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Welcome

Welcome to Princeton University. From its modest beginnings in Elizabeth, N.J., in 1746, Princeton has become one of the world's foremost research universities engaged in graduate education while preserving its historic commitment to undergraduate instruction. We expect our faculty to be great scholars as well as great teachers, and we offer our students a diverse yet close-knit community that gives them the widest possible scope for academic exploration and growth.

Whether one is a Nobel laureate or a newly matriculated freshman, whether one's field is electrical engineering or comparative literature, Princeton invites its faculty and students to join a common search for answers to the fundamental and pressing questions that confront society. We do so not in the name of learning alone but, in the words of our informal motto, to serve our nation and all nations. As Princeton's fourth president declared in 1760, "Let it be the vigorous unremitted effort of your whole life to leave the world wiser and better than you found it at your entrance."

Today, we continue to foster this spirit by identifying talented students at home and abroad and by giving them the skills and insights they need to realize their potential and, as alumni, to make a positive difference in their communities.

Shirley M. Tilghman, Princeton University's 19th president, assumed office on June 15, 2001.

In the News

- Tilghman asks new students to 'occupy' Princeton and serve the greater good
- Aspire campaign raises record \$1.88 billion for Princeton University

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Whatever the purpose of your visit, I hope that you will find the answers you are seeking and return one day soon.

Sincerely,

Shirley M. Tilghman

2012 Opening Exercises

President Shirley M. Tilghman

September 9, 2012

Greeting

Good afternoon, and welcome to Opening Exercises. The tradition of gathering together at the beginning of each academic year goes back at least to 1802, when an opening exercise was held in Nassau Hall. As the University grew, the ceremony moved to Marquand Chapel, which has since burned down, then to Alexander Hall, and eventually to the University Chapel in 1929. I doubt whether the attendees at the first opening exercise enjoyed drum music or colorful banners, but its purpose was the same—to take a moment to reflect on what lies ahead.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all new members of the University community and to those of you who are returning after the summer. To the 1,357 new members of the Class of 2016, you are already well on your way to earning the title the "*Great Class of 2016*." For you are definitely great in numbers—the largest class that has ever matriculated at Princeton. With hometowns like Katmandu, Nepal; Nairobi, Kenya; and Limerick,

Ireland, you represent 57 countries on six of the seven continents. No one from Antarctica, I am sorry to report. On the domestic front, you hail from 48 states of the Union plus the District of Columbia, and one even could argue that with domiciles in Jupiter, Florida, and Mars, Pennsylvania, even the solar system is well represented. But however far you have traveled, from farms, hamlets, small towns, big cities, or megalopolises, you begin as one community—the Class of 2016. We are so glad you chose Princeton.

To the 615 new graduate students, I also offer special greetings. This year's entering class is a strikingly cosmopolitan one, as you too come from six of the seven continents, proof positive that Princeton is truly an international university. Whether you have come to develop your professional credentials in engineering, finance, architecture, or public policy, or to embark on a life of scholarship through doctoral studies, you have an important place in this community.

Welcome, as well, to the 37 new members of the faculty whose distinguished scholarly achievements and dedication to teaching in dozens of disciplines are certain to enhance Princeton's reputation for excellence in research and in undergraduate and graduate education. I offer a warm welcome to new members of the staff. From the custodians in the residential colleges to the night nurses in McCosh infirmary; from the

science librarian in the Lewis Library to the strength and conditioning coach in Jadwin Gym, the staff at Princeton work around the clock to make your experience as positive as possible. Please remember to thank them from time to time.

Finally, a warm welcome to the returning members of the Classes of 2013, 2014, and 2015, as well as to the graduate students and faculty who have spent the summer either here or away from campus pursuing their scholarly work. I hope it has not escaped your notice that we have not been resting on our laurels over the summer. If you wander down to the lake you may be surprised to see that the Hibben and Magie apartment buildings are about to be replaced by a spectacular new graduate housing complex, and if you cross the lake you will find a large field of solar panels assembled on the West Windsor lands that will help us achieve our ambitious greenhouse gas reduction goal. The field hockey team, ranked fourth in the nation in preseason and with several players freshly back from the Olympics, has a brand new playing field next to its former home in the Class of 1952 Stadium, and even elderly Nassau Hall has refurbished front doors. I am often asked by nostalgic alumni why the campus needs to grow and change. In their view, the campus was perfect, especially during *their* four years! Don't laugh—you'll be saying the same thing in 40 years. The answer, of course, is that the best universities not only respond to change, they lead it. And so, as new ideas and ways of thinking are born,

advances in technology create new fields, and old buildings inevitably crumble, Princeton must be both intellectually and materially at the forefront of discovery and change.

