



Remarks upon the Opening of the Academic Year 2010 by Mr. John Surface

University American College Skopje Academic Year Inauguration, Aleksandar Palace, Skopje, 22 September 2010

Thank you everyone. Good evening, Rector Bojadziev, Dr. Grcev, Dr. Nenovski, Mr. Gagovski - and other distinguished guests, faculty, students, parents and family members. It is an honor to be here this evening and it is a pleasure to return for a second year – and especially to be back in the company of academics and students. My first career, before joining the State Department, was as a teacher and as a university lecturer. As Educational Attaché for the Embassy, I greatly enjoy working with university students and encouraging them to consider study opportunities in the United States like the Fulbright program. Teaching was the greatest job I ever had. But I'll tell you this – being a student was a lot more fun. Staying up late every night to read, drink coffee and argue about ideas until the morning ... Not as easy to do with a full-time job and a couple of kids. So I ask you to do this – enjoy your time as a student. Use this time of your life to explore and play with ideas. This is your opportunity to create your own future – to have the time to pursue new interests and to travel the world – but also to travel the realm of the mind. So I encourage you to dream big – but to also pay attention to the small details of student life – the quality of your work, the quality of your studies and the quality of your friends. The ideas of your fellow students are just as interesting and important as your own. Your conversations after class and in the cafes should carry on the discussion from class. As you build your future, and build your connections with each other, you build the future of this country – and you are already doing it, together, in the classroom, everyday.

President Obama said that the accomplishments of the United States in the 20th century were not an accident and they were not a gift and they were not the work of one person. They were the result of hard work and discipline and sacrifice, and an ambition that served a common purpose. They came from a society that worked together to make a better future for themselves and for their children. And they taught their children to always work toward something better than they had.

Your parents and your professors want that better future for you as well. So when you have a difficult text to read or a challenging paper to write – remember that each task is a step – another step towards the life you build for yourself. Take the long view – look down the road – and keep walking and working towards that horizon. No one else can do this for you. This is your journey – seek out your opportunities, step by step, day by day.

We are all here to watch you get there – your parents, your professors and your friends. So show us how it is done. Show us how you are going to get there.

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