



FALL 2017 COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER TIMOTHY LAW SNYDER, PH.D.

The University of Toledo Fall 2016 Commencement Speaker

Saturday, December 17, 2016 | 10 a.m. | John F. Savage Arena

Timothy Law Snyder was named the 16th president of Loyola Marymount University in March Snyder2015 and assumed his responsibilities on June 1, 2015. Snyder has been a professor and administrator for more than 20 years at Jesuit institutions, most recently as vice president for academic affairs at Loyola University Maryland from 2007-14. He was also dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Fairfield University from 2001-07, and dean of science at Georgetown University from 1995-99.

Snyder's career has been devoted to the Jesuit and Marymount tradition of education of the whole person, encouragement of learning, and the service of faith and promotion of justice. He told [LMU magazine](#): "We don't just educate well, we educate with purpose. And we have the incredible academic freedom to think and talk about anything, and to forge faith with reason. Not many places do that, and only the Jesuits do all the above."

Snyder earned his M.A. and his Ph.D. in applied and computational mathematics from Princeton University. He holds a B.A. in psychology and a B.S. in mathematics, and an M.S. in mathematics from the University of Toledo.

He has published and presented widely on his research interests, including computational mathematics, data structures, design and analysis of algorithms, geometric probability, digital processing and computer music. Recently, he has been working on risk assessment, with applications in commercial air travel, HIV and other areas. He has spoken nationwide about the Millennial Generation and ways to educate them. He has practiced "technogogy" for more than 20 years and created LCAST, a series of podcasts aimed at helping students. The podcasts also feature original music he has written, arranged, recorded, produced, mixed, and mastered; his music can also be found on iTunes.

At the time of his appointment, LMU's Board of Trustees Chair Kathleen H. Aikenhead said, "Timothy Law Snyder is the best person to lead LMU forward. He has a long and distinguished career in Jesuit higher education as a teacher, scholar, dean and vice president, and has a passion for our mission of creating the well-rounded person within a rich academic community of excellence. We are grateful to have his experience and leadership."

He said he will encourage students to study abroad more and create more partnerships between the university and technology, film and fine arts companies. "L.A. is one of the most creative places in the world ... and we should take advantage of that," he told the Los Angeles Times.

Timothy Law Snyder Inauguration Address

Chairwoman Speyer,
Members of the Board,
President Gaber,
Provost Hsu,
Faculty, Staff, Administrators, and
Parents, Children, and Family Members of the Class of 2016,
And *Members* of the Class of 2016,

Welcome, and thank you for honoring me today as part of your celebration.

Today is a glorious day!

I am happy to be home here in Toledo...and delighted to be with each of you.

My thoughts for you will come in three parts: First, *today* is special not just for you, but for all of humankind, for our time is startlingly different from what preceded us. Second, you are suited to meet today, as well as our tomorrows. Third, your life architecture need not be constructed now; it will evolve with you.

Let's begin: Our time is special, startlingly different from what preceded us.

Following the example of theologian Jack Haught, let's imagine our human history as a 300-page book. Were we to write such a book, we would find language and writing first appearing on the last page or so. The World Wide Web, which is the same age as undergraduates who walked this stage just a few years ago, would show up as the last word of our book.

And in that very last word of our 300-page history, something dramatic has happened. We went from communicating with a few dozen people, as we did as individuals for about two million years, to having the ability to expand our human connections. To hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands. Cross-cultural communication brings us into a new cave—and it is not the 20- to 30-person hunter/gatherer cave that Anthropology Professor Seamus Metress told us about in the first college course I ever took here, in 1977, over in University Hall. It is a cave in which we have never dwelled.

This great *bend* in the human story, in human connectivity, brings us new burdens—and new capacity—as we collide now with different languages, habits, arts, economies, ecologies, customs, virtual realities, visions and versions of God.

For millions of years, we gestured. Or we wrote, graphically. Now, we Snapchat to the world; our children swipe book pictures, expecting them to move, grow, or shrink on command; visitors text on the way, rather than showing up unannounced; and yoga instructors ask, as did mine the other day, upon her arrival, “Is there WiFi so I can Spotify”?

Meanwhile, a landmark disruption has shaken life and its development. For millions of years, we were formed, slowly, through natural selection. Now, as we change our environment faster than we can adapt to it, the evolutionary mechanisms that governed our adaptation to date are suddenly rendered too slow to help us. That means that adaptation is now in our hands. It must come from—for the first time in the history of life—our *minds*.

To what does this lead? Our need to adapt using our minds drives us to be creative, imaginative. Our hyperconnectedness

drives us to be global, to understand where and how different disciplines and ways of thinking and being complement and interact with one another. In short: today's world needs people like you. Educated *persons* like you. Millions of years of history have set a stage for a new way of...being. For which you are now responsible; from which, if you do well, humankind can experience greater joy.

