

Welcome, the founding class of the Shiv Nadar University, the class of 2015!!

And what a talented class this is. Academically, the class is exceptional with the average PCM in the 12th. board exams being over 90%. And among its members are those that have topped their high school in or are members of the American society of high school scholars. But academics is not all that the class excels in. We have martial arts black belts and national level rifle shooters, bharatnatyam and kathak dancers and quizzards who've been featured in the Limca book of records. We have state level footballers and national level kayak and canoers and we have stamp collector who's nationally recognized. We have talented athletes: a national level high jumper and a member of the winning 4x400 meters relay race at the national games. We even have a gold medalist, not in athletics but in painting. District level table tennis player and top ranked national level debater many who have volunteered their time and efforts to NGOs to help the underprivileged and many more achievements than I have the time to list here. Welcome all of you to the Shiv Nadar University.

And I welcome also the parents, guardians, and friends and relatives of the students of the class of 2015. Parents, we thank you for the trust, faith and confidence you have placed in us. You have turned over to our care your most precious possessions, and you will not be disappointed. Over the next four years we commit to

educating your children to the very best of our abilities equipping them with the learning and skills that will enable them to take their place in the next generation of leaders of the country and beyond. But equally importantly, we consider it part of their education to develop in them the values, commitment and motivation to be exemplary citizens and to dedicate their lives to the betterment of the world. In the past, institutions of higher education have often assumed the role of what in Latin is known as “in loco parentis” or stand-in for parents. And while no institution can replace the care and guidance of family, we commit ourselves to serving to the full extent of our ability as advisors, tutors and guides to your children in the full range of their lives.

In return we ask you to become part of the family of the Shiv Nadar University and consider yourself our partners in the development of the University and its students body. Your, advice and suggestions will play a very important role in shaping the future of this institution and we welcome your engagement in the life of the University. While our doors are open to you at all times during the year we will sometime in February or March of next year host a parents weekend, giving you the opportunity to not just your visit your students but to get a window into the life at campus and the educational and cultural experience of its students. Welcome to SNU.

I hold in my hand a reproduction of the Times of India of August 15, 1947 announcing the birth of a new nation. As Pandit Nehru said in his speech that night in what was then called the Constituent Assembly, at the stroke of midnight the country awoke to life and freedom releasing its long suppressed aspirations. But as he also acknowledged in his speech that night, though India was free, freedom had not been achieved “wholly or in full measure”. Still tied to the British Empire, the fledgling nation faced daunting challenges. Over 100 years of colonialism had left its people poverty stricken and its economy in ruins. Its people had little experience in democracy or self-governance and its society was riven by differences in caste, class, language and religion. Other than the 350 million people of newly independent India, few held out much hope for this new nation. And even among them I’m sure there were doubters. And yet here are 64 years later, in a country that has taken its rightful place as among the great nations of this world. Our GDP is the 10th largest in the world or 4th Largest if you account for the relative purchasing power of its currency with the second fastest growth rate. Over a billion people now call themselves citizens of India. In these past sixty-four years we have reduced poverty, increased literacy, maintained our democracy, unlocked the secret of the atom, ventured into space and won the world cup of cricket, not once but twice. And still as we all know, much more remains to be done for we have only taken just the first few steps into the on-going journey that is nation building.

Today, 64 years almost to the day since India's independence, all of us gathered are witnesses to another birth. And though the birth of one university is in no measure comparable to the birth of a great nation, there are still some similarities between the two. We too have great aspirations for this institution and are challenges too are daunting. To paraphrase Pandit Nehru, We do not launch the university wholly or in full measure. Not all the schools that we're planning are ready, our infrastructure is not yet complete, our faculty and staff are still being hired. And I'm sure that there are people who are skeptical of what we can achieve. And yet I'm confident that 64 years from now the Vice Chancellor of Shiv Nadar University will be able to address the students of the class of 2079 and welcome them to the one of the great universities of the world.

What then is this university that we are creating. What are its foundation and its vision. The motto of the university: Knowledge is the path to freedom is based on our belief that human freedom: be it political freedom; freedom from repression and coercion; freedom from want and hunger; freedom to seize opportunities and realize dreams; freedom of expression and personal development; indeed the full range of freedoms that characterize the human ideal, all are made possible, strengthened and deepened by the acquisition and application of knowledge. The Shiv Nadar University will contribute to the process of creating and disseminating knowledge, cementing the path through which individuals and communities both within and outside India can

realize and exercise these universal freedoms.

The University is an international, multidisciplinary research university with the goal to be among the leading institutions of higher learning in the world. Even though we start today with five undergraduate engineering courses and two small BS and MS courses in Mathematics, the University will soon offer a full range of academic degree programs including undergraduate, postgraduate and professional degrees and will shortly establish schools for the study of the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, business, communication and education.

