

Ohio
Wesleyan
University

PRESIDENT ROCK JONES' 2012 CONVOCATION REMARKS

Thursday, August 23, 2012

Living and Learning Beyond the Boundaries

Rock Jones, Ph.D., President of Ohio Wesleyan University

August 23, 2012

Good afternoon, and welcome to the opening of the 171st academic year of Ohio Wesleyan University. It is a special pleasure to welcome members of the OWU Class of 2016 and your families and friends to campus. We are thrilled that you have chosen to become a Bishop.

Today you take your place in an academic community that enters its 18th decade of education in the tradition of the liberal arts and sciences. Here in the Phillips Glen, we are surrounded by historic buildings, five of which date from the 19th century. Behind you sits the most recent addition to the academic campus, the state-of-the-art Schimmel/Conrades Science Center. Here we see the connection of historic values and future possibilities, long-standing tradition and contemporary opportunity.

You join a class that comes to Ohio Wesleyan from across the country and around the world, representing 22 nations in addition to the United States. You bring a wealth of diverse backgrounds, cultural traditions, religious convictions, and life experiences. Some of you are the first in your families to attend college. Some of you come from families with long-standing relationships with Ohio Wesleyan. One of you is the great, great, great, great grandson of our founder, Adam Poe, who in 1842 established Ohio Wesleyan University when he purchased the Mansion House Hotel, now Elliott Hall sitting on the hill behind you.

As you take your place on this campus, you walk in the footsteps of generations of students who devoted themselves to the rigors of OWU in preparation for extraordinary leadership. OWU alumni have shaped every sector of our society as groundbreaking scientists including Nobel laureates; Pulitzer Prize winners; public servants including members of Congress, federal judges, and a vice president of the United States; innovative entrepreneurs and corporate CEOs who led some of the world's largest companies; educators at every level; musicians, actors, and artists who captured the imagination of their time; and social pioneers who literally changed the face and structure of our social order.

These are people like you, people who arrived on this campus not always certain what they would study, rarely clear about how their lives would unfold, not always confident that they had the ability to become the leaders they would become. But, like you, they arrived here with a passion for learning and a desire to make the most of their OWU experience. Like them, you will make your mark on this campus, and in the years to come you will make your mark on our world.

You are here today, in part, because you have chosen Ohio Wesleyan. I say in part, because you are also here because Ohio Wesleyan has chosen you. You represent less than 15 percent of the students who applied for admission to OWU this year. You were invited to join this student body and become a part of this community because of the unique attributes each of you brings to OWU and to our life together. We have enormous confidence in you, but we know that only you, by the choices you make and the actions you pursue, can fulfill this vote of confidence.

Ohio Wesleyan University is a residential liberal arts university. The vast majority of you will live on campus all four years of your tenure at OWU. The residential experience reflects our commitment to a culture of living and learning that permeates every aspect of the OWU experience.

Some would see your choice of a residential, undergraduate, liberal arts university as unwise. Earlier this week, a major publication questioned the economic value of the liberal arts and, in particular, the value of certain majors in the liberal arts. I beg to differ. I see no greater investment in the future than a liberal arts education.

A liberal arts education gives you both the ability to master content and the capacities to use the content in ways that enhance the quality of the human experience.

A liberal arts education understands that asking the right questions always precedes the opportunity to find lasting answers.

A liberal arts education teaches you to understand and live with the complexity of nuance and to see the patterns of relationships among different areas of knowledge and different ways of being.

A liberal arts education challenges you to examine the moral implications both of your own actions and of the organization of the social order.

A liberal arts education challenges you to develop habits of the mind and of the heart that lead to lifelong learning and provide the foundation for empathetic leadership in a rapidly changing, ever-shrinking, increasingly complex, and interconnected world.

Here at OWU, we aspire to educate the next generation of moral leaders for a global society. Our enthusiasm for that endeavor will never wane. The power of that investment will never diminish. You have chosen well.

You arrive at Ohio Wesleyan at a particularly dynamic time. Our faculty recently completed a significant enhancement of our curriculum, building on Ohio Wesleyan's historic commitment to connecting theory to practice, and enriching global opportunities for our students.

