



## From the American Secretary

IT IS A great pleasure to introduce the United States Rhodes Scholar class of 2015. They were elected last November from 16 districts across the country—all with similarly sized pools of students (averaging about 60)—following rigorous endorsement reviews by 305 colleges and universities. A number close to twice that size sought but did not obtain their institution’s endorsements. This year’s class will do at least 23 different degrees and, as I write this, are spread among 10 colleges at Oxford, with two Scholars still to confirm their degree and 11 awaiting college placement. Like all the classes before them, they combine outstanding academic ability with character, publicly directed ambitions, and capacity for leadership. They will enrich Oxford as surely as they will the many communities they will contribute to thereafter.

I am often asked by older Rhodes Scholars how Oxford has changed since their time there, or how the Scholarship experience has changed. The largest difference in the Oxford experience this new class will have—compared with all but the five or six immediately before it—relates to the central roles now played by Rhodes House. And those roles expand and deepen each year. Rhodes House has become a social and intellectual hub, complementing the rich experiences of college, department, community, university, team, musical group, club, and political or social or interest association. It has added in the last year specially designed seminars for Rhodes Scholars, relating to leadership and values and to questions of career, service, and personal fulfillment. I have been privileged to participate in some, and can attest to the richness of the discussions—and to some regret that we didn’t have similar opportunities in our days. And Rhodes House will increasingly become a leading convener of world leaders from all spheres, benefitting Rhodes Scholars in residence of course, but also the wider university.

Another difference relates to the self-identity of Rhodes Scholar cohorts. During our tenures at Oxford, for the most part, we thought of ourselves as American Rhodes Scholars first—and probably many of us didn’t get much further than that, other than perhaps to include the Rhodes Scholars from other countries who might have shared our Middle Common Rooms. While there is no risk that national (or even regional) identity will vanish, the Rhodes community now sees itself as global first. And strikingly that identity is assumed now even before matriculation. Each year, I urge members of the new class of American Rhodes Scholars to create a listserv or Facebook page or similar, so they can begin to get to know each other before their “sailing” weekend and Oxford orientation. This year—without my suggestion—



this class established such a group but defined it globally and not nationally. So as they learn about their department and college admissions, they share their news not just with their US classmates but with those from other Rhodes constituencies as well.

Let me add a few words about that admissions process. I have mentioned this in this annual letter before, but the days are long past of near-certain admission for Rhodes Scholars to their choice of one of a relatively small number of courses. In my day, the choice for most of us was among four or five BA courses (with senior status, so it was possible to complete them in two years) and a half dozen or so taught two-year masters degrees (then called BPhils, and now, except in philosophy, called MPhils). Today, the choice of taught degree courses is exponentially broader, with many being one-year master's courses (MSc or MStud), which increase in number and variety each year. (Rhodes Scholars who do them are strongly encouraged to continue to another one-year course in their second year, or progress to a doctorate—and we are pleased that extremely few leave Oxford after just one year.) And more go straight to DPhils than they did in decades past.

But with many of these new options comes much greater difficulty of admission. Most of these courses are limited to a small number of students, and demand from outstanding students worldwide is intense. As many do not get admitted to their first-choice degree, we advise most Rhodes Scholars-elect to prepare back-up applications for their second- and even third-choice course options. Given the breadth of most Scholars' interests, and the relative luxury afforded by US higher education, which almost uniquely postpones most specialization until graduate school, this situation leads to little if any unhappiness.

A final and obvious difference, and one made more important by the global self-identity of Scholars today, is that these US Scholars will join fellow Scholars from a wider range of countries and regions. In their first year, this class will be joined by students graduating from United Arab Emirates universities—students who may come from any country of the world—and, in their second year, they will be joined by the first Rhodes Scholars from China. Other countries will follow as our global footprint grows.

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