

**Welcome to the Rhodes Scholar class of 2010  
by the Warden of Rhodes House, Oxford,  
Dr Donald Markwell,  
Rhodes House, Saturday 2 October 2010**

Scholars –

It is so good to see you here today at this important and exciting, if in some ways slightly daunting, moment in your life's journey.

When, last Monday morning, with Bob Wyllie, Krista Slade, and two later-year Scholars, I met the Canadian and Indian Scholars at Heathrow, one of the newly-arrived Scholars, astonishingly alert after a long flight, did what the *Unofficial Guide* suggested always worked with me, and started a conversation by reference to the pet kangaroo my family had when I was a little boy in the Outback of Australia a long time ago.

This got me thinking – thinking about the journey through life that by some route has brought each of us, from some far corner of the globe that we call home, to this home of the Rhodes Scholarships today. Let me say what cannot be stressed enough – how warmly welcome you are, how delighted my colleagues and I are that you are here, how keen we all are to get to know you, to encourage you in your progress and to encourage and support you even more when things are down.

Few Rhodes Scholars doubt that their time in Oxford is life-transforming. A world of new opportunities is now opening to you – a world of potential friendships and experiences you have probably not imagined; and neither you nor I know in what ways this experience will transform you. But being open to opportunity and change requires a willingness to try out new things and to take risks. Rhodes Scholars, though often rightly seeking self-improvement, are often also risk-averse, and often, having never had to practise the fine art of coming back after failure, have not yet developed the skills of resilience we all need. I hope that in your time here you will take risks, and think about how to improve your skills of overcoming the inevitable stumbles and even traumas life will unavoidably bring.

Your time in Oxford is not only a chance to try new things, and to embrace rather than judge or repel what is unfamiliar; it is also a chance to pause. You are here because you have been exceptionally successful in your studies and in extra-curricular activities. While we of course want you to remain successful in these ways, now is also a chance to pause, take stock, reflect, and consider where you want to go in life's journey, and how you will along the way make the most valuable contribution you can to the lives of others. Think about your development as a person in all its aspects. By this I do not mean planning furiously for the next urgent step in your breathless progress to exalted office. I do mean thinking about the things that really matter to you in life, the deep passions or inner drivers, the aspirations or the callings, that will motivate you in a life of leadership and service;

the aptitudes you have and how to give them best play; and the weaknesses you have and how to overcome or at least manage them.

When I ask you, as I will, what you want to be doing in 25 years' time, or what you think you need to do to be ultimately satisfied that you have lived a good life, I am not trying to encourage obsessive careerism or a Soviet-style five-year plan for your life: I am trying to encourage you to reflect on how you can make the greatest difference in the areas that matter most to you. I am also trying to encourage you to think about how you can best use your time in Oxford to prepare yourself for your life and career beyond. Consider the deep purposes of your life, and how and when you will give best expression to them.

This is a paradox: in the intense, sometimes exhaustingly intense, busy-ness of Oxford nonetheless to 'smell the roses' and reflect on the things that matter most. As with so many things in life, this requires balance. Another paradox is that this is one of the great experiences of your life – I never doubted that for myself, and I doubt if you will doubt it for yourself – but at times it may also feel like one of the hardest, most homesick, or loneliest times. When this happens, aided by the descent into long grey wet winter, remember that you are not alone. Many others have felt this way before – 'Oxford blues' is a familiar phrase – and many others will be feeling it at the same time as you. Experience suggests that the 6<sup>th</sup> week of every term, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of Hilary term, are the deepest moments for many – though sadness and depression do not necessarily obey any timetable. You are also not alone because there are people here to help – your fellow Rhodes Scholars, other students, college nurses and doctors and other advisors, staff of the University counselling service, and many of us here at Rhodes House. Do not hesitate to seek help, even just to talk. Please do read the advice from later-year Scholars, born of their experience, on 'Oxford blues' in your welcome pack.

We at Rhodes House cannot promise to solve all problems for you – academic, personal, financial, or other – but two things are certain: one, that we will do everything we can; and two, that the only problems we definitely cannot help with are the ones we don't know about. Please do let us know early of problems you see coming – for example, talk early with Mary Eaton – and enable us to do what we can to help. More generally, of course, try to stay ahead of difficulties – plan ahead, deal early with problems, discuss them with your friends, other advisors and us; think in advance about your strategies for minimizing and managing stress.

All of this is also an indirect way of saying that as a Rhodes Scholar you are a member of a community – a Rhodes community in Oxford, and a global Rhodes community of Scholars from many nations and generations around the world. I hope that you will be active in the Rhodes community here and, once you leave Oxford, as a Rhodes alumnus over the decades ahead.

