

Globalists, Futurists and Moral Leaders

Robert M. Franklin, PhD

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I salute the board of trustees, President Ripich, faculty, staff, alumni, students and members of the class of 2016. I am delighted to join you today.

President Danielle N. Ripich spoke to me many months ago and I listened to her pride in speaking of the beauty of your seaside campus in Biddeford, Maine, your historic campus here in Portland, and your trailblazing campus in Tangier, Morocco. I have now seen two of your campuses and look forward to visiting Biddeford where Frederick Douglass, Horace Greeley and Henry Ward Beecher were welcomed guests. In March, my wife and I visited Tangier where I delivered a lecture at the Tangier Global Forum. I'd like to commend and thank Prof. Anouar Majid for his leadership, hospitality and vision.

I have great admiration for President Ripich and her dedicated years of service. Also, I admire the University of New England because you are a global and innovative institution standing firm but leaning into the future. So, I am here today as a distant admirer of this institution and all schools that venture into the brave new world of global education.

This occasion reminds me of the time when George Bernard Shaw reminded a speaker that he had 15 minutes to speak. The speaker bristled and declared, ‘how shall I tell them everything I know in 15 minutes? Shaw replied, “I suggest that you speak very slowly.”

It should not take me that long to offer three words of advice and invitation: be globalists, be futurists and be good.

BE GLOBALISTS

Your education here has prepared you to be a globalist, a person who resists her or his own parochialism and sees connections to other people, other worlds, and new possibilities. Embrace your particularity but be suspicious of your parochialism. Mark Twain reminds us that travel is fatal to prejudice.

It was my pleasure to serve as president of Morehouse College, the alma mater of young Martin Luther King, Jr. In his final book titled, Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? I commend to your reading, the last short chapter titled, “The World House.” There, he writes: “...a novelist died and among his papers were suggestions for future stories. One of the most prominently highlighted suggestions was the following: ‘A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together...’

King says.

“This is the great new problem of humankind. We have inherited a large house, a great world house in which we have to live together__black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu__a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.”

Then, in my favorite quote, he says:

All people are interdependent...(W)hether we realize it or not, each of us lives eternally “in the red.” We are everlasting debtors to known and unknown men and women. When we arise in the morning, we go into the bathroom where we reach for a sponge which is provided for us by a Pacific Islander. We reach for soap that is created for us by a European. Then at the table we drink coffee which is provided for us by a South American, or tea by a Chinese or cocoa by a West African. Before we leave for our jobs we are already beholden to more than half of the world... All life is interrelated. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”

King believed that “All life is interrelated. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Dr. King’s vision of interdependence has been creatively reformulated for our digital age. Perhaps you have encountered some version of this internet thought exercise known as the “Village of 100” or “100 People, A World Portrait” produced by University of Wisconsin faculty.

It reads: “If we could shrink the earth's population to a village of 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look something like the following:

There would be:

60 Asians, 11 Europeans, 14 from the Americas,
 15 Africans, 51 would be female, 49 would be male
 73 would be non-white, 27 would be white
 67 would be non-Christian, 33 would be Christian
 22 Muslims, 14 Hindus, 7 Buddhists, 12 would practice other religions,
 12 would be nones or nonaligned with a religion,
 12 would speak Chinese,
 5 would speak Spanish,
 5 would speak English,
 3 would speak Arabic,
 3 would speak Hindi,
 3 would speak Bengali,
 3 would speak Portuguese,
 2 would speak Russian,
 2 would speak Japanese,
 62 would speak other languages,
 92 would be heterosexual, 8 would be homosexual
 5 people would possess 23% of the entire world's wealth and all 5 would be from the United States.
 33 would live in substandard housing
 17 would be unable to read

1 would be dying of starvation, 15 would suffer from malnutrition, 21 would be overweight, 1 would be near death; 1 would be near birth
7 (yes, only 7) would have a college education
78 would not be able to read this message because only 22 would own or share a computer.

It concludes. “When you consider our world from such a compressed perspective, the need for cooperation and understanding becomes compelling and clear.”

I believe that universities that are engaging the world must produce moral leaders defined as women and men who live with integrity, courage and imagination to serve the common good. Global universities are among the world’s most important and urgently needed institutions for a better global future.

