

PRESIDENT'S AWARD LUNCHEON REMARKS

DR. IVAN SASCHA SHEEHAN

Remarks As Transcribed:

Thank you, President Schmoke.

Thank you all.

I was once introducing a prominent politician at an event in Washington and I prefaced my introduction by noting, "the next speaker needs no introduction."

But as President Schmoke was giving that very warm and generous introduction, I was reminded of a cartoon – sometimes referenced by Dwight Eisenhower – that featured a speaker being introduced and it said: "The next speaker needs *ALL* the introduction he can get."

I think I just received *ALL* of the introduction and welcome that I could have possibly hoped for.

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Let me begin by extending my heartfelt appreciation to all of you for coming out today.

It means the world to me have you here – as colleagues, partners, and fellow educators.

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Let me also thank the extraordinary team in the Office of the President – especially Susan, Kathleen, Donna, and Joanne...

I've seen behind the curtain and I know how hard they worked to pull together this event.

And they do so each year not to honor a single faculty member but because this luncheon – held during *Convocation* week – is meant to praise the dedication of all of the educators at our university and to remind us of the values we share in common.

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And thank President Schmoke for this high honor and extraordinary privilege.

Your career in public service is an inspiration to all of us in the public affairs field...

...and to have your confidence means more than words can say

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My remarks today were prepared with an important principle in mind.

As President Schmoke reminded at his investiture last spring:

For remarks to be *memorable*, they need not be *eternal*.

There's actually a similar saying in Ireland where my family is from:

In Ireland they say that a good keynote address is like the *body* at an Irish funeral. They need you to get everyone together...

But nobody anticipates that you'll say very much!

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Often my remarks in public forums are heavily prescribed:

- (1) I'm speaking on my evidence-based counterterrorism research at an academic conference, as I was last week;
- (2) I'm speaking on a policy oriented matter on Capitol Hill or at a think-tank;
- (3) Or I'm in the classroom tackling whatever course content we have scheduled for that day.

But I was told today that I could talk about anything I wanted and what a unique invitation that is.

I see my remarks today as an opportunity unpack and integrate my journey to date – to look back...

...but also to look forward.

Today I'm going to do a few simple things:

- I'm going to tell you about the people I admire most and why they inspire me
- I'm going to talk about why I believe that an educator's guiding star should be *making a difference*.
- And I'm going to say *thank you* as I open a new chapter in my journey.

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It wasn't that long ago that I was sitting in the audience supporting my colleagues Chris Spencer and then Heather Pfeifer – never expecting in a million years to be standing here myself.

So my advice is simple: Begin preparing your remarks right now!

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As I prepared to speak today, I reached out to a number of individuals at the university to ask them what made prior talks so successful.

I was reminded again and again of the extraordinary accomplishments of my colleagues.

Prior award recipients are mentors and colleagues, people who I hold up as examples, and people who have mentored, influenced, and invested in me.

I won't attempt to name each of you – I'd almost certainly forget someone who was important – but please know how grateful I am to you for your confidence in me.

I asked one mentor what I should do today and she gave me what might be the best advice I received:

She told me to Skip the talk, arrange everyone in a circle, and pass my son around...

I won't do that but if you promise to stay until the end... he will be available for photos ☺ -- for a small fee.

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Today I'd like to talk to you about something very simple and yet incredibly profound:

I'd like to speak to you about why I believe that educators can and must *seek to make a difference*.

But first I'd like to begin by introducing you to my beautiful family.

My extraordinary wife, Dr. Kerunne Ketlogetswe, took the day off from her Cardiology practice to be here today.

I asked her out to dinner 18 years ago this fall.

I'm pretty sure I didn't look like a guy that would be getting an award...

And I'm certain that she never saw a day like this in my future...

But her love and companionship has given meaning to my life...

...and I can't imagine this journey without her.

She keeps me grounded, doesn't let my ego get too big, and reminds what's really important in life...

18 years ago – as she learned more about me – she did insist that I make promise:

She made me promise that I would never go into *Politics*.

It's a promise that I've kept.

And it's a good thing I did – because it led me here...

...to do something even better:

Political Science!

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8 months ago she gave me the greatest gift in the world: Our little boy, Thapelo DeVere Sheehan.

He's the handsome little guy in the bow tie.

He won't remember any of this but someday I'll tell him about it...

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I'm also joined today by my parents: Drs. David and Kathy Sheehan.

Their distinguished careers in medicine and academia inspired my own journey.

