice in the Gothic Wonderland put it, this place "is affected by every crazy Dukie who came before you and by all those who will pass through its wondrous doors in the future."

One major lesson you as students have taught me and my colleagues in the administration is that we don't communicate well what things we are trying to change, and why, and which things we are seeking to preserve, and why.

The bonfire controversy turned out to be cathartic. I hope it was a turning point for Duke. In its aftermath, quite a few of you have decided to reach out across the gap you had identified between students and administration, to make things better for Duke students of the future.

I think especially of the members of Tony Brown's leadership class in Public Policy, all seniors, who turned a gripe session about change at Duke into a constructive and promising strategy for leadership during change. I hope that you have read the letter they sent to the Chronicle, calling on both the administration and the students to repair the breaches in communication and work together for Duke. Even though they will all be graduating, these seniors cared enough to suggest some

strategies for other students who will follow, and to issue a challenge to the administration as well, and I thank them warmly.

I pledge to you that we will respond to the challenge. Improved communication with students will be at the top of my priority list as president in the years to come, right up there with raising all that money in the capital campaign.

I hope that you as alumni will continue to remain involved, to care about Duke, to learn about what's going on on campus, and continue to share your views on what we ought to do.

Together, we can do much to ensure that Duke continues to deserve your affection and your loyalty, even though if you were in my shoes, you might each do some things rather differently. And someday one of you could well be president of Duke; if so, I hope you will use that precious opportunity wisely. In the meantime, I will do my best to keep the place solvent, strong, vibrant, and uniquely Duke, until it's your turn to wear this seal and carry on the work.

God bless each and every one of you, and God bless our university. Go Duke!

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