

## The Welcome Speech

Júlia Moore Trias

Congratulations to you all on your admission to Sharpe University. On behalf of the University, I would like to also extend my warmest greetings and my most sincere congratulations to the families and friends of this incoming freshman class who have gathered here today to celebrate this memorable occasion.

*God, are we having ANOTHER middle-aged white male making a speech and talking “on behalf of”? I tell you right now, I’ve had enough of white privilege and male privilege and all your other God-given privileges. Plus, I can’t believe you used the word “freshman”, are you aware of how many women this speech is addressed to? Do you want them to feel alienated?*

Oh... Right. I’ll have Mrs. Jones make the speech. And I’ll erase the word “freshman”, I’ll do that, yes, of course. No one should feel excluded.

*Stop right there. “You’ll have” Mrs. Jones make the speech? Do you think you can impose anything you want on women? She can refuse, you know? Only yes means yes. And what the hell happened to “Ms.”?*

Sorry, I mean I’ll ask Ms. Jones if she’s willing to take my place. Not *my* place, as such, but, you know...

*Right. As I said, count your privileges. Please continue.*

Today, we welcome a grand total of 13,203 students, 1,474 of whom are international students, representing 11.2% of the class.

*Are we back at Auschwitz Birkenau Camp? Are human beings only numbers to you? And what do you mean by “international”? Borders are imaginary constructs drawn by men –because it’s always men– who choose to build walls instead of bridges. Can we please remember that we are all inhabitants of one single planet?*

Well, I just wanted to highlight how the university's growing...but, hmmm, I guess I should skip that part as well... I wouldn't want to get cancelled or be called a Nazi or anything, God forbid!

*Yes, you'd better do that. Go on.*

We are extremely pleased to have such accomplished and talented students here with us today from all over the world. Sharpe University students come from all walks of life and have stories to tell. From today, we hope you will immerse yourselves in a wide range of educational opportunities and build rich characters as individuals, all the while enjoying a fulfilling student life.

*Wait, why focus on socio-economic status? Why talk about "walks of life" without mentioning ethnic groups, sexual identities, sexual orientations, religions and beliefs? It's such a capitalist-centred perspective. Also, it's kind of hypocritical to highlight that, taking into account the exorbitant tuition fees...*

Wouldn't it be a little too long? No? No, of course not. Not at all. I'll just add some extra commas. Gotta be inclusive! And we do give out scholarships.

*Great. As if a few ridiculous scholarships could make up for the systemic injustice that undermines the fundamental human right education is claimed to be. The prohibitive costs of attaining a university degree have created a vicious cycle of inequality, where those who are already disadvantaged are further marginalised by the insurmountable financial barriers to education. It's disgusting.*

Anyway, we aren't going to change tuition fees in the welcome ceremony, so I'll just continue if that's okay...

*Oh yes, just turn a blind eye to a major social issue. It's what society is supposed to do. Who cares about the harsh realities of low-income and marginalised communities? As long as YOUR salary is untouched...*

Sir Thomas Moore, the founder of Sharpe University, welcomed the inaugural class of 78 students in 1882. At that entrance ceremony, Hannah O'Connell, a driving-force behind the establishment of the college, also known as "the Mother of the Foundation," made the following statement: "The independence of a nation is based on the independence of its people, and the independence of the people is based on the independence of their spirits. Thus, as the independence of people's spirits can only be achieved through the independence of learning, if the country desires to be independent it is essential to maintain the independence of learning."

*As soon as a female leader appears, she is reduced to her reproductive mission. Seriously, Mark, "Mother of the Foundation" is an abominable nickname. So reductive.*

I didn't really choose the nickname myself...

*And all that about independence, wouldn't it be more appropriate to focus on cooperation and partnership?*

I can't change a speech that was made in 1882...

*I see your point. But I can't agree either. So just cut it and maybe get someone like Amanda Gorman to write a poem instead. What's next?*

Newly admitted students may have been told until now the assumption that there is one single answer or solution to a problem. However, we live in an age where scientific technology has developed rapidly and the societal framework has dramatically changed. We are bound to face many questions without existing answers. One American academic predicted that by the time children who entered elementary school in 2011 reach college, 65% of the jobs that will be available to them do not exist today. What the future holds is unknown.