Seldom in life does one have an opportunity to issue such a public expression of gratitude.

All that I am today and all that I've done, I ultimately owe to them.

Without them my journey would not have been possible and I certainly wouldn't be standing here today.

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Today is the culmination of a series of events and experiences in my life.

You may come to see *my work* is part of larger *generational* journey on which my family embarked generations ago.

I come from a long line of educators – at least 6 immediate, sequential generations.

They say that we do what we know...and I've been surrounded by *educators* all of my life.

My Great, Great Grandparents were what were called "Hedge Teachers" in Ireland in the 1800's.

This was a time when the Penal Laws – imposed by the British – made education a forbidden pursuit for Irish schoolchildren.

The Penal Laws made it illegal for Irish children to learn to read and write or practice their religion.

The Irish were deemed second-class citizens and the hope was that denying them *access* to education would break their spirit.

Disenfranchisement helped to reinforce status asymmetries so important to domination by the British Crown and denying access to *education* was a tool of statecraft.

"Hedge Teachers" – who were much revered by the communities they served – taught children in the bush and at night to avoid British persecution.

Teachers like my great, great Grandparents were individuals that were well read and often self taught but also individuals who believed – as we do here at the University of Baltimore – that:

- Education isn't a privilege for a select few;
- And that education shouldn't be reserved only for those who hold high station or the means to pursue it.

These were teachers who believed that every child has promise.

These were teachers who believed that education could be transformative –

That it could change communities and transform lives.

These were teachers who believed that through the repetitive acts of individual agents

we undo injustice, we build structures that are more equal, and we improve the human condition for all.

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My Great Grandparents absorbed these values and commitments.

And they too became *hedge* teachers.

Like their parents, they operated under oppressive conditions and worked with children in the shadows.

But when Ireland gained independence in 1922 they developed one of the first free schools to educate Irish schoolchildren.

As *schoolmasters* I'm told that they were strict and principled and expected the best from the children they taught.

Education to them wasn't an optional pursuit – it was a hard earned right that should never be taken for granted.

My Grandfather was the eldest son of these schoolmasters and took up his parent's charge.

He in turn had an extraordinary impact on me.

Aristotle wrote that: "Where your talents and the needs of the world cross; there lies your vocation."

Well, my Grandfather was supremely talented – and he chose *medicine* as his vocation.

He wanted to make a difference and saving lives was the ultimate challenge.

His distinguished career as a surgeon became – for me – the standard of a life well lived.

He lived through World War II where he served in England during the German air raids.

Ireland was neutral during the war but my Grandfather tended to the same soldiers who served under the very Crown that had denied the Irish people basic civil rights.

When the war was over, my grandfather returned home, founded a *teaching* hospital in Ireland – a teaching hospital that still exists today.

He made a mark on generations of surgeons who came from all over to study with him.

He pursued a second doctorate – a Ph.D. – in his 70's at one of Ireland's premier institutions.

His multivolume dissertation became a classic surgical textbook and it occupied a special place on the shelf in his office.

When the first word processor was released prior, my mother offered to run a computerized spell check for him before publication.

As an illustration of his attention to detail and his *perfectionist* ways, he dared her to find a single mistake.

I'm told that I suffer from this same perfectionist affliction.

As a young boy my Grandfather took with him to watch him lecture his medical students.

I was mesmerized by his ability to engage an auditorium full of medical students some sixty his junior.

During these years, Ireland – whose people had been oppressed for generations – made special efforts to attract medical students from around the world, and in particular from countries that also had been denied access to education by the British.

I recall entertaining discussions when he would invite his medical students to join him for tea – it was a virtual United Nations of students around the table.

These experiences and the stories that I heard sensitized me to the broader world around me.

He was ultimately recognized by the Pope for his contributions to medicine, including extensive work on the African continent.

When he passed away one of his students penned his obituary in the *Irish Journal of Medical Science*. He praised him by noting he was the "Ultimate Schoolmaster."

He said that the students referred to him as "Machine-gun Sheehan" – not because he ever fired a weapon – but for the didactic way he would pepper students with questions during his lectures.

One of my most enduring memories, as a young boy, was asking him whom *he* admired – thinking he might turn me on to an individual of great station, influence, or acclaim.

Instead he told me that he admired the great *intellectuals, thinkers, poets, and artists*.

What he was saying was that he admired individuals that created and contributed through the use of their mind –

- individuals that had the courage to create, and not destroy
- individuals with the audacity to hope,
- Individuals with the courage of their convictions
- Individuals guided by their conscience to leave something meaningful behind.

