

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

General University of Maine Publications

University of Maine Publications

12-18-1999

1999 UMaine Presidential Outstanding Teaching Award Recipient

Keith W. Hutchinson

University of Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Hutchinson, Keith W., "1999 UMaine Presidential Outstanding Teaching Award Recipient" (1999). *General University of Maine Publications*. 1600.

https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications/1600

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in General University of Maine Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

Celebration of the Academy

Dec. 18, 1999

Prof. Keith W. Hutchison

1999 UMaine Presidential Outstanding Teaching Award Recipient

It is an honor to be here today, though I must admit that I view it with a certain amount of certain trepidation. On such an occasion one has the urge to say something profound... or at least funny, so as to be remembered. Having never been accused of being either, perhaps I don't need to worry about such things. However, having won the teaching award, I have been accused of being a pretty good teacher. So there is this sense that I need to say something educational. I find this difficult for two reasons. Like all faculty, I am programmed to talk for discrete time intervals and I am used to lecturing for an hour and 15 minutes. President Hoff has given me only five. In 5 minutes I can barely get warmed up. I've also not been given a piece of chalk. So I'm left having to stand here with my hands in my pockets, summing up our relationship for the last 4 years, faculty to student. It is also my job to give you your last assignment.

So where are we? After 4 years of classes, endless notes, exams, term papers, questions, answers, and open discussions I can safely tell you that, in fact, you don't know very much. I can hear the parents in the gallery saying what did I just pay for? But I didn't say you don't know a lot. In fact, you have learned a lot, just not very much. The reality is that in 4 years no one can teach you all there is to know, regardless of your major. Perhaps the best example I can think of was a conversation I had with a student in my 400 level Molecular Genetics class a few years ago.

The student came to me toward the end of the semester and said: "After Bio100 I thought I knew this much [hands held wide apart] about DNA and genes and how they all work. And then I took the 200 level course and found that I had learned only this much [hands held close together]. But after the 200 level I was sure that I knew this much [hands held wide apart] about DNA and genes and how they all work. And then I took your course..." I assured him that by the end of my course he would still know only a little bit about all there is to know about DNA and genes and how they work.

So now what? Well the glib answer is: go figure it out for yourself and then come back and tell us. Put more accurately and perhaps more kindly: What we have done is give you a little bit of knowledge (admittedly in some cases more than you cared to know) and give you the tools to find out the rest. As mentors we've shown you how to use those tools. As mentors, and sometimes as tormentors we've helped you hone those tools. The tools are very simple. Ask questions, challenge the answers. Note that I did not say ignore the answers. It is too easy to ignore answers we don't like, even if they might be true. But if you use your knowledge as the basis from which to ask questions and to evaluate the answers you get, you are a long way down the road to the finding out the rest. To the academic it is also a very exciting road to be on and if we as faculty have done our job, we have been as inspirational as educational. And you will be inspired to get on that road to finding the answers. Ask questions, think for your self.

Think for yourself. This is not easy to do when faced with the onslaught of poll after poll, telling what everyone else thinks or think they think. Actually, the concept of polls and the dangers they represent is actually not a new thing. In 1948, the head of the division of journalism at Stanford University, Dr. Chilton Bush, was quote as telling his students "A publisher is smart to take a poll before he gets his neck out too far. Polls provide a better idea of acceptance of newspaper policies." Author and adopted Maine resident, the late E.B. White took exception to this statement, noting that Dr. Bush was handing his students not a sword, but a weathervane. If we, as faculty have done our job, we've given you the sword.

And when you figure it out, come back and tell us. And this isn't just because we'd enjoy seeing you again. No. No idea, no matter how profound, or funny, or educational, is worth anything if the rest of us don't hear about it. An idea conceived and carried in a vacuum remains a vacuum. Simple physics. Stick your neck out, come back and tell us, and be prepared to do battle. To an academic it is in the arena of scholarly debate that things really get fun. Stand your ground when you are right, and learn to accept when you are wrong. I promise to do the same. When I was an undergraduate, my most inspirational professor took just as much delight in being proven wrong by his students as being proven right. Now that I am in his role I can understand at least two reasons. First, being proven wrong by one's students is one of the best ways to show that they are thinking for themselves. The second reason is that life is too short to go through it with a wrong idea.

So we the faculty have given you a base of knowledge and the tools to use them to find out the rest. And I give you your last assignment. Go figure it out for yourself and come back and tell us. There will be an exam at the end and yes it will be cumulative. My experience with the success of the graduates who have gone before you is that you will do very well, indeed and that you stand second to none in what you can accomplish.

I'll end with a quote that great modern day philosopher, Garrison Keillor. "Be well, do good works, and keep in touch."

500 Graduate at UMaine's 195th Commencement

Dec. 18, 1999

Media Contact: [Joe Carr](#) at (207) 581-3571

ORONO, Me. -- Inspired by a [Commencement address](#) on the subject of taking action to contribute to and improve the world, 500 students received degrees at the University of Maine's graduation ceremony this morning.

