



Q & A

Indiana University  
Indiana Daily Student

INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
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THE HON. MICHAEL KIRBY

*How did you first begin working with IU?*

About ten years ago, I was asked to serve on the Board of the Kinsey Institute. This came against a background of my work in the World Health Organisation Global Commission on AIDS and other UN bodies. Coming to Bloomington has been a precious part of the last decade for me.

*What was your first visit to the University like? How often do you visit?*

On my first visit, the Uni threw in (at my request) a side trip to Fairmont, where James Dean grew up. I got to see the heartland of Indiana and to meet James Deans' family. Bloomington was a surprise and IU campus is one of the most attractive I have seen anywhere. During my work on the Kinsey Board, I came at least once a year. And the best thing was it was paid by Yale University! I tacked it on to an annual visit to their law school in September each year.

*What are some of your memories as a professor?*

I am not really a professor of IU. More a citizen of another country invited to bring new perspectives to the KI Board. Kinsey's name rings round the world. His Institute is a jewel in the IU crown. Sadly, it is not always appreciated enough.

*What do you like about IU?*

That a fairly conservative university, then in a fairly orthodox part of America, backed up Kinsey's trail-blazing research. And did so against a lot of political

and other opposition in the 1950s. This is a real First Amendment story of which Americans can be very proud.

*How were you asked to be commencement speaker?*

When the President, Michael McRobbie, offered me the honorary degree, he asked if I would give the speech. In Australia, and elsewhere, that is often the price tag. I have given many such speeches over the years, including in India, Ulster, England and Down Under. It is always a great privilege. I know it is a very important day for the new graduates and their families. I will be very proud to be with them on that day and I am looking forward to it.

*Tell me a little about your speech.*

I don't want the audience going to sleep when they hear it. So you will have to wait. But for starters, I will appeal to the IU community to recognise the need for all educated people to be more international in their outlook.

*How did you decide what your speech is about?*

I owe a personal debt to Kinsey and his research. So the topic came naturally.

*Why did you pick this topic?*

Because it is about IU, the world and each one of us individually.

*What are your goals for the speech?*

To light up the day of the new graduates. Not to be boring (which a lot of speeches are). To emphasise the things we all have in common. And to plant a few ideas about IU in the world.

*What kind of impact are you hoping to make on the graduates and their families?*

In a short speech, the impact remains to be seen. But the work that Kinsey began at IU, with the support of President Herman Wells, has had a huge impact all around the world. It is not my impact, but Kinsey's ongoing legacy that is important. I am crossing the whole world to come for the ceremony. So it is pretty important to me as well as to you.

*What differences between American and Australian universities?*

The differences are negligible compared to the similarities. In both countries, there is pride in research and teaching excellence and fierce determination to pursue knowledge even when the results may be unpopular, upsetting or controversial. I stand for intellectual inquiry. IU is a proud beacon to a sometimes hostile world for these great values.

*Why are human rights so important to you?*

Because I am human. I believe we are genetically programmed to be rational, even though we do not always act this out. Human rights should bind the planet together. Never forget, it was a committee chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt that drafted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* sixty years ago. The struggle now is to convert it into reality. IU and its graduates have a vital part to play in this endeavour. Every IU graduate can lift their heads high for the world-changing work done at IU. And Kinsey is a great example of the inquiring human mind. I will be proud to be with the students and their families on a special day for them. And a special day for me.

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