

Welcome!

I am quite honored to have been asked to give this first first lecture.

Being in Physics I was not quite sure what I should talk about: the coefficient of static friction between rubber and metal or perhaps the interaction of the cupboard spice turmeric with acids and bases. Since most of you have not brought your calculators or even a pencil and paper I thought better of it.

Today, I would like to briefly talk about three important aspects of a university experience: traditions, decisions, and understanding.

I always think that it is very impressive to see a university faculty march in wearing their fancy academic robes. It is interesting to note that these date back nearly 700 years to when the first universities were being founded in northern Europe. Professors needed heavy robes (with hoods) just to stay warm in those old, drafty, unheated university building. Where the funky little square hats came from I have no idea.

Today, I no longer wear heavy robes, but I do often wear a lab coat to protect my other clothes. Perhaps in 700 years faculties will march in wearing fancy lab coats. Maybe even goggles! Everyone will think they look so distinguished!

But all traditions are not so formal and distinguished. We often say that a student who wants to get into a class after it has started, wants to "green card" into the class. Why? Because that is what we have always called it! In the dark recesses of a long time ago, students had to get a green IBM punch card and turn it in at the registrar's office. We haven't used IBM punch cards in years but we still call it "green carding" into a class.

But there are also going to be the personal traditions such as the whole gang going for pizza at Roma's every Tuesday night or meeting your best friend at the UC after your 2 o'clock classes to talk about everything. These are probably the most important traditions of all. You will always remember them. Savor them.

I personally can remember when I was just starting college. Yes, that was back in the middle ages sometime. There were not preview days back then. Freshmen came up a week early for orientation. It was during this week we did all the paper work and registering for class. I can remember very clearly sitting on the steps of the student union filling out a forms.

I had grown up with a cousin who was 4 years older than me. He had majored in math and I had always planned on doing the same. But sitting there filling out form, I thought how this was the first year the college was offering a physics major and how much I had enjoyed physics in high school, so I decided to mark down my major as physics. It was a simple decision then but it has certainly had a profound impact on the rest of my life.

In college you will make a number of decisions, some of them large (should I marry him or not) some of the small (do I want fries with that). It is not always easy to tell which are the important ones. Do your best. In high schools the school and your parents made most of the decisions. College is a time to learn how to make your own decisions.

College is also a time to ask and find out why. Students in high school (I know because I taught high school for 23 years) often think they are good students because they have memorized the answers and gotten good grades

on the tests. While we still have grades here in college, after all it is one of our traditions, you should expect more of yourself than simple memorization because you are here for is an education not just a grade.

One of my favorite demonstrations might be a good example. Some time ago I was in a thrift store and bought this nice brass vase. When I got it home, I discovered that a genie lived in the vase and I have brought the base to prove to you that genies really do exist. Now she is too shy to actually come out and say hello but when I put this piece of rope into the bottle she can grab it and hold on. Oh, but I forgot, genies always take a nap in the afternoon and usually don't wake up before 6pm. If I turn the bottle upside down I can usually wake her.

See, she has grabbed the rope and is holding on so the vase does not fall.

So far this has been a nice little story, but I hope you have not really been taking notes because this demonstration has not really been about genies. It is really a lesson on the coefficient of friction between rubber and metal. You see inside the vase is a rubber ball and when I turned it upside down, the ball rolled down and wedged itself between the metal vase and the rope and held every thing there by friction.

While we can all be entertained by the simple stories, it is the understanding that is key. It is really science not magic that is important. In college, it is the understanding that we hope you are really here for. You may have to dig for it, but if you do, you will have really gotten an education whether you remember the simple stories or not.

I have talked about traditions, decisions and understanding as fundamental parts of the university experience. I was even able to work in the coefficient of friction, how can I slip in the action of turmeric with acids and bases. I know! Here I have some goldenrod paper. It is dyed this golden color with turmeric. When I spray a weak base on it you can see:

Welcome to UNC

Thanks you and enjoy your next four years.