One of the most valuable opportunities you have in the Rhodes community is the opportunity to get to know exceptional people from many countries, including people who will be leaders in all sorts of fields around the world over the decades ahead. You can develop a community of friends from many countries – a global network of future leaders who are your friends – but only by extending the hand of friendship, and by taking it when it is offered to you. Remember also that this is a community

and not a clique – and please do not let your nationality or other group of Rhodes Scholars be seen as a clique within the Rhodes community.

While you are a member of the Rhodes community, you are – importantly and simultaneously – a member of several other Oxford communities as well – your college, your course or department, the communities associated with your extra-curricular activities, for many a faith community, and perhaps others. Our Rhodes activities seek to supplement, not to supplant, the other communities of belonging and engagement to which you belong, and we hope you will take an active involvement in them, including most especially in your college.

With an educational philosophy that emphasised the development of ‘breadth’ and engagement with fellow students from different backgrounds, including of course British students, Cecil Rhodes was keen that Scholars have all the benefits of college life in Oxford, including that they be based in colleges all around Oxford and not clustered in a few. Whatever your college, throw yourself into it and make the most of it.

There will be many aspects of Oxford that may seem puzzling at first, old-fashioned, inefficient, mysterious. Once you have become familiar with them, many of them will come to seem charming; others you will realise are part of the unfathomable genius of one of the world’s greatest and most distinctive universities; and others you will, I hope, develop the wisdom simply to accept without judgment.

You are here because you applied for and accepted a scholarship based on a vision and on values. Rhodes’s vision was that, by bringing exceptional all-round students into the collegiate environment of Oxford, you – we – could be broadened in perspective and encouraged to see public duties as our highest goal, and that by the mixing of Scholars and other students of this and many other countries international understanding and indeed peace would be promoted. The values are inherent in this vision and in the criteria on which Rhodes Scholars are chosen – criteria of excellence in intellect, character, capacity for leadership, and commitment to service. Let me say a little about each of these in turn.

**Intellect.** You were chosen as a strong student and admitted to a course because you were judged to be academically well suited and motivated for it. If you are like I was when I first came to Oxford, you will be quietly fearing that now you will be found out – now it will at last come out that you aren’t really up to it, or as good as all these other students. Don’t believe a word of it. You were chosen for a Rhodes Scholarship and admitted to Oxford because you *are* up to it. But don’t go to the other extreme. You will only do well by working hard – working hard combined, I hope, also with a rich and balanced life of extra-curricular activities, including the purposeless enjoyment of friendships and many moments of idle reflection. During this year, many Scholars will make applications and receive offers for second or third year programs – most commonly the DPhil – which depend on meeting academic conditions. Do not take those conditions for granted. It will be important to discuss your second and third year options with Mary Eaton and with me; and essential also that, if you have doubts about your current course, you talk with Mary also. Please do not lift a muscle without talking with Mary!

Oxford should be a period of further intellectual growth for you. It is especially good at helping you develop greater capacity for clarity of thought – for rigorous analysis – and for clarity of expression. It places a strong emphasis on thinking, writing, and speaking with precision. It often does this through a strong emphasis on questions. ‘What exactly do you mean?’ and ‘Why do you say this?’ are two. In many fields of life – certainly in leadership in any field – one of the keys to achievement is the art of asking the right questions – fundamental questions that penetrate to the core of what is at stake. Oxford is the home of good, if hard, questions. Your thesis, if you write one, will probably best be conceived as answering a very precise question. If you sit exams, the best advice I can give you, far more important than it probably sounds, is ‘answer the question’ – answer the specific question that is set. When you come to see me, what you may think is my giving you advice will actually most often be my trying to help you identify the right questions for you to ask yourself, and suggesting some possible ways for you to answer them for yourself.

Your Oxford studies are in a context where you have the opportunity both to pursue one or more fields of specialization, and importantly to develop further the breadth of knowledge needed to understand your specialization in context, to see the often ever-evolving links between apparently separate fields of study, to be able to respond well to a changing world, and to be an educated person. You can develop breadth through, for example, going to almost any lecture or seminar on any lecture list in the University, to special lectures, to clubs and societies, to the cultural activities with which Oxford and London are so rich, and through friendships with students, including Rhodes Scholars, of disciplines, of countries, and of backgrounds different from your own.

Not only is postgraduate study, which most of you are now entering for the first time, usually less prescriptive – for example, about precisely what to read – than undergraduate study, but Oxford is traditionally particularly unprescriptive about what you need to study. The traditional Oxford doctrine is that you are expected to master a field of study, not a narrow topic, and to have your own well-considered lines of interpretation on the issues that count, not just to have read and recycled particular chapters or articles. All this requires a greater degree of individual initiative and capacity for independent study than many students are used to. This – and all the immense array of enriching extra-curricular activities – requires careful attention to the management of time.

