

You are the face and future of opportunity.

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Yours is the face of opportunity. Through your hard work and the opportunities you found at the most diverse college campus in the nation, in the most diverse and most wealthy state of the nation, you have become part of the nation's elite. One-third of Americans do not complete high school. Two-thirds do not complete college. You have earned graduate degrees at Rutgers University.

You are diverse in what you brought to Rutgers-Newark – the education and culture of many nations, schools, families, religions, and other traditions. You are diverse in what you found at Rutgers-Newark. Our graduate school has dozens of masters and doctoral programs, and you represent them all.

The diversity and enterprise of Rutgers-Newark is not an accident. It is a product of decisions taken over hundreds of years. Over and over, New Jersey, Newark, and Rutgers have chosen to offer opportunity, to encourage enterprise, to flourish by inclusion.

The English royalists who became the proprietors of New Jersey when it was wrested from the Indians and Dutch had little affection for the Puritans who proposed to settle on the banks of the Passaic River. But they so valued the Puritans' enterprise and the taxes the Puritans would pay that they granted what the Dutch had refused: freedom of religion and local self government. Thus was born, in 1666, the town of Newark and the constitution of New Jersey.

The founding of Newark was no accident. The inclusiveness of New Jersey is no accident. The diversity of Rutgers-Newark, I repeat, is no accident. These are results of a commitment to opportunity. It is no accident that New Jersey's taxpayers make it possible for 12,000 of New Jersey's least advantaged students to attend college each year, through the state's unique Equal Opportunity Fund. It is no accident that outside the south, Rutgers has the highest proportion of minority faculty of any flagship public university. It is no accident that the masters and Ph.D. programs from which you have graduated are so diverse. The diversity of Rutgers-Newark is the result of the vision and dogged belief in opportunity of generations of Rutgers faculty members and administrators.

Opportunity has an enemy: the talent myth. How fine are your genes? What are your SAT scores? Don't bother to work hard if you don't have the talent. The talent myth is beguiling to all who want to believe that they owe success to something essential within themselves. But it is a lie. How did Tiger Woods become the best golfer? How did Garry Kasparov become the best chess player? The same way top violinists and top

mathematicians succeed. They practice, then they practice some more, and they practice in ways that count. Ways that challenge them and advance their skills, under the guidance of those who know. This is called education.¹

Who will bring these truths to the less privileged of the 2010s, the 2020s, and 2030s? Who will give them a chance to work as hard as their contemporaries in elite schools and expensive SAT prep classes? Who will be the teachers, the scout leaders, the religious leaders, the community leaders? Only you. You are the future of opportunity. Today we celebrate both how you have seized your opportunities and how you will give back to the next generation.

You number in the hundreds, and I cannot tell all your stories. But to make our celebration real, let me talk about a few of you.

- Leah Owens, a high school teacher in the neighborhood where I live right here in Newark, who now works with the school's students to help them with their college applications and SAT scores. She is earning a master's degree in public administration.
- Rena Jaffe, who earned a Rutgers bachelor's degree in nursing, worked in the Mayo Clinic and the Massachusetts General Hospital, and has now earned her master's degree in nursing with us. New Jersey is fortunate to have her back.
- Hector and Jennifer Mendoza, who arrived in the United States in their mother's womb, fleeing the civil war in El Salvador. They too symbolize our graduates' determination to give back. Hector is known for his contributions to young people through Big Brother Big Sister and the NJ Division of Youth and Family Services. Jennifer left a career in publishing to dedicate her energies to the improvement of public health around the world. Both are earning master's degrees in public administration.
- Michael Martins, who was born in Boston and grew up in the Brazilian countryside. He is completing the 5 year MA/BA program in economics and expects to work in the financial industry.
- Donna Fountain, who provides health education and counseling to at risk-client populations. She finished her master's degree in nursing and worked while caring for a dying father and dying husband at home.
- Saskia Agustin, completing her master's in public administration, who will be working with Rutgers-Camden on minority leadership this coming year.

