



Special note: The University's convocation ceremony, originally scheduled for Sunday, August 28 at 6:00pm was cancelled as a result of the adverse weather conditions related to Hurricane Irene. The text of planned remarks follows.

CONVOCATION 2011

PLANNED REMARKS FROM PROVOST JANE KNODELL

Good afternoon. To the class of 2015, welcome to the University of Vermont. To all of my colleagues in this vibrant community of teachers and scholars, welcome to the 2011-12 academic year. It is truly invigorating to experience the renewal of campus as it once again comes alive, and as this university readies for a new class, and for a new year that holds boundless promise.

To our first-year students, enjoy this rare occasion as you come together this afternoon as the Class of 2015. It won't happen often in the years between today and that seemingly impossibly distant spring morning when you will graduate from the University of Vermont. And this is as it should be at a university, this place that is marked by an incredible diversity of academic endeavor that will include your courses of study, opportunities for independent research or research with a faculty member, leadership roles on campus, internships, or perhaps civic engagement. Your education will encompass that which happens both in and beyond the classroom. Your passions and your paths will be many.

Yet, through our summer reading focus for first-year students and the campus community, we've established a tradition at the University of Vermont of a common intellectual starting point. In *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot we have had the opportunity to share a thought-provoking story told with both drama and grace—a narrative

that crosses generations and touches on issues of race, class, gender, and bioethics.

Simply reading the book will alter your perspective on the many important issues it raises. Fortunately, we will have numerous opportunities to explore these perspectives through events this fall. I encourage you all to dig deeper into this book as it is blended into your coursework, by participating in campus panel discussions and student blogs related to the book, and by joining together again on October 11 in Ira Allen Chapel for a talk by author Rebecca Skloot. These will all be outstanding opportunities to engage deeply with an exceptional work and the challenging questions it raises.

Thank you, and my best wishes to all for the year ahead.