In all of this, though you are likely to receive more individual attention, you are also likely to receive less prescriptive guidance and less affirmation from those who teach or supervise you than you may be accustomed to. Oxford may be the home of piercing questions, but it is not the home of personal or academic affirmation. Do not expect anyone to fall at your feet. That stopped when you ceased to be an undergraduate, perhaps when you hopped on the plane. It is quite likely that the invaluable intellectual challenge and stretching you will face, perhaps combined with less affirmation than you may be used to or (being human) need, will shake your confidence for a while, perhaps a long while. But experience shows that the chances are very high that you will emerge sharper and stronger, including with well-justified confidence about what you are good at and well-founded modesty about what others are better at.

**Character.** Cecil Rhodes was very clear about attributes he wanted to see in his Scholars. Some Scholars have heard me speak about this earlier in the week. As well as referring to ‘moral force of character and ... instincts to lead’, Rhodes specified attributes wanted: ‘qualities of ... truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness, and fellowship’. As some have heard me say before, the winning of a Rhodes Scholarship is not a certificate to say that you have such character; it is a lifelong challenge to you to show that you do. It is a challenge to live a life of integrity and authenticity. Your character will continue to be judged by your fellow Rhodes Scholars and by the communities you serve over the years and decades ahead.

One part of character is the courage to stand up to authority when justice demands that. Another is not believing that the rules don’t apply to you. The Rhodes Scholarship has very few rules, set out in the Handbook which you have and should read carefully; I hope that none of you will need reminding of them. Wilful or wilfully ignorant breach of the rules will not bring forth from me the kindness which was another of Rhodes’s desired attributes of character.

One of the important questions for Rhodes Scholars is how to combine the apparently saintly qualities of unselfishness that are sought with the more assertive qualities and the relentless ambition often considered necessary for success in many fields of public and business life. The answer lies in part in the first two attributes I quoted from Cecil Rhodes: truth and courage; living a life of integrity and showing moral courage; knowing what you believe and standing firmly – fighting - for it.

This leads us to the connection between character and **leadership**. Rhodes Scholars should be leaders, in whatever fields, whose leadership is grounded in ethics and integrity. Goodness knows how much all our countries need excellent leadership, and ethical leadership. I hope that one of the topics on which you will reflect while you are in Oxford and over the years beyond is on the nature of leadership, and how you can be the best leader you can be. My own favourite definition of leadership is that it is doing what is needed to get a community or organisation to deal effectively with its real issues.

Two attributes of excellent leadership that are much spoken of today are humility, and emotional intelligence. The business writer Jim Collins is well known for his notion of ‘level 5’ leadership, the most effective form of leadership, which combines personal humility with resolute professional focus and will. Humility is not a quality that comes naturally to all Rhodes Scholars, but it is worth working at.

A few months ago we had at Rhodes House a talk on leadership from Rhodes Scholar Joseph Nye, author of, amongst much else, a book called *The Powers to Lead*. Joe Nye lists six skills needed for leadership, and one of these is emotional intelligence. This too is worth working at – for example, as you engage with British people both in and out of Oxford, as you develop friendships with Rhodes Scholars and other students from other countries, seek to develop your capacity for empathy. Try to understand them, and do not rush to judgement. The development of empathy will increase your capacity to understand, appreciate, and get the most from whatever new environments you enter, whatever new people you encounter, and it will increase your capacity to lead effectively.

One of the phrases you will often hear in the Rhodes community is that Rhodes Scholars should fight ‘the world’s fight’. This is one way of expressing the idea that the purpose of leadership should be **service**. While all Rhodes Scholars are called to do something with their lives that will make the world better than it would otherwise be, our tradition has never been to be prescriptive about what form this service should take. The lives of so many Rhodes Scholars, good people making a difference for good in so many corners of the world, reflect diverse pathways. Each person and each path is unique. Part, I hope, of what you will reflect on over your time in Oxford is what your unique form of service will be; what you will do with your life that will make the greatest difference you can for good in the world. As you reflect on this large and crucial question, there are many opportunities as a Rhodes Scholar to serve communities near and far, including through Rhodes activities such as – just to name one – the Rhodes Scholars’ Southern Africa Forum, and through activities in the wider community.

Without becoming insular, one community that requires service is the Rhodes community itself. All of us have been given a life-transforming opportunity through what a Scholar in the year above you described as ‘this incredible gift’ of a Rhodes Scholarship. It is my hope that both in Oxford and over the decades beyond you will do all you can to help ensure that ‘this incredible gift’, of which you are now a beneficiary, is equally available to future generations of exceptional young people like you - young people who, as you will do, will make a difference for good in the world. If I did not believe in the importance of this, I would not be standing here today.

Today it is my immense privilege and pleasure to welcome you – to Britain (which it feels odd for an Australian to do!), to Oxford, to postgraduate study, to the Rhodes community in Oxford, to the global community of Rhodes Scholars. You have multiple transitions to manage, and multiple opportunities to seize. All of us here at Rhodes House will do all we can to help. We are delighted that you are here – and I hope that you are too.