It is now my honor to introduce the Dean of the College, Professor of English and African American Studies Valerie Smith, who will recognize the academic achievements of seven exceptional undergraduates.

Address: Occupying Princeton

Opening Exercises is one of the truly joyous occasions at Princeton because it marks the *beginning* of a great adventure—*your* great adventure. At this moment in your Princeton education everything is possible—every door stands open, every dream has the potential to come true. You are about to Occupy Princeton.

Now don't panic—I don't mean to suggest that you are going to live in a soggy pup tent on Cannon Green for the next four years. Instead, I am co-opting that phrase from last year's political season to preview what I hope will be the many ways in which you will seize the moment, take this University by storm, make it uniquely your own, and leave it better than you found it.

Let me begin with the most literal meaning of Occupying Princeton. Here you are! Bravo for making the wise decision to attend this University. I

suspect that there are almost as many reasons for why you chose Princeton as there are members of the Class of 2016. Some of you knew you wanted to come to Princeton the moment you stepped on this beautiful campus—it just looked and felt like what a college campus is supposed to be. I completely understand that reaction. Even after 26 years, I occasionally find myself dazzled when I encounter a long vista through Gothic arches, or the sky's reflection on the glass façade of Sherrerd Hall. Geography matters, and you will find inspiration in living and working in a setting that can continually astonish.

Some of you were attracted by the opportunity to work with faculty who are not just extraordinary scholars, scientists, and engineers, but also are committed to sharing their knowledge and erudition with the next generation. That is a great reason to choose Princeton—you will come to know faculty as individuals, not just as talking heads at the front of the class. And rather than being intimidated by the prospect of writing a senior thesis, some of you were motivated to come to Princeton by the chance to take responsibility for your own intellectual development, rather than being a passive recipient of learning. Writing a senior thesis may seem daunting to you right now, but it will be the most exhilarating and rewarding experience of your academic career, and the one you remember best.

There are those of you in the Class of 2016 who had siblings who attended Princeton, or parents or grandparents, and undoubtedly received regular doses of Princeton lore around the family dinner table and have a closet full of orange and black paraphernalia. Others of you had never heard of or even considered Princeton until a teacher or guidance counselor or family friend suggested that you should take a look. And by the way, it has been my experience that the moment you arrive on campus, those differences completely evaporate, and you all become Princetonians to the core. Some of you had something very specific in mind when you applied to Princeton—to study with world-class mathematicians; to combine a liberal arts education with a serious commitment to the arts; to play on a sports team that contends for Ivy championships on a regular basis. The great majority of you, however, are completely open to what lies ahead and plan to use your first year or so to explore the tremendous smorgasbord of opportunities that Princeton has to offer.

But whatever your path to Princeton, you are now a member of the Class of 2016, collectively poised to Occupy Princeton for the next four years. As I warn each freshman class, the next four years are going to go by in the blink of an eye. If you do not believe me, ask any member of the senior class. That look of panic in their eyes is not solely brought on by the fact that they are still struggling to find a topic for their senior theses. It also reflects their realization that there is a light looming at the end of the

tunnel, and they have just one more year to savor and extract the full worth of this place.

So Occupying Princeton means first and foremost *carpe diem*—seize the moment, take responsibility for consciously and conscientiously carving out your own vision of a Princeton education. For there is no quintessential Princeton experience, especially for a class as broadly diverse in every imaginable way as yours. Each Princeton experience is forged from a highly individual spectrum of interests, talents, initiative, focus, and, yes, serendipity. Luck matters. The roommates you are randomly assigned, the conversations you happen upon in the dining halls, the preceptor who takes a special interest in your work, the play you decide to audition for on a whim—who knows what will turn out to be a revelatory moment in *your* Princeton experience?