Ben Wildavsky, author of “The Great Brain Race” says that because big problems often transcend borders, the leaders of tomorrow must have a global education. You can be a moral leader whether your chosen vocation is in science, technology, business, health care, the humanities, entertainment, media, religion or whatever. See the big picture, make a difference for the good where you are, include the least advantaged members of the community, and enable all people in your sphere to actualize their fullest potential.

I was a young kid who attended public schools on the Southside of Chicago. But, I was drawn to a school much like UNE. Once I arrived on

campus, I explored all of the intellectual and cultural riches of the campus. But, instead of feeling satisfied, that education made me restless. I wanted to learn even more, and to learn it in new and different challenging environments. This must be what Oliver Wendell Holmes meant when he observed that a person's mind once stretched by a new idea can never return to its old dimensions. I'll bet all of you have encountered a big idea here that changed your mind and your life forever. I hope that you will cherish that idea but also be open to thinking new ones of your own.

For me, that meant pursuing a junior year abroad experience. I found myself in a small town in northern England (Durham) and my life was changed. Now, some of you didn't have a chance to study or travel abroad but your chance starts now. Take your UNE education on the road, be an ambassador for UNE. Be an ambassador for the great state of Maine, and for the United States of America.

In a recent address at Emory University, a friend and former CDC Director, William Foege suggested that good citizenship is about having one's inclinations consistently directed toward the good of the group: the larger the group that inspires these feelings, he said, the better. So strive to be a globalist. Einstein said nationalism is an infantile disease. He called it the measles of mankind.

BE FUTURISTS

I challenge you to be more than globalists, but also to become habitual futurists.

The first appearance of the word futurist was in 1842. Many of you know the names of Jules Verne and HG Wells. More recently, we see Alvin Toffler and Arthur Clarke, or even Elon Musk and Steve Jobs. You don't have to be an inventor or an engineer. Whatever your vocation, you can and should imagine how your work can help lead to the world of the future.

In a survey of 108 futurist, researchers found the following shared assumptions:

- 1 Futurists are willing to think outside the box including unconventional thinking, internal critique, and cross-cultural comparison.
- 2 Futurists consider alternatives. They're aware of multiple possibilities.
- 3 Futurists believe in participatory futures. They try to get everyone involved in improving our shared lives. They work to liberate the future in each person.
- 4 Futurists believe in complexity. Futurists believe that a simple, one-dimensional or single-discipline orientation is not satisfactory. Trans-disciplinary approaches that take complexity seriously are necessary. Systems thinking, particularly in its evolutionary dimension, is also crucial.
- 5 Futurists are motivated by change. They are not content merely to describe or forecast. They desire an active role in world transformation.
- 6 And, futurists strive to be practical problem solvers, even as they imagine and work for another world. Futurists have a long term perspective.

Be globalists and be futurists. Finally, be moral leaders who make sacrifices for the common good.

BE GOOD

Because each of us can do so little, we need to make sure our little bit counts. I think this should be a real existential question for each graduate. How will I make a difference? How can I use my education here to move the arc of the universe towards greater truth, goodness and beauty?

We are in the basketball playoff season and if you follow basketball you may know the name, Stacy King. As a rookie, he had a disastrous night for Chicago, making only one point. Michael Jordan, that night made 69 points. A reporter asked Stacy King for a comment on his performance and he said, "I will always remember this as the night I combined with Michael Jordan for 70 points." Each of us must do our part.

As you go forth today, remember the wisdom of Kent Keith in his wonderful *Paradoxical Commandments*.

"People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.
Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.
Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.
Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.
Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.
Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down
by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.
Think big anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.
Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.
Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.
Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.
Give the world the best you have anyway.

Do something global this month, this year.

Allow your education to upset your equilibrium and upset the status quo.
Reach for the future. Be restless in your search for new knowledge, new
experience, and new friends.

Strive to be a moral agent every day. Do something good. Tell the truth.
Keep your promises. Be good, decent and honorable.

See the big picture, make a positive difference where you are, include the least advantaged members of the community, and enable others to actualize their fullest potential.

Remember the words of the German poet Goethe: “At the moment of commitment, the entire universe conspires for your success.” And heed the words of Rabbi Maimonides: “The world is equally balanced between good and evil. Your next act will tip the scale.”