¹ Anders Ericsson, who carefully studied what makes world-class musicians different from normal people, tells us that innate talent has nothing to do with it. What counts is deliberate life-long effort to improve performance. Carol Dweck has demonstrated how damaging it is to tell children that their successes are due to talent rather than hard work. I commend to you recent popular books that report on the research across many fields of human endeavor by these and other scholars: Geoff Colvin's *Talent is Overrated* and Matthew Syed's *Bounce*.

Dominican-born, Saskia is one of the founders of Rutgers' Latino Alumni Association.

I wish I could tell you about graduates from all the master's programs here at Rutgers-Newark, those in the sciences and humanities as well as those in the professional schools, but I also want to say a word about a few of our Ph.D. graduates.

First let me tell you about a graduate from our Ph.D. program in criminal justice.

- First Min Liu, who was a police officer in Beijing before coming to Rutgers and studying the resurgence of prostitution in China since the 1980s. She has earned her Ph.D. in criminal justice and will teach this fall at Delaware State, a historically black college.
- Second a Rutgers educator in criminal justice, now earning his Ph.D. in urban systems, Vincent Andre Keeton. His dissertation will help New Jersey adopt high school graduation policies that will send urban students on to opportunity instead of prison.

Let me also tell you about some graduates of the program I know best, the Ph.D. program in the Rutgers Business School. College programs in business need teachers with Ph.D.s, yet the US produces 30% fewer Ph.D.s in business now than 15 years ago. Why? Because of competition among business schools to advance in the rankings. Business schools get ranked higher by investing in MBA programs, not in undergraduate or Ph.D. programs, and the recipe for prestige for their Ph.D. programs is to graduate fewer and fewer students, only those who can be placed in the most prestigious universities. Rutgers-Newark has chosen instead opportunity – opportunity for potential business teachers and opportunity for those they will teach. We have more than doubled the size of our business school's Ph.D. program. This year our graduates are moving on to teaching assignments in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, and Kansas.

- One of these graduates, Shalei Simms, taught second grade before coming to Rutgers to study how minority status can inhibit risk taking. Shalei now teaches at Ramapo College. We are proud that New Jersey business students are benefitting from this lively and knowledgeable teacher.

Let me tell you another reason to be proud of Rutgers. In 1994, Rutgers was a founding member of the Ph.D. project, a nationwide New-Jersey-based campaign to expand minority representation in business school teaching. This project has added 1000 minority professors with Ph.D.s to business school faculties in the 15 years since it began. Shalei Simms is number 1000.

- Another of this year's graduates, Pooja Thakur, came to Rutgers with a bachelor's degree from central India and an MBA from central Pennsylvania. At Rutgers, she

studied why pharmaceutical companies sometimes delegate clinical trials to other organizations and other countries. This fall she will teach at Virginia Tech.

Pooja is only one example of the strength Rutgers draws from our international students. About 60% of the students in the business school's Ph.D. program are international. They all teach undergraduates here at Rutgers while writing dissertations, and they are often our best teachers. Most go on to teach in the US.

Let me conclude with two more of our many international graduates, both from Maharastra in India.

- Anand Pore opened a computer repair shop in his home town after earning an undergraduate degree in computer science, then expanded into software and began consulting in the United States as well as India before coming to Rutgers. He now teaches at Emporia State in Kansas.
- Dinesh Pai came to Rutgers to study supply chain management after struggling to bring order to the harvest-time pandemonium at a large sugar-cane processing plant in India. He now teaches at Penn State Lehigh Valley.

Let us celebrate all our graduates, and let us celebrate their teachers, in American studies, biology, business, chemistry, criminal justice, economics, English, environmental science, global affairs, history, jazz, mathematics, neuroscience, nursing, physics, political science, psychology, public administration, public health, urban systems, and women's studies. Let us celebrate not only the teachers in our degree programs but also those in the Program in American Language Studies, who provide essential training in English speaking and writing for our international students.

Most of all, let us celebrate the opportunities our graduates will bring to the next generation. Graduates, I know these are hard times, and some of you may not yet know where you will find your next job. But you are all more important than you think. You are launched on careers where you will be leaders, teachers, employers, mentors – careers where you will touch many lives. Some of you will be college professors. All of you will be educators.

Let me say it again. You are the face and future of opportunity.