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His eldest son – my father – was and is an educator too.

Like our own Lenneal Henderson – he holds the title of *Distinguished Professor*.

He reminds me that I'm just a lowly Associate Professor.

I remind him that he's *Emeritus*.

In fact, both of my parents are Professors emeritus.

More than anyone else they shaped what I believe is a faculty member's principal task:

Making a difference.

During my childhood, my parents took me with them as they traveled the world to speak at international medical conferences.

These trips took me, among other places, to the Arab world, to Eastern and Western Europe, through Asia, and to the African continent.

During these conferences I would often sit like a fly on the wall through long dinners and discussions.

I heard professionals from one country voicing their distrust of those from another.

But in these meetings I also saw ordinary people actively working at overcoming national and historical barriers by cultivating relationships in a spirit of cooperation that contradicted the conflict-ridden situations I read about in the newspapers and heard about on television.

International schooling reinforced these experiences.

And through them I learned life lessons about the importance of collaboration, communication, cultural sensitivity, and the pursuit of knowledge in a world in which, very often, people see the "truth" differently.

These opportunities provided me with my first window into the world of international conflict resolution.

And they taught me one of the most valuable lessons I've ever learned:

What we can achieve when we work together – in the interest of common goals – is far greater than that which we can achieve when we work alone.

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But these trips also sensitized me to a darker side of the human condition.

- I saw what happens when governments oppress their people.
- I saw what happens human progress and human development is stifled.
- I saw civil and political repression.
- And I saw what happens when academic freedom is curtailed.

I was fascinated by the frequent targets of these oppressive policies – academics and intellectual with influence – and learned to appreciate the unique responsibilities they have in society.

I also grew to appreciate the civil and political liberties we so often take for granted in this country.

Those of you that have consumed my work know that these are all themes that feature prominently in my writing and in my research.

And they inform – to a large degree – the urgency and importance I bring to my teaching.

They also help to explain why I push my students so hard.

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My parents were the early model for my career choices -- not through anything they said but through the example they set.

Believing that my Grandfather had pushed the boundaries of medicine through improvements in surgical techniques, my father set out to map the brain and explore the mind.

His contributions to our understanding of the biological factors complicit in mental illness led to an era of evidence-based, biological Psychiatry, improved diagnoses, and new pharmaceutical therapies.

His contributions quite literally, improved the lives of millions.

He traveled the world captivating audiences with his presentations, writing articles and books, and making scientific contributions to improve lives.

He's still the best public speaker I've ever seen and he's the model for all that I do.

Every little boy looks up to his father. But I admire my father's extraordinary efforts to make a difference now more than ever.

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My Mother too is a professor but a very different type.

She's the type of professor who never gives up on you, helps you to realize your dreams, and pushes you farther than you ever thought you could go.

...the type of professor that invests in you and mentors so that you can achieve your own dreams.

She encouraged my voice...

...told me to reach for the moon...

...and inspired me to write my own story.

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My parents were – and are – an extraordinary team.

I honor them every time I work with a student, deliver public remarks, write an article, or try to make a difference in my own discipline.

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I've tried to carry on the generational legacy that was passed on to me.

And though I abandoned the medical sciences to pursue my global interests, I've tried to make things a little better than I found them.

Today my research focuses on matters related to terrorism, counterterrorism, and international conflict management with an emphasis on U.S. foreign policy.

In an effort to bridge the gap between the ivory tower and the public forum, I speak frequently on policy-oriented matters in Washington, D.C and around the world.

Since arriving at the University of Baltimore in 2009, I've delivered more than a dozen scholarly presentations at academic conferences around the world – meetings in North America, Europe and the Middle East.

But I've also made an effort to speak to policymakers in the U.S. Congress, journalists at the National Press Club, and analysts at think-tanks.

These experiences have sensitized me to the breakneck speed at which policy matters are decided and human cost of inaction.

I've been fortunate to develop a reputation in Washington as a faculty member who can speak alongside current and former U.S. officials and help them find their voice on complex policy issues.

This is the culmination of a realization that I had in the mid 1990's – as a college student – when I went to work as a research assistant on Capitol Hill and discovered that there were virtually no faculty influencing or shaping policy.

I set out on a slow journey to bridge the divide between faculty and the policy world.

My early scholarship – including my first book and several journal articles – involved quantitative analyses of terrorism incident data and the impact of preemptive force on terrorist activity.

