

“Making the Most of a Magical Opportunity”

PKU Shenzhen Welcome Ceremony

Jeffrey S. Lehman

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President Zhou Qifeng. Vice Mayor Wu Yihuan.
Chancellor Hai Wen. Fellow faculty members, staff colleagues, and Beida students,

It is my honor, on behalf of the faculty, to welcome our newest students to the Shenzhen Graduate School of Peking University.

This is an exciting moment for you, as you begin the next chapter in your lives of accomplishment and contribution. It is also an exciting moment for us.

For a professor, there is nothing like the beginning of a new academic year. Each year at this time, our school is renewed, our lives are renewed. You bring fresh experiences, fresh personalities, and fresh ideas. We are so very happy that you are all here, and that the time has come for us to begin our work together.

In speaking to you this morning, I have been inspired by a movie that I saw last month: Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part II. Ever since I saw the movie, I have been thinking about how the three main characters – Harry, Hermione, and Ron – were changed by their school, the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

I see many similarities between the Hogwarts School

and the Peking University Shenzhen Graduate School.

Hogwarts is located in a very special place, and so are we. If you have not lived in Shenzhen before, you will quickly come to know it and love it. For thirty years, Shenzhen has been China's City of Progress and Change. Shenzhen has a bold spirit of experimentation and it eagerly engages the world outside China.

Because of that bold spirit, Beida welcomed the invitation to establish a campus here. Beida is, after all, China's University of Progress and Change. For the past 100 years, Beida has led China's intellectual engagement with the rest of the world. Now Beida has chosen to use this campus as a place where the university's historic values can be expressed in an exciting new context.

Our campus has other similarities to Hogwarts beyond its location. Both schools have beautiful flowers and a large athletic stadium. To be admitted for study at either school, a student must be truly magical. Each boasts professors who offer profound insights into their domains of specialized knowledge. The Headmaster of Hogwarts is an inspiring leader, Albus Dumbledore, and our Chancellor Hai is just as inspiring.

Because the schools are so similar, Harry Potter offers lessons about how you should live your lives here. This morning I would like to stress three of those lessons. But I encourage you afterwards to think about what other lessons you might draw.

The first lesson comes from thinking about Harry Potter and his voice. In the first book, when the students first arrive at Hogwarts, they are each assigned to one of four Houses – Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, or Slytherin. They are assigned by a magical Sorting Hat, which is placed on the student's head and then announces where the stu-

dent should go.

When the Sorting Hat is placed on Harry's head, it starts to assign him to the Slytherin House, but he objects. He says he does not want to be put there, and so the Hat changes its mind and assigns him to Gryffindor.

Before you came here, it is quite likely that you took your assignments from others. Whether it was your parents or your teachers, others made the most important decisions for you. And it would be natural, while you are here, to try to continue that pattern. It would be natural to look to your teachers for direction about what to choose as your concentration, your thesis topic, or your first job after you graduate.

I urge you to resist that temptation. Here is the place where you should begin to develop your own voice. It is not easy to look inside yourself, to listen carefully to your own emotions, to be thoughtful about your life goals, to make a decision, and to find the voice to express your own true preference. It was not easy for Harry to do that either. But that is what you must do if you want to gain maximum value from your education in this magical place.

The second lesson comes from thinking about Hermione Granger and how she overcame prejudice. Students at Hogwarts are witches and wizards – young people with magical powers. Most of the students at Hogwarts have witches and wizards for parents. Many of them have parents who also attended Hogwarts.

A few Hogwarts students, like Hermione, are children of people who did not have magical powers themselves – the people called “Muggles.” A witch or wizard who has two Muggles for parents is called “Muggle born.” But some of the others like Draco Malfoy call them “Mudbloods” and argue that they should be treated as inferior.

Hermione proves all these prejudices to be completely wrong. Although she is in some ways different from the pure blood wizards, in the most important ways she is no different at all. In fact, she proved herself to be the most talented student in the school – brilliant and magical and able to accomplish heroic things.

As wonderful as modern life is, it is not immune to prejudice. Many people still believe that some races are inferior to others, or that women are inferior to men. When you are around such people, it is easy to allow their prejudices to go unchallenged, because it is easier to avoid confrontation.

I urge you to stand up against prejudice. This is a school that recruits only the most exceptional talent. If you open your eyes fairly, you will see that exceptional talent can be found in all races and in both sexes. This is a school that is committed to rewarding merit, so that the Hermiones among us can flourish and achieve their full potential.

The third lesson comes from thinking about Ron Weasley and self-confidence. From the very beginning, Ron seems to be the least talented of the three friends. Harry is uniquely powerful. Hermione is uniquely brilliant. But Ron is ... just Ron. In the final book, the three friends have identified Salazar Slytherin's Locket as something they must destroy. They have acquired the locket and a sword that can destroy it, and the locket starts speaking to Ron.

"I have seen your dreams, Ronald Weasley, and I have seen your fears. ... Least loved, always, by the mother who craved a daughter. ... Least loved, now, by the girl who prefers your friend. ... Second best, always, eternally overshadowed."

Ron wavers, but then he finds the strength to swing the sword and smash the locket, destroying it.

Each of you is remarkably talented. But when you arrive here, at a campus where every student is exceptional, you are almost certain to find someone smarter or more talented than you are. One of your classmates will be a Hermione Granger. When this happens, it will probably be the first time in your life that you have felt this way. And there is a good chance that you will experience a crisis like Ron Weasley.

There is a good chance that you will feel your self-confidence wavering. “Maybe,” you will think, “I’m not really any good at all. Maybe I don’t have what it takes to keep going forward.”

I urge you to work past those fears. You are here because you have unique and special abilities, and because you have the capacity to change the world. You do not need to be the very best here in order to make enormous contributions to a world that desperately needs you. If you begin to doubt yourself, talk with others. Talk with a friend, talk with one of your teachers, express your worries. And let us work with you. Let us bring you back to reality, to a point where you appreciate your true capacities and use them to do great things.

New students of the Peking University Shenzhen Graduate School, your time here will be gone in an instant. Whether you are here for six months or six years, it will be over before you realize it, and you will look back and wonder where the days went. And we, your teachers, will be sad that you are leaving us so soon.

So do not waste even a second. Make your Beida and Shenzhen years a time when you explore new places and new ideas. Stretch yourselves physically and intellectually. Expand your cultural horizons so that you can be effective bridges across cultural boundaries.

Drink deeply from all that this remarkable university and this remarkable city have to offer. And leave your personal mark here, so that history will record the special magic you brought to the Shenzhen Graduate School of Peking University.

Welcome!