Our mission is to develop students with the breadth of vision, knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to shoulder the globally responsible and ethical leadership burdens of the 21st Century and beyond. The University will have a strong emphasis on leadership, responsibility and service to society. Its interdisciplinary focus will prepare students not only to specialize in specific disciplinary areas but also to develop a broad-based learning foundation that incorporates a range of academic disciplines. Our vision is to institute an interdisciplinary undergraduate curriculum in which all students are required to take courses in a range of subjects, while also specializing in, and gaining mastery of the subject of their choosing: a combination of disciplinary depth and multidisciplinary breadth. The undergraduate curriculum at SNU will also place heavy emphasis on experiential learning and all students will be required to

participate in some form of internship, practicum or service learning program.

Our ambitions for undergraduate education at SNU are high, and unprecedented in the recent history of higher education in India: to provide students an integrated multidisciplinary education over four years regardless of the discipline of their choosing. Such an academic structure is foreign to the current Indian university system and draws heavily from the contemporary American college system. However, we are also inspired and motivated by the fact that the tradition of interdisciplinary education runs deep in India's intellectual heritage dating back to the great centers of learning of ancient India -- Takshashila and Nalanda – and even before them to the Gurukul system of the Vedic era. As relevant as it was then, we believe such an approach is as vital today and essential for the enduring education of our students; for fostering their ability to integrate critical thinking, scientific exploration and normative principles into their worldview; and for their preparation as future leaders in a complex, changing, and unpredictable world.

As in any great building, the most important first step is the laying of the foundation. The foundation of SNU upon which the future of the university will rest is its faculty. We can only achieve our vision for the University through an internationally recognized faculty with a passion for research and teaching and an academic environment that values and rewards innovation, bold ideas, freedom of inquiry and the search for truth. The University will seek to recruit exceptional faculty in India and abroad by offering opportunities and resources for research, the best and brightest students to teach

a commitment to academic freedom and social relevance and competitive compensation. We will consciously identify and recruit faculty who believe that teaching, research, scholarly or creative production and service to the campus, community, their profession and society at large should be integrated in a seamless continuum. We have already made a great start with the founding faculty whom you will get a chance to meet shortly.

High ambitions in and of themselves lead to little good unless guided by equally strong values. In pursuing our mission as a premier center for higher education and learning, we are guided by these values and principles that serve as the pillars of the University's intellectual and moral edifice:

- ❖ freedom of inquiry and the creation of an intellectual environment conducive to the free, open and respectful exchange of ideas;
- ❖ academic excellence, initiative and integrity in an environment of collaboration, collegiality and civility;
- ❖ engaged teaching and learning based on dialogue, student involvement and experiential learning;
- ❖ research, scholarship and creative activity as fundamental sources of new knowledge, contributions to the betterment of society and expressions of the human spirit;

- ❖ recognition and respect for the diversity of people and ideas, a spirit of inclusiveness, a global perspective, and a sense of community as essential conditions for campus life;
- ❖ the cultivation of character and the modeling of honesty, integrity, compassion, fairness, respect and ethical behavior, both in the classroom and beyond;
- ❖ a commitment to social justice and public service as the foundation of individual, educational, social, economic and political development;
- ❖ Environmental consciousness, sustainability and prudent management of natural resources as central tenets of the construction and operation of the university
- ❖ responsible stewardship and thoughtful reflection, collaboration, planning and evaluation as essential for meeting the changing needs of those we serve.

Let me end where I began – with the students of the founding class of SNU. Ladies and gentleman for you now no longer boys and girls -- This is your moment – seize it. We at the very university and you your parents, friends and family have placed a lot of faith in you. Exceed our expectations. In fact, exceed your own expectations. These four years will be among the most formative

for you – so take everything the university has to offer academic or extra-curricula and then push us to offer you more. Learn from us – but learn also more from each other. Set aside the boundaries and identities that divide you and forge a true community -- build a microcosm of the kind of society you'd like to live in – as Gandhiji said – be the change you want to see in the world.

Very few students ever have the chance to be part of a founding class and to have the tremendous opportunity to participate in the shaping of a university and its culture. You have this opportunity – embrace it. Participate, contribute, engage. But always remember that with great opportunity comes great responsibility. Yours will be the most talked about class for years – think about how you want to be talked about. Set the standards high for the classes to come and you will be remembered as institution builders, set the standards low and you'll soon be forgotten. The choice is yours. Our commitment to you is that we will give our very best to your education and development. All we ask is that you do the same.

I'd like to end this address with a poem, an invocation really by Rabindra Nath Tagore. It was written for a nation but applies equally to our enterprise and I've taken the liberty of adapting the words accordingly:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let this, the Shiv Nadar University
awake.