

Ohio
Wesleyan
University

PRESIDENT ROCK JONES' 2010 CONVOCATION REMARKS

Discover Yourself: Explore OWU

Thursday, August 19, 2010

2010 CONVOCATION REMARKS

Rock Jones, Ph.D., President of Ohio Wesleyan University
August 19, 2010

Discover Yourself: Explore OWU

It is a great pleasure and a deep honor to join those who have stood before me today in saying welcome to the Ohio Wesleyan University Class of 2014. Your arrival today marks the culmination of your search for the place you believe is best suited to helping you meet your highest aspirations and pursue your deepest passions. At the same time, you are here because you have been chosen carefully by Ohio Wesleyan. Our admission committee reviewed carefully your academic accomplishments, your record of leadership and service, your self-understanding demonstrated in your written work, and your hopes and dreams for the next four years and the life you will live beyond your years on this campus. Your arrival represents the fulfillment of dreams shared by your families, your classmates, and this University. We are thrilled that you are here.

Today you gather in this historic chapel where tens of thousands of OWU students have gathered for more than a century. You take your place in seats previously occupied by students who went on to become members of Congress, Nobel laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners, CEOs of multi-national corporations, trailblazing scientists, accomplished actors on stage and screen, educators, religious leaders, public servants, and volunteers. The faculty seated before you continue the tradition of excellence in scholarship and passion for teaching that has characterized the OWU faculty from its beginning. Outside the windows of this chapel one can see four buildings, which like this building, date from the nineteenth century. Those buildings bear the names of our founders, and together they give witness to the longevity of our mission and the relevance of our aims.

While the buildings echo our distant past, you arrive at OWU at one of the most dynamic times in our recent history. Over the past year, our faculty worked diligently to develop new initiatives in our curriculum that will be piloted in the coming year and from which you will benefit over the next four years. Some of you will have the opportunity to participate in a first-year seminar, OWU Connections. Some of you may enroll in a course that travels to Bangladesh to study microfinance; or to Mexico to study ethnobotany; or to Italy to study public health; or to Japan to study depictions of war in literature, film, and culture. Some of you already may be thinking about applying for a grant to fund study-travel experiences that connect theory to practice. Over the past four months, OWU students have traveled and studied in 30 countries on five continents. Their studies have included the ecology of Bolivia, delivery of healthcare in rural South Africa, and the effectiveness of NATO policies in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Other students participated in the Summer Science Research Program here on campus, while others spent their summers in internships across the country and around the world. All of these experiences reflect the OWU commitment to prepare global leaders for a global society.

Your first days on campus will be marked by a time of Orientation that has been planned by students who this year developed the theme Discover Yourself: Explore OWU. Your time at OWU will be a journey of self-discovery through a curriculum that is designed to be tailored to your individual interests and to your particular passions. When a student says she wants to double major in English and astrophysics while completing a study of ancient art along the way, our faculty and the student work together to find a way for her to pursue her passion and to fulfill her dreams. As an introduction to OWU, our student orientation leaders have given particular attention to four words drawn from our Mission Statement. I would like to reflect with you about each of these four words.

Community. Your enrollment at OWU brings you into the life of a community. Here at OWU, we value the individuality of each person, but we also understand that we form a community that is bound together by a particular story. In a community, we care for one another, we celebrate with one another, we learn from one another, and we hold one another accountable. In a community, we share a common language, reflected here by such terms as the JAYwalk, the Sulphur Spring, and the Battling Bishops. A community is marked by shared values. Those shared values are reflected in the other three words selected by our student leaders.

Diversity. Here at OWU, we celebrate diversity, and we embrace differences. We are proud of the fact that more than ten percent of you come from outside of the United States and that more than 15 percent of you are domestic multicultural students. We embrace the opportunity to learn from one another and to understand the many life journeys and world views that are represented in our student body. You will be required to take a course in cultural diversity. You will have the opportunity to study and travel abroad. I encourage you to take time to get to know people whose life experiences are different from your own, and to understand individuals whose political perspectives differ dramatically from those with which you have arrived.

