

**PRESIDENT'S CONVOCATION
BOBBY FONG
22 AUGUST 2010
BUTLER UNIVERSITY**

On behalf of Butler, and in particular on behalf of those seated behind me, who are representatives of the faculty responsible for the teaching and learning that is at the heart of university education, I welcome you, the parents, guardians, friends, and especially the students of the Class of 2014.

Students, today is a special day of your lives. It is a day of leave-taking, when your parents will be giving you in trust to the teachers and other members of the Butler community whose responsibility it is to foster you in your journey to adulthood. It is also a day of initiation, when you will be formally received into the academy by these professors, who at the end of this convocation will form a double line between which you will exit to begin symbolically your lives as Butler students.

Let me introduce the academic leaders of the faculty, whom I ask to stand and remain standing as a group to receive the recognition of the assembly: Dr. Jamie Comstock is Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; reporting to her are Dean Mary Andritz of the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Dean Jay Howard of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Dean Michelle Jarvis of the Jordan College of Fine Arts, Dean William Naher of the College of Communication, Dean Ena Shelley of the College of Education, and Dean Chuck Williams of the College of Business. Let us give them a hand. The Provost and Deans are the sponsors of the reception following this convocation. At the

reception, you will have an opportunity to meet both these administrators and faculty representatives of the academic programs at the University. Parents, I urge you to make the entrusting of your children a personal gesture by introducing them to an appropriate professor in their areas of intended study.

Students, you comprise the largest entering class in the history of Butler University. The Office of Admissions did not set out to achieve this distinction. For years, the University has sought a freshman class in the neighborhood of 925. Last year's entering class was 945. For this fall we received about 500 more applications than the year before, but we made offers of admission to virtually the same number of students as we did last year. What changed this spring and summer is that more of you accepted admission to Butler and decided to come here. Our latest count is that there are 1065 of you in this class! Our previous high had been 987.

What happened? Well, for one thing, after offers of admission had been sent out in March, Butler had a team that proceeded to rampage through the NCAA men's basketball tournament, making it all the way to the National Championship. By then, many of you had decided to come to Butler, and you rejoiced at the excitement of your university in the news. Others of you may have been undecided at the time, but the coverage led you to give Butler special consideration. Very few of you, however, based your decision to come to Butler solely on the notoriety of the basketball team.

Sports are the front porch to a university, and our front porch was very crowded this spring. But when people on the front porch looked through our

windows, they found a pervasive sense of academic seriousness and a commitment to excellence in all our educational endeavors.

Yes, the members of the basketball team did go to class the day of the Championship Game. Their daily practices during the season did take place at 6:30 in the morning to accommodate class schedules. They were true students, majoring in engineering, mathematics, finance, and education, and graduating at high rates. The point, however, is that Butler expects a similar commitment and discipline from all its students. Butler has high hopes that each student will achieve great things, while at Butler and after graduation. Butler is ready to support you in preparing for a fulfilling life. That, I hope, is why you decided to come here.

Our faculty is dedicated to providing you with the highest quality of instruction. Last fall, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences became one of only 280 colleges in the country to house a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the nation's oldest and most prestigious academic honor society. Qualifying to house a chapter entailed a process in which the college had to document for a visiting team the rigor of the curriculum, the credentials of the faculty, the resources of the library, and the focus on student learning.

This spring the College of Business was included in *BusinessWeek* magazine's 2010 list of top 100 undergraduate business schools. Espousing a "Real Life, Real Business" approach, the College is distinctive among undergraduate business programs in requiring two internships as a condition for graduation.

Last fall, the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, which has some of the most competitive admissions standards in the University, opened a new wing that includes two 135-seat classrooms, an instructional laboratory in which students learn to perform physical examinations, and a state-of-the-art laboratory for research in pharmaceutical sciences. The College is organized around a public health model, where its graduates are prepared to be community leaders in promoting healthy lifestyles and preventive medicine.

This fall, the College of Education is partnering with the Indianapolis Public Schools to jointly operate a new laboratory school for preschool through grade 5. Together with an existing partnership at Shortridge Magnet High School, which offers education for grades 6 through 12, the cooperative ventures express the College's desire to get prospective student-teachers into real classrooms beginning their freshman year and to ground them in pedagogies that serve pupils across socio-economic and cultural lines.

