

*Welcome and Introduction*  
*Dr. Sandra J. Peart, Dean*

Welcome!

And congratulations on being accepted into the Jepson School of Leadership Studies. You have chosen to enter a school with some of the very best professors – teachers and scholars – in the country. You’ve chosen a school with the reputation for being not only the first but also the best in the world.

This is my rookie year for Prelude as it is for those of you who are in the class of 2010. We will learn about Jepson together. I look forward to hearing from you about your impressions, challenges, and victories, over the next two and a half years.

My job here, as I understand it, is to welcome you and to say a few introductory remarks on what we do at the Jepson School.

Leadership studies. That’s what we do. We look at human decision making and behavior in situations where individuals are subject to purely self-regarding and other-regarding interests (to use a helpful 19<sup>th</sup> century expression). In other words, leadership as a set of problems emerges in situations where you interact with others and your decisions affect yourself and other people.

One could argue that most situations in life involve this confluence of interest. It’s rare indeed that I make a choice that affects only me. Even the apple I eat, if it lengthens my life expectancy, affects my children’s happiness (I hope positively!). On the other side of this, if I decide to smoke cigarettes, then I reduce their expected happiness.

So, we at Jepson in leadership studies are concerned with the overlap of the individual with the collectivity, within a family, a city, a school, a nation, society. And since that overlap occurs pretty much all the time, problems of leadership are omnipresent.

We know society is important. No denying that. When we try to go farther than that, however, we run into some really tough – but interesting – questions. What’s the best way to ensure society (the group) is looked after and healthy given that it consists of individuals? Since this is a celebration of your achievements, this evening I want to remind you of the latter point – to stress the importance of the individual.

And what I have in mind is not so much to encourage you all to be selfish, or self-centered, or overly introspective. Instead, I want to emphasize what J. S. Mill saw as so important: the importance of individuality and even eccentricity. In 1859, JS Mill wrote in what is still a tremendously important text, *On Liberty*:

Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a **tree**, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.

The reason this matters in the context of tonight's ceremony, I think, is that I want to encourage you all to formulate your own questions and come to your own answers, with the help of research, reading, and your very good professors.

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision.

I want to encourage you to use observation, reason, and judgment to make decisions and come to conclusions, and, more than this, to hold to decisions with firmness and self control.

I also want to encourage you to be eccentric and to enjoy your eccentricities!

Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make **eccentricity** a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. **Eccentricity** has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of **eccentricity** in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigor, and moral courage which it contained.

Tonight, I want to ask you to help ensure the Jepson School continues to be known for "genius, mental vigor and moral courage" in the future.

Best wishes to you in the years ahead.