

Remarks to Prospective Freshmen Reception

Thank you, Joe. Students, parents and friends, welcome to The Great Hall and congratulations on your acceptance into the Class of 2010 of The City College of New York. Since we say "eyes" to just one student out of every three who apply, you should feel proud of that accomplishment.

We're glad to have so many of you with us this evening. Your presence here tells us that you're giving us serious consideration as the place where you would want to continue your studies. Many of you, no doubt, are mulling several options. I don't envy you. At age 17 or 18, you're being asked to make the most significant decision of your young lives.

Obviously, we invited you here tonight because we want your decision to be "The City College of New York." Now I may be just a little bit biased, but I believe passionately that we offer as fine an education as can be had anywhere and a truly unique academic experience. But this decision is yours to make, not mine.

To make that decision, you'll need to use two of your most important capabilities, your intellect and your instincts. The school you ultimately decide to attend will not only have to make sense because it offers an excellent education, it should feel right, too. You'll have to sense that you'll fit in.

You shouldn't think of a college or university as a destination, but, rather, as a place from which to begin one's life journey. Because, on that journey, where you set out from matters less than the direction you are headed in and where you ultimately end up.

My own journey began at Ball State University in my hometown of Muncie, Indiana. Since I had grown up in poverty, Ball State was all I could afford, and I had to support myself by working full time as a sheriff's deputy.

However, I was able to go from there to graduate school and law school in Washington. That led to a 30-year career as a university administrator that ultimately brought me here, to The City College of New York.

Over the years, many outstanding individuals from modest backgrounds have begun similarly remarkable journeys right here at City College; people like former Secretary of State Colin Powell; Intel Corporation co-founder and former CEO Andy Grove; writers Walter Mosley and Faith Ringgold; U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, and so many more ó not to mention nine Nobel laureates, the most of any public U.S. college or university.

What did City College do for these extraordinary people? Well, Dr Grove said “City College allowed me to be me.” Not only did we make it possible for him to have a fabulous career in high technology; we unleashed his natural inclination to explore and question, something that was repressed in his native Hungary under Soviet occupation. Here, he was encouraged to speak his mind and fight for his convictions. He even won arguments with his professors when he was right.

A husband and wife who met while attending CCNY put it this way: “City College was our first encounter with the world

beyond our circumscribed environment. Our education opened our eyes to the joys of learning and opened doors to endless opportunities.ö Those two people, Harold and Lillian Hoffman, came back last year and gave the college \$1 million for a new student lounge.

While people who graduated over 40 years ago made these statements, the sentiments and possibilities still ring true. Our students today are going to places they never imagined they would get to and are gaining access to opportunities they never knew existed.

For example, Lev Sviridov, who first camped out under the George Washington Bridge when he and his mother came to this country from Russia, today is a Rhodes Scholar going for his Ph.D. at Oxford University

Last year, 10 Jewish Studies majors traveled to Poland and Israel and participated in the öMarch of the Living,ö commemorating the 60th (sixtieth) anniversary of the liberation of the death camps at Auschwitz [owsh-kvitz]and Birkenau

[bir-ken-ow]. Similarly, CCNY students have had opportunities to serve internships or conduct research in such varied places as China, Rwanda and the Dominican Republic.

At The City College of New York, the academic experience goes far beyond completing a prescribed selection of courses. Our science majors don't just study science, they *do* science; we have one of the most extensive undergraduate research programs of any college or university in the metropolitan area. This emphasis on research helped an undergraduate engineering major, Gary Chan, obtain a \$24,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to build a *green* roof atop the Grove School of Engineering. And, it helped City College attract the 2005 Intel Science Talent Search first place finisher, David Bauer, who did his award-winning research here as a high school student.

In biomedical engineering, our students design and build devices, like a sensor that monitors a baby's breathing patterns and could prevent sudden infant death syndrome; in our Sonic Arts program, they produce their own music recordings, and in our film

program they make their own movies. We emphasize doing rather than just studying theory because we believe that the best way to become an engineer or a scientist or a creative artist is to study what these people do AND do what these people do.

The opportunities to learn what you are capable of are virtually limitless at The City College of New York. One of our distinguishing characteristics is the access students have to our faculty, many of whom are internationally recognized experts in their fields.

These professors are well connected, so they have their ears to the ground. Consequently, they've been able to alert talented students to and encouraged them to pursue a scholarships, fellowships, internships, foreign study programs and other activities that enrich students' academic careers and enable them to stand out. Many of our students have learned, to their surprise, that it is actually possible to get paid to go to college.

Perhaps you are saying to yourself, "this sounds great, but can I rise to the level of a Colin Powell or an Andy Grove? Will I

fit in at City College?ö Those are questions I can't answer. Only you can answer them.

Our mission isn't to make you the next Colin Powell or Andy Grove; it's to help you become the one and only "you." These distinguished alumni serve as great role models, though. At City College, you can do what they did and use your education to become that person you are truly capable of becoming.

As our valedictorian from last year, Amie Dave [ah-me dah-vay] noted in her speech, "success is an individual journey." You have to find the path that's right for you.

As to whether you will fit in, your industriousness and the content of your character will determine your likelihood of being successful. However, you will undoubtedly find yourself among people like you who can be supportive because they understand where you're coming from. The City College is one of the most diverse and cosmopolitan schools to be found anywhere.

We are not a black school or a white school or a Hispanic school or an Asian school. Rather, we have sizable representation

from all of these groups. Overwhelmingly, our students are immigrants or first and second-generation Americans. They hail from 151 countries outside the United States and speak 85 languages in addition to English.

The decision in front of you is a momentous one that surely will affect the course of your life. However:

If you want a school that can help you achieve your full potential...

If you want a school that can expose you to opportunities you cannot even imagine right now

If you want a school that offers you access to a world-class faculty committed to your success

Then, you've come to the right place.

I look forward to meeting you again in September as members of the Class of 2010 of The City College of New York.

Thank you.

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