

SMU Speech 14 August 2015

Distinguished Guests, Freshmen, your families, guardians and friends: it is an honour to address you this evening. Welcome to SMU. The period you are about to spend at this impressive, international university will be among the most transformative of your lives. Nestled within this global hub, Singapore, and embedded throughout the city's communities, deeply engaged with countries nearby and worldwide and with their institutions, all falling within the University's natural orbit, SMU is uniquely placed to provide an enriching experience as you pursue your chosen field of study. It is those very communities that ultimately legitimise this university. Their range and diversity renders SMU an intellectually powerful and influential institution.

Though relatively young (15 years old), SMU's strengths are evolving rapidly. This is an innovative academy. It is a restless place committed to student learning, research impact, and local and international scholarly interactions.

SMU's academic programmes are carefully designed and developed to ensure you will be exceptionally equipped for your future careers in the rapidly changing global milieu. That suite of programmes is never static. It is deliberately moulded, remoulded and advanced at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It relentlessly reflects the expansion of knowledge and demand for new professional expertise to tackle the challenges of a dynamic world.

I want to say a little about the faculty members at the University. Through their research and scholarship, faculty members in the world's best universities constantly seek to understand that which we do not today understand. SMU is one such university. Here you will find many faculty members who are at the cutting edge of their disciplines, deeply respected by the best members of their international scholarly communities. In this university, faculty members are committed to your learning, to your education. Their deep and immediate knowledge is translated into your courses, for your learning.

Now, turning to you, the Freshmen: learning in such an environment requires curiosity and humility, patience and perseverance, discipline and dedication. It takes effort and often entails making sacrifices by you, the students, as well as by your families and guardians. In that regard, I should, perhaps, remind you that only around 7 per cent of the world's population are graduates of colleges and universities. Conversely, 93 per cent are not graduates. Further, too few universities are of the quality of your University. On the basis of those numbers and that fact about quality, I think you would agree it is an unqualified privilege for all of us to be here. Please, never forget this is a privilege.

You have all worked incredibly conscientiously to qualify for admission to pursue a degree programme here at SMU. I deeply respect you for that. Nevertheless, I would strongly encourage you, here and now, to commit to giving all it will take to obtain the most you possibly can from your time at this university.

Being a student is not just about exams. Certainly, exam results and grades are important for your ultimate degree certification. However, these years of relative freedom – in an intellectually stimulating environment - are important for other reasons. They are a precious opportunity to *educate* yourselves; an opportunity you are unlikely ever to have again; other responsibilities in your lives, as they materialise, will ensure that is the case. You will not wish to look back with regrets.

So, I passionately encourage each of you: to read widely; to participate in student clubs and societies; to attend special guest lectures; to learn from your classmates; to ask yourself the really difficult questions about the challenges and complexities of the world and to seek to understand more about them; to participate to the full in international exchange offerings; to take risks and (lawfully) to experiment with your talents; to learn from your mistakes and to celebrate your successes; to dedicate yourselves not only to preparing for an exciting and fulfilling professional life beyond, but also to developing your

critical faculties and your creative talents, as well as a broad intellectual maturity, and an informed world-view.

If you use your time here constructively, and fully, there is a high chance your on-going participation in civil society, your role as a citizen, will be the more meaningful. As the years roll by, yours will increasingly become the generation to which others will turn for leadership and wise counsel in addressing the most intractable issues facing your organisations, communities, societies and nations. Then, I assure you, you will want the foundations you are about to commence laying here at SMU to have been as sound and as deep as they could possibly be. You would do well to keep that thought with you, too, while you are studying here.

So: work hard; use your time well; question everything; cherish the opportunity you have. I wish you all every success here at SMU and throughout your lives beyond.

JAH

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