I joined with a small group of scholars to make scholarly contributions to the evidence-based counterterrorism literature after the 9-11 attacks.

I wondered then why more U.S. officials weren't interested in measuring the efficacy of the strategies they were deploying in the War on Terrorism.

I built one of the largest terrorism incident databases by compiling terrorism incident data from a number of privately held terrorism incident sources and then mined it for all it was worth.

In recent years I've extended this work to include a range of other topics.

Since coming to UB in 2009 I've published in scholarly journals on:

- Terrorism teaching and terrorism courses
- Terror tagging and terror designation
- Counterinsurgency doctrine
- Suicide terrorism
- And the concept of regime change from within
 - I've tried to better articulate this last concept for policy purposes.
 - I've also offered it as an alternative – a third path – between preemptive war and unlimited engagement with rogue regimes.

My latest work has involved both peer-reviewed scholarship and policy-oriented writing on U.S.-Iran policy and the democratic Iranian opposition in exile.

But I've taken great pains to ensure that my research and writing isn't just meant for consumption by scholars.

In an op-ed titled "Scholars on the Sidelines" the Dean of the Kennedy School of Government, Joseph Nye, observes that scholars are "paying less attention to questions about how their work relates to the policy world."

And this, he notes, is problematic.

This may be, he argues, because advancement comes faster for those who develop mathematical models than for those who contribute to "public dialogue."

But Nye argues that scholars have an "obligation to improve policy ideas when they can" and that such engagement can "enhance and enrich" our academic work.

I agree.

My own policy-oriented commentary – almost 40 op-eds since coming to UB in 2009 – is motivated by a desire to bring ideas beyond the usual realm of academia and into the public sphere.

This writing – written in coffee shops and at all hours of the night, as my wife will attest – has appeared in newspapers in the U.S. and around the world.

Some of these articles have been shared via social media thousands of times in a matter of hours – an audience that would be impossible to reach if I was only to write for academics.

And some of the analyses have been endorsed by senior U.S. officials at Homeland Security, CIA, the Department of State, and in the U.S. Congress.

The articles have even placed pressure on foreign officials during U.S. visits through mentions on TV.

I've even seen the language I used *first* feature in statements delivered by sitting U.S. officials – as happened recently with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran.

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Writing for *Foreign Policy*, Professor Stephen Walt of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government writes:

"Why does so much of the academic writing on international affairs seem to be of little practical value, mired in a "cult of irrelevance"?"

He asks "Is it because many prominent academics fear criticism and are deathly afraid of being controversial, preferring to hide behind arcane vocabulary, abstruse mathematics, or incomprehensible postmodern jargon?"

I'd ask a slightly different question:

Have we created a reward structure in academia that has grown our collective isolation?

In a New York Times article titled "Professors, We Need You," Nicholas Kristoff laments the absence of a faculty presence in many of the great debates of our time.

He writes: "Some of the smartest thinkers on problems at home and around the world are university professors, but most of them just don't matter in today's great debates."

He points out that never before have we had tools to reach mass audiences like we do today but instead many faculty are cloistered in the ivory tower, not engaging real world problems, not informing the public discourse, and keeping their opinions to themselves.

A big reason that I've chosen to stay here at UB...

A big reason that I find my day-to-day interactions so meaningful at this institution is that this isn't the case here.

What's interesting to me is that what I'm doing in wrestling with real world challenges isn't unusual because it's what you're doing too.

I'm surrounded by individuals – in the College of Public Affairs and throughout this university – that have as their primary objective: **making a difference**.

I'm inspired by colleagues developing study abroad courses;

And engaging their students in experiential education;

I'm inspired when I listen to you weigh in on pressing social and political issues affecting our community.

I'm inspired each and every day by people whose metric of success is **IMPACT**, public service, and change.

I'm inspired because you remind me that educators are the true architects of the future by creating sustainable change through the lives you touch.

I'm inspired to work with you because – together – we're more than a university imparting *knowledge that works*, we're a university that's making a difference.

And I'm motivated – like I know that you are – by the most important we all do every day and that's **TEACHING**.

No matter how many talks I give or articles I write, teaching is ultimately what gives me the most satisfaction.

I know you that you feel the same way.

I'm preaching to the choir, but how can one even describe what it feels like:

- When the international student – the first in his family to even go to college – pursues a graduate degree in your program and now works for the U.S. government.
- When the undocumented undergraduate student who feared he wouldn't have an opportunity to succeed in the U.S. gets into one of the finest graduate schools for foreign policy in the country.
- Or when the young woman who you taught was inspired to seek out a teaching position in order to give back, secured a faculty position at a small college in Pennsylvania, and now recommends students to *you* on official university letterhead.

