

ORIENTATION SPEECH

September 2015

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the University of Limerick this morning. I wish to congratulate each of you, first on having secured your university place and second, for having the good sense to choose to study in the University of Limerick. The University of Limerick puts the student at the centre of everything it does; your experience here at UL and your success is important to each and every member of staff who works here.

Your arrival at university marks a new chapter in the story of your life. But this chapter is a bit different. The preceding chapters were largely written by others – your parents, guardians, families, teachers and the like. Now you will be the principal author of the next chapter – you have the opportunity to determine the direction, the plot and the tempo of your story. This can seem as daunting as it is exciting, as challenging as it is empowering. But the great thing is that you are doing something that you have chosen to do, not something that was chosen for you by others. And while you are here at UL you will have the opportunity to learn new things, acquire new knowledge, develop new skills, and enhance your personal attributes in profound ways that will equip for life after University. At the same time you will

make new friends who will become your friends for life, with whom you will share memories of your University of Limerick days for many years to come.

The week and for the next few weeks you are likely to be bombarded with information and I am conscious of the danger of adding to information overload. Nevertheless, I wish to share three pieces of advice with you.

1. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR LEARNING

Up to now, most of your learning, and indeed your life, has been very structured. The objective was clear – to secure sufficient points to get your place in university. Most of you here today followed a quite precisely defined curriculum and your approach to how you learned was dictated by the demands of the Leaving Certificate. But now you are entering the less structured environment of the University where you will have greater freedom and the responsibility that comes with that.

Others who have come here by different routes no doubt remember their Leaving Cert days, with what degree of enthusiasm I cannot say – but you too have worked hard to get your university place. The important point is that each of you, irrespective of how you came here, has earned your

place in the University of Limerick. What you have achieved up to now is now behind you – you have turned a new page and it is blank. Now you must write the script.

You will now be expected to be more self-reliant. You are responsible for what you do, for ensuring that you do the work that will be required of you. There will be no one to check up on you, you are accountable to yourself. Make sure you attend your lectures, labs and tutorials, that you do the assignments and read the material advised by your lecturers and tutors. Ensure that you make enough time for private study; develop a study plan; go to the library; use the on-line learning resources.

And while we expect you to assume a new level of responsibility please realise that you are not alone. If you find things difficult don't run away; seek help. Part of being responsible for yourself is recognising when you need the support of others. TALK TO PEOPLE. Talk to your classmates, your housemates, your friends, or the Students' Union. We know that peer support contributes hugely to student success. And I also want you to know that there is an abundance of support services available to you. Contact your student advisor, a lecturer or a tutor. There are learning centres on campus – Mathematics, Science, Writing, IT – that are there to provide specialist support if you find you require it. And don't forget the vital pastoral support is provided by

the Student Health Centre, the Counselling Services and the Chaplaincy.

And while I am at it I must mention the First Seven Weeks programme that is designed to help your transition to University. Find out more about it and get involved in the activities.

Most important – understand that while we expect our students to become self-reliant we are to help when that is needed. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

2. MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TIME AT UL

One of the great things about university life is the range of new experiences that will be available to you. You will have abundant opportunities to flourish as a student and as a person.

At the University of Limerick many of the opportunities are built into your programme while others are extra-curricular. Most of you will undertake co-operative education or practice placements as an integral part of your programme, ensuring that the world of learning is intertwined with the world of work. What you learn in the classroom is applied in the workplace which in turn gives you a deeper

understanding of what you have learned in the classroom; it is an incredibly enriching experience that few other students in this country, or Europe for that matter, will enjoy. And it is no accident that the University of Limerick has the best graduate employment rate of all universities in Ireland, bar none, something of which we are very proud. We call it the “UL Edge”.

In addition, you will have opportunities to study abroad or take co-operative education abroad – 30% of our students spend at least one semester abroad, by far the highest percentage in Ireland. Again research has shown that a foreign student experience is valued by employers.

You will also have the opportunity to give back to the community, to assist those less fortunate than yourself. The Presidents’ Volunteer Award programme is a regular part of UL life and I hope that as many of you as possible get involved in it. Our students’ contribution to their communities is a credit to us as an institution.

The University boast splendid sports and cultural amenities – amongst the finest in Europe. There is something to cater for every taste – the Sports Arena, the Olympic Swimming pool, the all-weather pitches, the rowing tank in the Boathouse, this Concert Hall, and the art collections that are dotted throughout the campus. Avail of them, enjoy them. And

while you are at it join one or more of the many clubs and societies on campus – why not try something you haven't had the opportunity to do before. You have the chance now.

Again we know that availing of extra-curricular opportunities is linked to high quality student engagement and success.

GETTING INVOLVED HELPS YOUR LEARNING.

3. EMBRACE DIFFERENCE

The University is a melting pot. You have come from different backgrounds and communities to pursue your ambitions as students. In a large institution it can be tempting to stick with the familiar and that is especially true with respect to the people with whom you associate. But it would be a lost opportunity to stick with your own all the time – embrace difference. Get to know people who are different to you. It could be someone from a different part of the country, or from another country, of a different ethnicity, a different religion, who has different views to you, or who has different interests and perspectives. You might or might not change as a person by embracing difference but you will get a better understanding both of yourself and of those who are different to you. Knowing others and understanding others will help you develop as tolerant individuals.

So to recap:

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR LEARNING;

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TIME AT UL

EMBRACE DIFFERENCE

And with those few words of advice I wish you every success at the University of Limerick and I am confident that you will find it an immensely rewarding experience.