You are the first class to enroll at OWU with full access to the OWU Connection. I encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities it makes available. Look closely at the Connection Networks. These networks invite you to explore complex issues from the perspective of multiple disciplines. Think about travel-learning courses and the opportunity to spend as much as two weeks away from campus with your professor and classmates. Prepare to pursue your passion by developing individual programs of research, apprenticeships, cross-cultural encounters, and artistic creativity. Consider a semester away from campus in the New York Arts Program, the Arneson Institute's Wesleyan in Washington Program, or any of the dozens of programs that are available to our students across the country and around the world.

All of these opportunities are the work of the faculty seated behind me. Nothing will be of greater value to you here at OWU than the relationships you establish with your professors. They will be your teachers and guides. They will challenge you to challenge yourselves, and they will help you discover wellsprings of knowledge and horizons of opportunity that you did know exist. They will introduce you to new ways of knowing and new perspectives from which to view the world. They will challenge you to hone your intellectual capacities; to develop your own well-researched positions and to articulate those positions persuasively in writing and in conversation; to acknowledge both the solid foundation and the potential limits of moral frameworks that contribute to the life well-lived; to become stewards of knowledge, of societies, and of the earth; and to test your own limits by crossing boundaries that might prevent you from fulfilling your potential.

Get to know your professors, and allow them to get to know you. You will remember and cherish them for the rest of your lives.

Your learning here extends beyond the classroom. Here your learning happens in the intensity of athletic competition, artistic performance, informal conversation with friends, volunteer service in the community and around the world, opportunities for formal leadership in organizations and informal leadership in relationships with peers, and experiences with people whose cultures and traditions are quite different from your own. Be deliberate to take full advantage of these opportunities.

You take your place today in a community of scholars where the ultimate measure of our work is found not so much in your accomplishments as a student as in what you do with those accomplishments beyond Ohio Wesleyan. We are blessed by a rich history of alumni who allowed their time at Ohio Wesleyan to shape them in ways that led them, in turn, to reshape our society. No story is more powerful than the story of Branch Rickey.

In the spring of 1903, as a student coach at Ohio Wesleyan University, Mr. Rickey traveled with the baseball team to South Bend, Indiana, to play Notre Dame. There, he witnessed the shocking indignity of a teammate being denied a hotel room because of the color of his skin.

As he returned to this campus and contemplated the injustice he had witnessed, Mr. Rickey pledged quietly that someday he would do something about this. As you know from your study of American history, in 1947, nearly a decade before the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* and nearly two decades before Congress acted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Branch Rickey opened the doors to America's pastime so that the courageous Jackie Robinson could break the color barrier in major league baseball.

Together, Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson were among those who set the stage for the Civil Rights movement which, while still not complete, provided the most dramatic reordering of American society in our history. Branch Rickey told friends he was fulfilling a commitment he made while a student at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Branch Rickey was shaped by this University. With the courage of his convictions and the foundation of lessons learned in classrooms and on playing fields on this campus, he challenged the conventions of his time and made an impact that changed the face of our society. He understood what it means to live and learn beyond the boundaries.

As you take your place at Ohio Wesleyan, I challenge you to ready yourself for an intellectual journey in which you open your mind and unleash the full force of your intellectual capacity to immerse yourself in the world of ideas, to be bold, to ask the big questions, and to pursue the ultimate solutions to the most pressing problems of this global society. Take the courageous step to channel the power of your intellect and passion in to an education that frees you to live and learn beyond the boundaries.

On this bright day, you stand on the threshold of an amazing four-year journey. When you gather next as a class in this setting on Mother's Day 2016 and look at this journey in the rear-view mirror, what will you see? And how will you be different? It is a remarkable thing to consider. And it is a privilege to imagine being a part of the journey with you.

To the parents and families who accompany this entering class today, I know this is a bittersweet day for you. You have devoted 18 years in preparation for this day. Today we share your pride, even as we acknowledge the mixed emotions you feel. With gratitude, we honor the sacred trust your families have bestowed on Ohio Wesleyan with the arrival of these students.

Welcome to the Class of 2016. We are thrilled you are here, and we look forward to the journey together.

Thank you.

Rock Jones, Ph.D.
Matriculation Convocation
Ohio Wesleyan University
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