How can one even describe what it feels like when a student brings her nine-year-old son to your class, and puts him in the front row -- so that he can see what *college* looks like...

...so that he has something to aspire to....

I asked him whether my class felt like his school....

He told me it did...

But he also criticized me for not hanging my student's work on the walls!

These are the moments when you really know that you're really making a difference.

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The future looks like what we have here at UB:

- A belief that we can and should serve a diverse community of students
- A conviction that traditional disciplinary boundaries often matter only to academics since problems cut across the disciplinary landscape
- A belief that community engagement and public service matter
- A belief that teaching is every bit as important as research
- A belief that the measure of our scholarship is its impact on human lives.

These are core UB values.

These are the convictions that get me excited and make me hopeful.

But as we look to the future and continue to build innovative programming for our students, we also need to build an incentive structure that rewards policy-oriented work, community engagement, and outspokenness.

Universities of the future won't have the luxury of being home to neutral observers who pursue knowledge just because.

Institutions will need to be forums where faculty are disagreeable about the big issues of the day and bring these disagreements into the classroom or hash them out in the public sphere.

The university of the future will require not just that we build cross-disciplinary programs but that we find new – yet undeveloped tools and means – to assess whether scholars are making a difference.

- Are we informing the public discourse?
- Are we facilitating important public encounters?
- Are we making contributions to communities at the local, the national, or the international levels?

Are we generous with our analyses, bold with our predictions, and willing to insert ourselves into difficult discussions in the public sphere?

Do we have the courage of our convictions or are we playing it safe?

Pursuing knowledge but not really making a difference...

The public, urban university of the future will need to be more than a series of compelling but discreet academic programs.

Faculty will need to be active players in the public discourse;

And administrators will need to protect their academic freedom.

Universities of the future – and particularly Schools of Public and International Affairs – will need to work with students where they are, meet diversity – in all its forms as an opportunity and a challenge.

Universities of the future will need to be safe spaces where students can make up their own minds.

But this doesn't mean that faculty should be neutral.

No, faculty should have opinions, they should share their values, sit on different sides of issues, grow with their students, and above all -- ask questions and more questions and more questions.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the great statesman, Harvard faculty member, and public intellectual had – as he put it – “no pretense of disinterested objectivity...”
The university of the future can be an extraordinary incubator of ideas, a kind of *think and do* tank if you will.

But the Colleges of Public Affairs that will make the biggest impact in the future are the ones that embrace academic freedom and attract scholars that share not just their research, but also their opinions and their best judgments about important social and

political issues.

As conventional institutions isolate themselves from public discussions, unconventional institutions – like UB – can become the forums where we convene public meetings, heighten awareness of the problems we face, engage contested issues, give voice to the voiceless, and sometimes even find common ground.

They can become vehicles for sustainable change and the places to visit when communities need to come together.

Institutions like this will see their currency and their profile rise...

...and communities will come to appreciate them as anchors.

Intellectuals, writers, thinkers, and artists have always been society's imagination.

And faculty are needed more than ever to spark the thoughtful introspection and examination we so rarely see in public life.

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A student who knew that I was receiving this award recently called me to tell me that I had influenced his path and he thanked me for believing in him.

He worried that early life obstacles and challenges would limit his future potential.

He thanked me for pushing him to go farther than he thought he ever could.

He told me that I was a "model" professor – that was the word he used.

I mentioned it to a friend of mine who – in an effort to keep me grounded – reminded that if you look up "model" in the dictionary it says:

"A small version of the real thing"

There are so many people in my life and in this room that are the real thing. I know that – just ten years into my faculty journey – I have more years ahead of me than I do behind me.

But I also have people that continue to inspire me to believe that faculty can make a difference.

I was also taught to believe that to whom much is given, much is expected...

So, President Schmoke, my commitment to you is that I will continue to make contributions alongside my colleagues for years to come –

Contributions through my teaching, research, writing, service, and academic leadership that I hope will lead to a world less victim to violence, terrorism, and persecution.

...And most importantly contributions that will allow every student I work with to live up to their full potential.

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So let me end where I began:

By thanking you all for joining me on this special day.

It has meant the world to me to have you hear as I looked back and looked forward.

And I wish you all a wonderful year ahead as you seek to make a difference in the lives of our students...

....and in all that you do.

Thank you so very much.