

HKU President Professor Xiang Zhang's speech at the Inauguration Ceremony for New Students 2018-19

August 29, 2018

Professor Lung, distinguished colleagues and guests, new students of the University of Hong Kong,

Good morning and welcome to HKU! – whether you are here in the Grand Hall or upstairs in Lecture Theatre 2.

Many of you will have heard about the tragedy that has occurred on campus, and I am sure that you are as saddened and shocked as I am.

While the details are uncertain, what is clear is that a tragic event has occurred and that many students, staff and alumni will be affected.

The University is offering its support to students and colleagues requiring support.

Our thoughts are with those who are affected, and the University will be providing the necessary assistance to them at this very difficult time.

But now, let us turn back to focus on the theme of the day.

Today is about you -- our new students!

You have been accepted into HKU mainly because of your excellent academic credentials.

Through your hard work and dedication, you have earned this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

So, my warmest congratulations to you all!

This is my first Inauguration Ceremony, so in a sense, I am a freshman too! So you see – right away, we have something in common.

I have always enjoyed interacting with students. I liked teaching, which I have done at the undergraduate and postgraduate level.

And I enjoyed working with my research students in the lab as well.

In fact, one of the first things I did after beginning my Presidency here was to meet with various student groups, including the HKU Students' Union.

This reflects how important I think my relationship with our students is.

And I look forward to meeting you too, as you begin this new chapter of your lives here at HKU.

In the past few years, perhaps one of your chief concerns was to think about what your future career might be.

What job do you want eventually? What is your career path? You've heard all these questions before.

I'm going to say something that may shock you. I want you to forget about your career for a moment.

I want you to think bigger than that.

Think about the world we are living in. Think about the world you will inherit. The world you will spend the rest of your lives in.

The truth is, we all face tremendous challenges in the 21st century.

These range from effects of economic and social globalization to overwhelming societal challenges.

Many of these have already started: shortages of energy and water supplies, human health problems and poverty, to name just a few.

So why am I telling you all this?

Because here at HKU, I want you to look beyond just a job, or an ordinary career.

Now is the time to work towards an ideal that is bigger than ourselves.

I want you to be the best academically and also be innovative.

I like to see students embracing a wide range of interests, so that they will not just be striving for an excellent GPA all the time.

This university has so much to offer, and I urge you to make the most of all the opportunities available.

For example, push past your comfort zone by taking a subject you know nothing about, in our common core courses.

Broaden your horizons by signing up for our international student exchange programmes.

I know you're undergraduate students, but find out more about research. Learn to create knowledge, create new things. You don't have to wait until you get into a postgraduate programme!

And take advantage of all the extra-curricular activities our student organisations have to offer.

Here at HKU, we want you to explore new ideas.

You've all heard that saying: Think outside the box! I know you are all rolling your eyes, and yes, it is a cliché.

But what does it mean? What does it mean to be innovative?

It starts with leaving comfortable ideas behind.

It means you cannot be complacent.

It means taking risks.

Maybe you will understand my passion for this if you will allow me to share a personal story with you.

When I was a boy, about six or seven years old, I remember going bicycling with my father.

We ran into a thunderstorm. So we took shelter, and watched the storm unfold. It was an amazing show of thunder and lightning. Of course, as a boy, I was quite excited.

I turned to look at my father. He seemed as impressed as I was. But then he said something very unexpected.

He said: "Son, if someone someday could harvest all that lighting energy, it would be great for society."

My father wasn't a scientist. He was a middle-school history teacher.

But at that moment, he taught me the importance of freeing my mind to think. He taught me about the value of dreaming beyond the concerns of our own lives.

Of course, that dream is yet to be realized; it is an extremely hard scientific challenge. However, it has remained an inspiration for me to this day.

I hope that story will inspire you too, as you begin university life with us here at HKU.

Looking forward, there are so many challenges facing us, problems and issues that are greater than ourselves.

You are following in the footsteps of generations of talented young students who have gone on to shape our world.

So study vigorously and be innovative, and always aim high.

The world is yours.

How will you make it a better place? How will you make a positive impact?

I want you to answer that high call! Be brave, be bold!

I wish you all a great start to the academic year, and a fulfilling and successful journey with us here at HKU.

Thank you very much.

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