Ernestine Schlant Bradley, a professor at Montclair State University in New Jersey and the wife of Presidential candidate Bill Bradley, delivered the address and encouraged the graduates to take the "sense of excitement and challenge" they experienced in college and carry it with them in life after UMaine.

"It is not enough to learn -- we have to act on what we've learned," she said. "Education and knowledge may help you forge ideals, but action alone gives you the possibility of making those ideals reality. In order to create anything new, to make a change or a difference, we have to take action. And taking action means taking risks."

Bradley, who is a scholar of German and comparative literature and is the author of four books and numerous articles on a variety of subjects related to German literature, told the graduates and an audience of 3,500 friends and relatives that she has been inspired by people she has met while traveling the country on the campaign trail in the last few months. She said that she is "heartened" to think that there are young people seeking to find a way to live up to the ideals set by others.

"Before any of us can join with others in courage and conviction, we have to understand ourselves and what we have to give," she said. "There are many conflicting emotions, drives and abilities within each of us. In a sense, just as a group effort is a blending of talents and forces, the individual is also such a blend. To be internally strong, you have to understand that you are not just a head or heart or body alone."

The German-born Bradley, who moved to the United States at 21 and earned a Ph.D. from Emory University eight years later, said that her education helped to prepare her to face challenges and to make judgments. She told the graduates that education can serve them in a similar way as they confront issues in their lives.

"I believe that the question of how we will all live together well in a uniquely diverse America is your generation's issue. It is your abilities -- your heads and hearts, your understanding of yourselves and others -- that will move our country to grapple with this crucial issue and get it figured out," she said. "Knowing yourself, respecting the self of another and acting on that knowledge are the first steps towards that goal. We are on the eve of the 21st century. You can make it your business to see to it that when we get to the year 2030 many of the divisions within our country will be mended."

The 90-minute ceremony, which was presided over by UMaine President Peter S. Hoff, included a [faculty message](#) from Keith W. Hutchison, the 1999 UMaine Presidential Outstanding Teaching Award recipient. Greetings from the University of Maine System Board of Trustees were brought by the board's chair, UMaine graduate James D. Mullen. Gregory D. Jamison, vice chair of the University of Maine General Alumni Association, welcomed the new graduates to the ranks of more than 84,000 UMaine alumni.

Dr. Ernestine Schlant Bradley

Commencement Address

University of Maine

December 18, 1999

President Hoff, Provost Zillman, Chairman Mullen, members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished guests, joyful parents and, most of all, members of the last class of 1999. I am very pleased to be here with you on a day that honors intellectual achievement and commemorates many days and nights of work and some, I hope, of play. The University of Maine has a long and proud tradition as a premier land-grant and sea-grant research institution, and I'm very honored that I've been asked to speak at this commencement.

I must confess that I have not only an intellectual but a very personal affection for the state of Maine--for it was during a vacation at Frenchman's Bay on Mt. Desert Island that my husband and I first fell in love. So I am especially pleased to be here with you on a day when you mark a turning point in your own lives and join a distinguished group of noted alumni including scientists, jurists, authors, athletes and public servants.

Your heads are filled with what you've learned, and at this very moment your hearts are no doubt brimming with a mixture of joy at what is to come, relief that you have completed this important phase in your lives, and sadness at what is being left behind. But as you will find, you are not leaving Orono and its memories too far behind. I can assure you that your friends and the Alumni and Development Offices will see to that.

I have spent the better part of my life on college campuses, as a student, of course, and, for the past thirty years as a professor of German and Comparative Literature. Many of those years have been spent at a public institution, teaching students very much like you. So, in a sense, being here today is a kind of homecoming for me--and it feels very good. I am sure, over the years, you have relished as I have the excitement of each new semester and the expectation of what it might bring in terms of new ideas, intellectual challenge and hard work along with new friendships. I'd like to speak to you today about taking that sense of excitement and challenge with you as you embark on new adventures and careers. And I do promise to be brief.

I believe this is a good time to applaud the fact that you've all probably spent a lot of your time at the University of Maine getting to know who you are and contemplating who you can be. Education brings you knowledge, or as the Greeks said "Gnosis." But that alone is not enough for us to forge meaningful lives. After all, none of us really live in ivory towers, although some of my students persist in thinking there is the world of the university and then "the real world."

We all live in the real world, and in that world, it is essential to take very much to heart the second part of the Greek ethos which is praxis, meaning to act or to do. It is not enough to learn--we have to act on what we've learned. Education and knowledge may help you forge ideals, but action alone gives you the possibility of making those ideals reality. In order to create anything new, to make a change or a difference, we have to take action. And taking action means taking risks.

Taking even what may seem like your small own risk for an ideal can exhilarate and energize the entire world. As Robert Kennedy once said, "Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. . .and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance." In your lifetimes you have seen this metaphor become reality, internationally with the end of Apartheid and the fall of the Berlin wall and locally, very recently, when, due to the work of environmentalists, the 162-year old Edwards Dam on the Kennebec River was torn down to help restore that

river to good health. These events occurred because many individuals spoke up and took risks for what they believed.