The Jordan College of Fine Arts is lauded for its nationally-recognized and accredited programs. To help sustain that excellence, we look forward this year to breaking ground for a 450-seat performance hall to serve theatre, dance, and music.

And just last spring we re-organized programs to establish the new College of Communication. Journalism, media arts, and communication are no longer distinct from one another: the internet and social media have changed the way we get our news, advertise, and interact with one another.

In the aggregate, Butler University strives to make accessible the legacy of past learning while adapting knowledge to a world that is rapidly shifting around us. Students, one-third of you will one day work at jobs that don't yet exist. We want to prepare you for that work.

But there's more. Butler's educational mission is to prepare each graduate not simply to make a living but to make a life of purpose, in which individual flourishing is intertwined with the welfare of others. You will be citizens of the world, and a fundamental part of a college education is learning how to deal with ideas, people, and experiences different from your previous experience.

College is not simply a matter of mastering a body of knowledge. It entails learning to think for yourself. You should be able to engage in dispassionate analysis. Critical thinking enables you to be a free agent, to make your own way in the world, to forge new paths.

College is a time when you will sift through values and perspectives bequeathed you by your family, your community, and your university so that you can choose which to claim as your own. At Butler, we hope to add to the stock of those people whom you admire and respect, after whom you can model parts of yourself. But ultimately, your own best self is one you fashion by your choices and commitments. It's not a matter of striving after the best grades, although that's laudable, or making the first-string on a team, for which we will cheer you. It's a matter of forming and living up to the highest expectations you set for yourself.

Parents and families, I pledge that we at Butler will do the best we can by your students. We will endeavor to assist them, not only in mastering the knowledge and methods of our disciplines, but to help them learn how to learn for themselves. We will endeavor to assist them in the development, not only of their minds, but also of their aesthetic sensibilities, their moral compasses, and their relations to the community of humankind. In the academy, we teach in community because no one of us, in pedagogical style, temperament, or time of life, can be successful in teaching every student. My expectation is that the students I fail, my colleagues can uplift, and the students they may be unable to reach, I may touch.

In the end, however, what your children learn at Butler will be determined by what choices they make. And the hardest thing for parents to do is to shift the authority for making wise choices from ourselves to our children.

All of you leaving a child today at Butler will engage in a process of believing that you have sufficiently equipped your children to manage their own lives. Your student is becoming a citizen of a new community, and that community will be a source of help and support. You yourselves will always be available to your child. But now is the time when your investment of love, discipline, and wisdom must begin to blossom into the self-sufficiency of this young person at the advent of adulthood.

In closing, students, be grateful for this opportunity to attend college. Don't take it for granted. The following trope, originated in 1990 by Dartmouth professor Donella Meadows and elaborated since by various individuals and

organizations, has helped drive the point home for successive classes of Butler students:

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

- 60 Asians
- 14 Africans
- 14 from the Western hemisphere, both north and south
- 12 Europeans
- 50 would be female
- 50 would be male
- 67 would be non-Christian
- 33 would be Christian
- 5 people would possess 32% of the entire world's wealth, and all 5 would be from the United States
- 80 would live in substandard housing
- 50 would suffer from malnutrition
- 1 would be near death
- 1 would be newborn
- and 1 (yes, only 1) would have a college education*

You have been afforded an opportunity to come to Butler by your ability, but many others of comparable ability have been denied the opportunity for college because of the happenstance of being raised in poverty or lacking a loving home

which stressed the value of higher education. You have an opportunity denied 99% of the world. I say to you, make the most of your time here.

We welcome you and the parents, guardians, and friends of the Class of 2014 to the Butler family. God bless you, and thank you for joining us.

* Statistics based on a “State of the Village Report,” the original version of which was composed in 1990 by Donella Meadows, and modified in subsequent years by various authors and agencies, most recently ODT (www.odt.org/pop.htm) in 2005, which has made its statistics available for public use without copyright. Also cf. “History and sources of the ‘State of the Village Report’” at www.odt.org/popvillagesources.htm.