

50th Anniversary of Madrid Study Abroad Program
(Universidades Norteamericanas Reunidas)
and Graduation Ceremony
Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie
President, Indiana University
Facultad de Filosofía
Plaza de Menendez Pelayo
1, Ciudad Universitaria
Madrid, Spain
Wednesday, May 17, 2017
6:00 p.m.

INTRODUCTION

Rector Andradas, Ambassador Marshall, Mr. Quade, distinguished Complutense University colleagues, and students, faculty and administrators from universities in the United States.

It is a great honor to be here at the historic Complutense University of Madrid for this celebration of the 50th anniversary of the *Universidades Reunidas* study abroad program.

As president of Indiana University, I had the honor, earlier today, of celebrating the 50th anniversary of IU's involvement—as a founding partner with Purdue University—of what became—when the University of Wisconsin joined in 1970—the Wisconsin-Indiana-Purdue, or WIP, study abroad program in Madrid. The WIP program, in turn, was instrumental in the development of the *Reunidas* program, and remains an integral part of it today. The WIP program is the largest provider of students to *Reunidas*, and as Indiana University is the managing institution of the WIP program, it is my privilege this evening to represent all of my colleagues at all of the American universities that have

benefitted enormously from their involvement in this remarkable program over many years.

I want to express thanks, on behalf of Indiana University and all of the American universities in *Reunidas*, to Rector Carlos Andradas and to all of his colleagues at the Complutense University of Madrid for their generous hospitality and for their continued and greatly appreciated support of the partnership we celebrate today.

I also want to thank Ambassador Capricia Marshall for her remarks. Ambassador Marshall is, of course, an alumna of our program, and as you have seen, is a remarkable example of the impact the Complutense has had on our students' lives and careers.

I also extend our most sincere congratulations to all of the students who are graduating from the *Reunidas* program this evening. It is a privilege to be here to witness your graduation ceremony. We expect all of you to carry forward your experience in Spain throughout your own lives and careers. And we know that you have all found this experience truly transformational.

THE COMPLUTENSE UNIVERSITY OF MADRID

This historic building in which we are gathered, the Facultad de Filosofia y Letras building at the Complutense University, reminds us of a more tragic and somber past, for it was right here that the International Brigade—that included a number of Americans—was based during the Battle of Madrid during the Civil War, as savage fighting divided the campus.

But this building and the Complutense University also remind us of a different past. Indiana University—and many other great American research universities—owe a great debt of gratitude to the much older European universities, like the Complutense

University, as they were highly influential in the development of American universities in their earliest days.

Since its earliest days in the late 13th century, the Complutense has provided an education of the highest quality to students who have gone on to become renowned philosophers; writers; scientists; historians; military leaders; and heads of state, including many who have served as Prime Minister of Spain.

AN EDUCATION THAT PROVIDES STUDENTS WITH GLOBAL LITERACY

Indiana University and its institutional colleagues in *Reunidas* have sent students to study here for over 50 years because we believe that student study and service abroad are essential components of a contemporary education meant to prepare students to live and work in the modern world.

Study abroad is an important way of ensuring that our students become globally literate not just in their major fields of study, but more generally.

Of course, none of this was as widely appreciated 50 years ago as it is today. Today, study abroad is heavily encouraged and even expected among certain populations of students.

In fact, increasing the number of IU undergraduates who study abroad has been a top priority of mine during my ten years as president of Indiana University. Today, IU's Bloomington campus ranks in the top ten out of about 1,200 universities in the United States in terms of the number of students who study abroad.

Even more importantly, students who have studied abroad universally say that it is a life-changing experience. For many undergraduates, their time studying abroad is also their first time travelling abroad. So not only are they acquiring global literacy and

understanding, but they are also learning the skills of, and gaining confidence in, living, working, studying, and travelling internationally. And the contacts they make while studying abroad often lead to lifelong friendships and lasting valuable international networks.

THE UNIVERSIDADES REUNIDAS PROGRAM

For five decades, the *Reunidas* study abroad partnership, whose anniversary we celebrate today, has enjoyed tremendous success and has had a major impact on the lives of thousands of students.

Almost 3,000 students—from Indiana University, the University of Wisconsin, and Purdue University alone—have studied here in Madrid over the last 50 years.

Not only is the *Reunidas* program one of the oldest programs of its kind, it was also—in many respects—a groundbreaking program.

The spirit of goodwill exhibited by the Complutense in the 1960s—a challenging historic period for all universities—was truly remarkable. The university worked with the program’s founding American partners in a spirit of generous cooperation and collaboration, welcoming American students and integrating them into the university at a time when some American activities on the world stage were controversial, and at a time when the Complutense, like all universities, was dealing with its own internal challenges. Over the years, students in the program have had a remarkable opportunity to witness firsthand Spain’s transition to democracy as well as the country’s maturation as a modern, democratic nation.

Another noteworthy aspect of the program that contributed to its success was the Complutense’s commitment to making it affordable for students at public universities in

the United States to obtain an immersive experience in Spain and to gain a deep appreciation for Spain's political, social, and cultural role in the world.

In the program's early days, the university established special courses for American students taught by some of the most exceptional and distinguished faculty members in all of Spain—renowned poets, art historians, and philosophers—a number of whom taught for *Reunidas* for decades, often in addition to other duties.

Reunidas also afforded our own U.S. faculty members an opportunity to provide leadership for the program. In this way, they deepened their own connections with Spain while also building longstanding ties with their students which grew out of their mutual cultural explorations during their time abroad. Many of these professors have joined us here today to help us celebrate this occasion.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of this remarkable program, and as the program enters its next phase, we can all be confident that the partnership between our institutions will continue to thrive.

On behalf of Indiana University, I extend my congratulations and most sincere thanks to Rector Andradas and his predecessors; to all of the faculty, students, and staff of the Complutense University of Madrid; and to all of the faculty and staff from IU and our partner institutions who have helped to make the *Universidades Reunidas* program such an enormous success for half a century.

PRESENTATION OF HART BENTON MEDALLION TO RECTOR CARLOS ANDRADAS

The splendid *Reunidas* program has brought enormous benefits to all of the American universities that have been involved, and it has enormously and positively affected the lives of many students by providing an opportunity for intensive growth and learning.

To recognize such outstanding contributions to higher education world-wide, Indiana University established the Thomas Hart Benton Medallion. First given in 1986, the bronze medal features a representation of a portion of the renowned American artist Thomas Hart Benton's murals that are on display at Indiana University that depict the "Social and Industrial History of Indiana." The reverse side of the medallion features the seal of Indiana University. It symbolizes the aspirations and ideals that are the foundation of the search for knowledge—aspirations and ideals that Indiana University and the Complutense University of Madrid share.

And so, for all the Complutense University of Madrid has done over 50 years to foster the partnership we celebrate today, I present to you, Rector Carlos Andradas, the Thomas Hart Benton Medallion.