Your knowledge, your individual voices and your actions can and will make a huge difference. Most of you know, I hope, that my husband, Bill Bradley, is campaigning for the Democratic Presidential nomination. For the past year, as his number one and most enthusiastic volunteer, I have spent quite a bit of time in your neighboring state of New Hampshire and have been traveling across the entire country as well. Everywhere I go I meet people in towns and cities who are giving 100% to what they believe in, to their communities, their causes and, of course, their families. These are the people who exemplify our best selves and exhibit the kind of energy and flexibility that keeps them, no matter what their ages, open to the opportunities and challenges that life offers them. They imbue our society with a unique dynamism.

Take, for example, the woman who was so moved by the unnecessary death of an aged neighbor that she made it her business to join with others to insure that the elderly in her community would have food, shelter and companionship. Or take a group of only three citizens who came together to preserve some historic buildings in their neighborhood. Or the young college graduate who through being a Big Brother opened the eyes and mind of a young boy towards a larger world. Or the young men and women who believe that teaching is truly an important profession despite the low salaries or the supposed lack of glamour.

Every year while Bill was Senator from New Jersey, we had a tradition of publicly acknowledging and celebrating women whom we identified as our state's "Unsung Heroines." One of these women, for example, began a food bank out of her home that today has grown to be known as the Community Food Bank, one of the largest food distribution centers in the country. I was always moved and exhilarated by meeting and knowing these women. I now know, through first hand experience, that there are so many more men and women across this country who should be acknowledged and applauded. I am equally heartened by the thought that there are young people like you who will join them.

But before any of us can join with others in courage and conviction, we have to understand ourselves and what we have to give. There are many conflicting emotions, drives and abilities within each of us. In a sense, just as group effort is a blending of talents and forces, the individual is also such a blend. To be internally strong, you have to understand that you are not just your head or heart or body alone. No doubt you've all dealt with the mind / body or the head/heart conflict-either in philosophy classes or, most definitely, in personal relationships. The University has taught you to dissect issues, to think things through, to apply critical thinking skills-- and your own course in Life 101 has taught you that to live well in the world a brilliant mind must be accompanied by a full and compassionate heart.

If there's one thing a good liberal arts education should do, and does do in my opinion, it is to teach you to deal with ambiguity and to be a flexible human being. We never know where life is going to put us or take us, or what kind of challenges we will face. Look at my own life. I was born in Germany; I followed my dream and took the risk and came to the United States alone when I was 21 years old, about the same age some of you are right now. But never in my wildest dreams did I expect to be campaigning full-time for my husband to be President of the United States. Yet here I am, and I am really enjoying it.

I like to think that I am living up to the challenge partially because my education has prepared me for anything-- for being flexible, for keeping my feet on the ground and for helping me to discover the values within. And, of course, most importantly, because I am committed with my whole being, heart and head, to Bill and to the ideals we both hold dear.

But arriving at any answer or position and standing firm when the world is in your face is rarely as simple as two plus two makes four. I am here to tell you that weighing right and wrong, seeing someone else's point of view and integrating head and heart is a life-long struggle.

Life's decisions are never easy and they often can only be arrived at after weighing your point of view and the other person's. Adolescence is a time when we seek answers in the eyes of our peers. They are our mirrors-- for how we appear and for whether we measure up. As adults, young or old, we look inside for answers, and the

only way to do that is to examine yourself with the same kind of interest, passion and scrupulous honesty that you have given to reading literature and history or studying physics and calculus. e.e. cummings defined this ongoing task incisively when he wrote: "to be nobody but yourself--in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else--means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight, and never stop fighting."

This is especially important today and for all of you because I believe that the question of how we will all live together well in a uniquely diverse America is your generation's issue. It is your abilities--your heads and hearts, your understanding of yourselves and others--that will move our country to grapple with this crucial issue and get it figured out. Knowing yourself, respecting the self of another and acting on that knowledge are the first steps towards that goal. We are on the eve of the 21st century. You can make it your business to see to it that when we get to the year 2030 many of the divisions within our country will be mended.

In 1982, my husband gave a commencement address at Montclair State University where I teach. He urged those graduates to treat their degrees, metaphorically, as brand new, shiny boxes of Crayola crayons--to use their imaginations and go out and color in the world to match their visions of an ideal place to live. Seventeen years later, and with our daughter nearing her own college graduation, I believe that his words are even more important. As graduates you have the wherewithal to create your own images. You don't have to color within the lines or follow the outlines given you by the generation before. It's your turn to make new pictures.

Benjamin Mayes, president of Morehouse College once said, "The tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach." We need a nation of people who not only have goals but who share those goals with others. May each and every one of you have the courage and heart to set goals and take the kind of risks that will make a difference.

This is the time to follow your dreams, to create your lives, to take risks, to make a new world. Work on your relationships, revel in your sense of humor and treasure individual moments. Remember, the most important things in life aren't things. If you look inside, you'll find the strength to set your ideals, to take on challenges, to know what you believe and to speak up and make your voices heard. I urge you all to take the risk of leadership.

And before I leave, I wouldn't be living up to my ideals or doing my current job, if I didn't remind you to vote, which is a very real way to look inside and take an action according to what you believe.

I wish you well and thank you all.