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Welcome Address

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To the incoming freshmen of the College of Arts—welcome. You have just set foot in the space called university. You are probably feeling some excitement, along with a touch of anxiety. You may not fully sense it yet, but in time you will come to feel that university life is at once truly liberating and truly agonizing. And so today, I would like to offer three things that may serve as a compass when you reach that realization and begin to chart the course of your university years.

First: Read—voraciously.

Your time right now is genuinely precious, because the seeds you plant in this period will become assets that last your entire life. If the thought “I don’t know what I should be doing” ever crosses your mind, go to a world-literature collection and pull out any volume at all. Pick one because you like the title, because the cover catches your eye, because something simply draws you to it. Sitting in a quiet corner of the library, holding your breath as you turn the pages, trembling at a single sentence—that moment sculpts your soul. That time does not vanish. Even when it seems forgotten, it lives and breathes somewhere in your memory, and at some unexpected moment it rises up to propel your thoughts and your choices. That is how the assets of your soul are built, and how they become the inexhaustible wellspring of creativity and imagination that will sustain you for a lifetime.

Second: No experience is ever wasted.

Anything you have tried to learn, anything into which you have poured your time and energy, will return to you—in one form or another—with more than you invested. So do not agonize over which path might be the special shortcut. Trust your own instincts and fill your time with a wealth of experiences. If you attend your classes faithfully and manage your grades well, the professors who guide you will do their very best to help you grow. That said, there may come a moment when you feel, “There is nothing more for me to learn in this class.” When that happens, do not react emotionally. Do not recklessly demolish the flow of your studies. Instead—within that framework,

or outside it—find a different avenue for growth. What matters is this: do not abandon the process, and yet do not let yourself stand still. The time you invest with sincerity never disappears.

Third: Broaden your horizons.

When I was studying in New York, students at the city’s universities could enter MoMA and the Met Museum free of charge. The Met Opera and the New York Philharmonic had excellent student-discount programs as well. Every week I received the intense stimulus of contemporary art in MoMA’s galleries, and attending the opera each week was one of my greatest pleasures.

I am not an art major. But as a consumer of the arts, I must say that visiting domestic museums sometimes feels like drinking flat sparkling water. As for opera, I have stopped expecting much altogether—because I know how difficult it is to find singers, orchestras, and productions here that meet that standard.

Your peers who have enrolled at NYU, Columbia, Parsons, or Pratt enjoy the stimulation that city provides as a matter of daily life. You must acknowledge the fact that you do not stand on the same starting line as they do. If that is so, what must you do to stand shoulder to shoulder with them? Instead of spending your part-time earnings on the latest iPhone or a healing trip to a Southeast Asian resort, if at all possible, go and live in New York or London for a month or two. See for yourself. Listen for yourself. Feel for yourself. Raise the bar of your own vision. The assets that your environment does not hand you—you must go out and claim them yourself.

You now stand at the starting point. The time you spend in the Departments of Arts at Chungbuk National University will produce entirely different outcomes depending on how you use it.

- Read.
- Never discard an experience.
- Broaden your horizons.

And do not spend these four years vainly.

Welcome to your new beginning.