*I'm sick of American hegemony. Can't you cite another study? Try to find one from a country which has public healthcare, less wealth disparity and no arms deals with war-torn countries.*

Are you kidding me? Oh, no, you're not. I'll look into it. Absolutely.

*Thank you, Mark.*

In such times as these, I believe that the true purpose of a university is to afford each and every individual an opportunity to become cultured, learn to think critically, build their character, and learn how to put ideas into action. This university is committed to expanding education and research systems so that students can cultivate global leadership skills while exercising a broad range of exceptional qualities and great power of insight. For example, at the Global Education Center, students can acquire practical foreign language skills...

*Oh yeah, all the neo-imperialist foreign languages they can have access to... No Swahili on the list, no Miskito, no Ryukyuan... not even Kurdish courses! And while we are on the topic of languages, a gentle reminder that you're all obliged to pay for a language certificate which will probably expire at some point, so, yeah, you'll have to pay again if you actually need it in the future. Who said education was a public good? Otherwise, you won't get your degree, which you'll ALSO have to pay for. It goes apart from the annual tuition fee, hundreds of euros just for that piece of paper, but don't worry, it's good quality paper, really quite thick and beautifully embossed! Totally worth it. And the certificate would be in one of the neo-colonialist languages, of course. So even if you are somehow learning Kurdish and upholding minorities, it won't do you any good. Such a stupid decision to take!*

...improve their academic and technical writing, and develop fundamental skills such as mathematical and logical thinking, regardless of the courses they enrol in. We encourage students at undergraduate and graduate level to take classes that include interactive discussions and problem-solving activities. In addition, hands-on learning opportunities such as internships, fieldwork, and volunteer activities enable students to take a step into the real world.

*Oh, please spare them advanced notice on the 21st century enslavement they are bound to suffer. Long hours, no pay, footing all travel and accommodation costs... It's clear-cut exploitation. Plus all the unnecessary red tape entailed... And don't get me*

*started on how paternalistic and condescending this whole volunteering stuff can get! It all adds up to a self-serving endeavour for career development on the part of well-off Westerners, a horrendous continuation of unequal power relations and unchallenged causes of poverty, injustice, and unsustainable development.*

Moreover, we are expanding study spaces and facilities equipped with the latest ICT environment, enabling students to take the initiative for their own learning. As is well-known thanks to our prominent alumni, there is a tradition at Sharpe of diverse students striving together while building their own strengths, influencing each other's work. It is up to each and every one of you to take advantage of the wide range of support and the wealth of resources available in academics, the arts, sport, and so on.

*Basically, a covert way of perpetuating laissez-faire and the so-called principles of private property and limited government interference...*

My dear incoming freshman class, we hope you will be enriched by the academic and cultural wealth this university, with its long traditions, has built up over the centuries, and take full advantage of our state-of-the-art facilities for research and learning.

*Excuse me, Sir! "Dear freshman class"? What did we say about using the word "freshman"? And how could you ever think "dear" was an appropriate adjective? It's way too intimate! Can't you see you are encouraging at least a patronising attitude, at worst sexual abuse and harassment?*

OH, COME ON!!! HOW ON EARTH AM I ENCOURAGING THAT!?! FORGET THE SPEECH, JUST FORGET IT. We'll go straight to the banquet and that's the end of it.

*Well, just remember to cater for vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, lactose-free, ketogenic, paleo... and all the other dietary options which deserve respect and non-discriminatory treatment. I'll also expect organic food, zero waste, zero plastic. There's no planet B, you know. And one can't just "forget" about ecology and the environment, although you seem to be doing quite fine "forgetting" about that. Oh yes, I've been to the university's cafeteria. I've seen what you have there. Biscuits wrapped in plastic eeeeeverywhere. Full of single-use crap. Reuse, recycle? Outrageous. Seriously, Mark, outrageous.*

Fuck's sake.