But as the 19th-century French scientist Louis Pasteur famously said, "Chance favors only the prepared mind." A prepared mind is open to courses in disciplines and fields you have never encountered before and to testing whether subjects that fascinated you in high school are truly your calling. A prepared mind will explore extra-curricular interests that bring you in contact with students who come to Princeton with very different life trajectories than yours, and who will challenge you to grow as an individual. With a prepared mind, you can leave your mark on Princeton by

the ways in which you choose to spend your time and engage with your classmates and fellow students. But let me be clear—Occupying Princeton *well* means making real choices. The buckshot approach to Princeton does not work. So take your time, pace yourself, and don't try to do everything all at once.

Although it may sound like I am about to contradict myself, Occupying the Princeton of the 21st century requires that you *leave* Princeton from time to time to explore the rest of the world. This was not always the case; in fact, Princeton was often criticized by its alumni for discouraging their efforts to study abroad. However, that began to change in 1996, when we celebrated the 250th anniversary of the founding of Princeton and President Harold Shapiro used the occasion to modify our informal motto. "Princeton in the Nation's Service" became "Princeton in the Nation's Service and the Service of All Nations"—words now carved into the walk in front of Nassau Hall. Whether you describe the world as flat, or shrinking, or massively interconnected, it has profoundly changed, and modern well-educated citizens need to be cosmopolitans—a word that Professor of Philosophy Anthony Appiah has used to describe a person who is genuinely familiar with and at ease moving between cultures, without losing sense of his or her own identity.

Economists and sociologists predict that many of you will spend some fraction of your lives in different countries with different languages, religions, and political beliefs. To be successful, you will need to be cosmopolitans, and the best way to acquire that trait is to engage the world—by getting to know students from other countries here at Princeton and by studying the languages, cultures, religions, histories, and political philosophies of other societies. But as meaningful as those experiences can be, they are no substitute for first-hand experience, and you will quickly discover that Princeton now offers many options for you to explore other parts of the world—semester- and year-long study abroad opportunities at excellent universities and myriad summer experiences, including *Global Seminars*, intensive summer language training, research opportunities, and internships around the world. This past summer you could have taken a *Global Seminar* in Rio de Janeiro to study urbanism and culture with Professor of Spanish and Portuguese Bruno Carvalho, or performed the dramas of ancient Greece in Athens with Professors of Theater Michael Cadden and Tim Vasen.

Here is what one sophomore e-mailed to me after her summer studying abroad: "I wanted to write and let you know that I had an absolutely incredible experience during the *Global Seminar* in Rio. Experiencing phenomena outside the classroom and then analyzing them in class gave the material a whole new sense of significance, and also meant that I

personally connected with Rio on a much deeper level than I otherwise would have. I'm excited to be starting Portuguese this semester with the hope of returning to see more of Brazil in the near future." And if you are looking for work experience, here are just a few things that members of the men's water polo team did this summer through Princeton's International Internship Program: one worked in Kampala, Uganda, to help a cultural center develop a successful business plan; another lived in Stockholm while preparing international democracy assessment reports for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance; and a third interned at the Istanbul Chamber of Industry. It is not too early for you to begin planning your strategy for becoming a cosmopolitan.

As you know, the Occupy movement began last fall in Zuccotti Park near Wall Street in New York as a protest against the growing inequality in income and opportunity in the U.S. and in many other countries around the world. The movement's rallying cry was "We are the 99 percent," to underscore the point that the widening gap in wealth is benefiting a very small percentage of the population. With your matriculation at Princeton, and irrespective of your family circumstances up to this moment, you have now become part of the 1 percent, not in terms of wealth, but certainly in terms of future opportunity. Admission to Princeton is a privilege that is bestowed on very few individuals, and with it comes a responsibility to use your education to make the world a better place. "Princeton in the Nation's

Service and the Service of All Nations" is not a hollow phrase, but a call to action that justifies the immense effort and resources that go into educating each of you. By virtue of that education, and the credential you will earn that signals to the world that you have worked prodigiously hard to pass a very high educational bar, you will have a dizzying array of options before you. We are agnostic about *what* you choose to do, but we do insist that it have a purpose that is larger than you. In that sense, Occupying Princeton is not an end in itself but, rather, a means of preparing yourselves for many occupations—and vocations—in a world that sorely needs the skills and qualities of mind you bring to this University and will surely enhance over the next four years.

I am looking forward to getting to know each of you and to cheering you on inside and outside the classroom as you Occupy this great University. I hope you will leave our campus, saying, as generations of students have said before you, "This place changed my life." Welcome to Princeton!