

HSMC President Simon Ho's letter to college freshmen encourages an open mind



First of all, I congratulate you all on becoming university freshmen.

You are moving on to a new and crucial stage of your life, and you will be opening yourself to new horizons. You will go through a transition period mixed with excitement and anxiety. You will be excited to meet new friends, and to explore new classes and activities. At the same time, many of you may encounter new challenges such as new learning styles, independent living, time management, interpersonal relationships, financial management, social engagements, etc.

I encourage you to keep an open mind, and to work proactively to make the best of the many learning opportunities and resources on your campus. Rest assured that your teachers will guide and inspire your new campus life, and will also help you overcome any challenges, so that you can mature into a responsible adult.

Before I move on, I would like to ask you two questions. Why do you bother to pursue university study? What competencies do you wish to acquire to be successful in the future? Many of you may think that by studying hard at your professional subjects, and receiving a good degree, you will get a good job with an attractive salary after graduation, and rise even higher up the social scale in the future. I would not disagree with these objectives, although one cannot guarantee they will be achieved, especially in this less stable, competitive, and demanding global environment.



Simon Shun-Man HO

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TAGS

Lessons in life

Just as a university's achievements cannot be judged by its student admission scores, its funding, its ranking, or its graduates' incomes, I believe human life cannot be measured by indicators such as academic achievement, income, wealth, fame, or power. Albert Einstein once said, "Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value." Many important life goals or values come in less physical or tangible forms, such as being honest and just, feeling happy, finding love, building strong relationships, realising your potential, contributing to the community, and enhancing the lives of others.

I believe a university education does more than prepare you for your first job. It prepares you for your future work and life. It also allows you to gain a deeper understanding of yourself, and establish your own personal values. This enables you to handle future challenges confidently, and achieve your life goals. University is a place where you learn to be a self-reflective, soulful, grateful and satisfied person. If you come to university with these ideas in mind, your university education will have more value, and will lead you to a more fruitful and rewarding life.

The common core curriculum, or general education programme, at your institution gives all students common cross-disciplinary learning experiences to prepare you for your pursuit of a liberal approach to life. It will broaden your outlook. Together with the major programme studies and out-of-classroom development activities, you will learn the so-called 21st-century transferrable competencies, comprising needed knowledge, skills, and attitude/character.

Dear students, let me give you four pieces of practical advice to help you realise these ideals.

First, you will meet people from different backgrounds with different views, and you need to learn to respect these views. Always exercise your independent critical thinking before making a judgment. Being 'critical' means to act with a careful attitude, an open mind, and a rational approach. Don't blindly follow authority, the current trends, or the crowd, without asking questions that start with 'why?'

Second, I encourage you to greet, smile, or even chat with individuals you meet on campus, even if you don't know them. I also invite you to interact deeply with at least one teacher each semester, as some of them may become your mentors, and your friends for the rest of your life. We must do more than think; we should feel for others, and show them that we care about them.

Third, I suggest you embrace the sustainability ideals of your campus, and learn how your personal attitude and daily changes of habit can impact the environment and our society.

Fourth, I encourage you to take part in more service learning and service leadership activities, so that you make contributions to your local community and society. I remind you to lead an honest, humble and honourable life.

Remember, it is entirely up to you to derive achievement and satisfaction from your university education. At the end, attitude matters most, and that is a matter of choice.

As a university president, I believe in the transformative power of undergraduate education. No matter where you start from, we will try our best to instil values into your development. We hope to ignite your imagination, stir your spirit, and guide your passion.

I wish all university freshmen a fruitful and meaningful university life experience.

Simon S. M. Ho

(This open letter is adapted from a speech that the author gave to all new students at the Convocation of HSMC on September 1, 2016)