Scholarship. We are, at the core, a community of scholars. We are dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, and we value above all else the opportunity to engage in the free exchange of ideas. We encourage you to ask deep questions and to be relentless in your pursuit of understanding. Test new ideas. Try new ways of thinking. Challenge yourself to be bold and daring. Take courses in disciplines you thought you would never study. Enjoy the thrill of discovery, and don't be frustrated by failed efforts. Take risks. Test boundaries. Celebrate curiosity. Embrace the life of the mind, and thrive in the world of the scholar.

Service. Few colleges and universities have a passion for service greater than the one you will find at OWU. Fifty years ago, Senator John F. Kennedy announced in a campaign speech his intention, if elected president, to establish the Peace Corps. Half a century later, Ohio Wesleyan is recognized as one of the leading providers of graduates who join the Peace Corps. Our student leaders challenge you to make the commitment now to engage in community service. Perhaps you will volunteer at People in Need here in Delaware or join the Columbus Initiative and travel with students each week to mentor children in an inner-city school; perhaps you will participate in a spring break mission trip or join the OWU Haiti Initiative; perhaps you will receive a theory-to-practice grant to spend a summer working with children in Kolkata. Regardless of the venue, the experience of service will enrich the journey of self-discovery and challenge you to reflect on the values that will give shape and meaning to your life and the impact that your life will have on the greater world.

Community. Diversity. Scholarship. Service. These virtues reflect the character of OWU. They are the values that shape who we are and the work we undertake. Today, as you join us, they are the values by which you will be formed and through which your education here will be shaped.

To the parents, grandparents, other family members and friends of the class of 2014, I offer my congratulations. This is a day that you have anticipated, for which you have prepared, and which you have dreaded for nearly two decades. Today we share your pride and joy. We recognize the devotion that brings you to this moment, and we honor the trust that you place in these students and in this University on this special day.

When you walk the paths of this campus you encounter buildings and places that bear names, many of which you may not recognize. One of the names you may recognize is that of Branch Rickey, whose name adorns our athletic arena. In 1904, Branch Rickey was a student coach of the OWU baseball team when it traveled to South Bend, Indiana to play Notre Dame. When the team arrived in South Bend at the hotel where it would spend the night prior to playing the game, the hotel clerk surveyed the team and said that one of the players, Charles Thomas, would not be able to stay in the hotel because of the color of his skin. Charles Thomas was humiliated, and Branch Rickey was enraged. Rickey told the clerk that if Thomas, who was African American, did not stay in the hotel, the team would return to Delaware without playing the game. After some time, the clerk relented, on the condition that Thomas stay in Rickey's room.

Branch Rickey never forgot that experience. He told the story for the rest of his life, and when he did, he told of the commitment he made to himself on the train as the team returned home and he thought about his teammate's humiliation. He said that somewhere, someday, somehow, he would do something about the injustice and human indignity of that day. More than 40 years later, nearly a decade before the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, and nearly two decades before Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act, Branch Rickey, against opposition more intense than he faced in the hotel in South Bend, invited the courageous Jackie Robinson to break the color barrier in Major League Baseball. Mr. Rickey saw it as fulfillment of a pledge he made while at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Today, as you begin your tenure at OWU, I wonder what experiences will define your time here. I wonder what ideas you will explore. I wonder what places you will visit. I wonder what boundaries you will cross. I wonder what commitments you will make. And I wonder, with all that you bring—including all that you have yet to discover about yourself—and with all that OWU offers—including all that you have yet to explore here—how these four years will shape your life, and how this community, grounded in the values of diversity, scholarship, and service, will lead you to make commitments that may have an impact not unlike that of Branch Rickey.

It is an amazing thing to consider. So with the wonder of the unknown about to unfold, I welcome you to Ohio Wesleyan University, Class of 2014. And with joyful anticipation for all that is ahead, I follow the custom that began 168 years ago as I ring the bell announcing the beginning of a new academic year.

Congratulations, again. Thank you for inviting me and for the privilege of addressing you, to whom history, and the dreams of mankind, will soon be entrusted.