

Members of the Washington University community and distinguished guests,

Good evening.

I am truly humbled to be selected for this award named in honor of such a distinguished and accomplished university leader. Chancellor Emeritus Mark S. Wrighton has contributed to Washington University, McDonnell Academy, as well as the local and global community, tremendously.

I would like to take this chance to reflect on the opportunities that we, McDonnell Scholars, are endowed with. In this climate of rising nationalism and populism, we will have many opportunities to take a lead role in making our local community, home country, the region, and the world – a better place.

There're 3 short points that I'd like to briefly touch upon today.

First – critical thinking and fact-checking skills.

Every single day, we are inundated with all kinds of information and *misinformation*. Many media feeds you the information they *want* you to believe.

But we, as McDonnell Scholars, know better.

We, as McDonnell Scholars, pride ourselves in having our own minds; our own perspectives; our own ideas. We do not feed off blindly from all types of media. We can, and should always, make especial efforts to maintain that healthy dose of skepticism towards all that information that the media feeds us.

In fact, the University offers various social science research methods courses. I strongly encourage you to take one of them to hone your social science research, analytical skills – Critical skills that help us sift through and analyze the overwhelming information out there; the truths and untruths; the facts and opinions; the rights and wrongs.

We must always be proactive in our critical thinking and fact-checking before coming to conclusions.

Global mindset and local engagement

We, McDonnell Scholars, must always embrace the core values of globalism and universalism. Indeed, we are on a mission to become global leaders.

As leaders, we also need real, meaningful engagement in local communities. It is critical that we develop the temperament to be genuinely in touch with local communities. This also requires us to be on the ground, talking to the people in the community and understanding their practical situations. Only then can we craft effective solutions to address their needs and concerns.

Recently, we have witnessed several conflicts and tensions unfolding in different parts of the world. Some of us are shocked to see that we are running short of independent, impartial and trusted local leaders to mediate between the government and people with deep-seated grievances. From my humble perspective – I see this as a call for better local leaders, not just global ones. We have to do much better in that respect.

Willingness to listen, talk and change

I observe that in today's world, we have plunged to the abyss of refusing to listen to the opposing sides' ideas, thoughts and opinions. We sometimes tend to cavalierly dismiss any views not in agreement with ours as bigoted and opinionated.

We might need to step back and understand that we all have to develop empathy for each other. We need to work together to agree on some irreducible core principles and values that could help us engage in meaningful dialogue in search for mutual understanding and tolerance. I would say it is a virtue to change and adjust our positions and to be comfortable with making reasoned compromises.

I hope we as McDonnell Scholars could bring the 'Spirit of McDonnell Academy' to wherever we end up professionally, in the quest for creative contributions that bring benefits to local and global society.

My fellow scholars, my final message to you is this –

You don't have to wait until graduation to follow your heart and pursue your dreams – you should kick the ball rolling RIGHT NOW.

If you passionately pursue your dreams, the Mark S. Wrighton award will – without fail – come pursue you.

Thank you.