Which leads us to our current moment. Your today. Your Moment.

As I noted at the outset [and this is Part 2 of my talk], you are *suited* to meet today, as well as our tomorrows. Let me outline three features that demonstrate this.

First: You are the most capable generation in history. Time and again I read articles describing our Millennial Generation as one of entitlement, of naivete, rife with unearned demands and inability to withstand challenges.

These sentiments are *dead-wrong*. Today's students—you—witness a world in which pundits pound podia, occupy polar standards, and refuse to compromise. You see creativity annihilated as parents and older adults accept fully the scripts from one political party, while denying every plank of the other party. You are yearning for, and you are acting toward a significantly more creative future, and you are doing it with admirable conscience.

You understand diversity and its *ultimate* value. You understand that none of us selected the family, the economics, the location, the time in history, or the somatype into which we have been born. You understand that human progress is always founded on a collision of different ideas or persons of different backgrounds and characteristics, who come together to create something

harmoniously brilliant. Diversity improves the lives of all those here and all those to come, as well as that of the Earth itself.

Your moral compass—with deep care for the environment, human health, ethical approaches to your work, and your desire for *meaning* in your work, while balancing work with a *life* of meaning, is truly admirable.

Now, I know not all of you are Millennials. I am sure that those who are not have taken on a little Millennial over the last few years?

So, indeed: You are the most capable generation in our history.

Second: You have as fine an education as humankind has ever offered. The instruction I experienced at the University of Toledo was notably better than what I received in my doctoral studies at Princeton. As UT graduates, you are gifted with valuable tools in thinking, in being nimble, in acting.

Third: You—we—stand on shoulders of giants of generosity. Persons of our past who made our lives greater, nameless to us. They have given us wisdom, love, invention, custom, and creation. Somewhere, somebody coined a new word that we now use daily. Somewhere, somebody first depicted us on a rock wall. Somewhere, somebody first popped a piece of popcorn. (And then somebody was brave enough to eat it!) Somewhere, somebody's first...kissed. We know the names of none of these people.

Those of our future will seek to stand on such gifted generosity. *You* will gift them—in every successful, well-intentioned action you take.

Speaking of giants of generosity, could I please ask the parents of the Class of 2016 to stand?

[Riff on parents]

Speaking of giants of generosity, could I please ask the faculty who taught and mentored the Class of 2016, as well as the student development professionals, to stand?

[Riff on faculty and student development]

Let me summarize: (1) you have arrived at a stunning bend in our history; (2) you are as capable as any generation in our history; (3) you are educated monumentally; and (4) you can create, as was created for you, a future on which others, later, will stand.

Let's now—in the third part of this chat—think about how you will navigate what is next. Your life architecture need not be constructed now; it will evolve with you.

Like so many of you—I did not have, when I was leaving my world at UT, any master roadmap toward my life. I did not plan to be a university president until

I was offered the presidency at LMU fewer than two years ago.

I have taken life as an epoch-by-epoch journey, praying that I can do better, always looking to do better. But “better,” for me, is like St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits’ *magis*: a restless desire to do better—for others. I think of professors like Professor Metress, Professor Peter Fraileigh, or Professors Westcott Vayo, Harvey Wolff, Marty Pettet, George Kurtz, Henry Wente, and Ivie “Junior” Stein in UT’s Department of Mathematics and Statistics, whose deep care for me—as a person, as a thinker—demonstrated how care for others can blossom into yet greater care for others.

Professor Vayo literally filled out part of my application for UT's Master's program, while I wallowed in summer courses, roadmap-free, following my graduation.

Though I was free of a master plan, I also aimed as high as I could go. For example, I took the risk of applying at Princeton, which was ranked #1 in math. Even though I was warned by one professor that that may have been shooting too high, I got in, thanks to my UT professors' letters of recommendation and to the education they gave me.

Without a plan, I bounced (it seems like now, looking back) from Princeton to Georgetown to Fairfield to Loyola Maryland to the Berklee College of Music, and now, to LMU. What propelled me was simple: openness to invitations and my mantra to go where I could best serve others. That has been the single determining factor in every decision I have made. I now recognize that I *had* a roadmap, and it was one borne from my professors and my faith: being a person for others *was* my roadmap.

At no point do you need you have your future figured out too deeply, especially in our increasingly dynamic times. In this life—the one I have, the one each of you has—we grow bit by bit, frame by frame, with bumps on a road that improves, gradually, for those who work hard.

And especially for those who care. Although it may seem the contrary, please know that good people finish *first*. The myth that they “finish last” comes from our inability to see how, occasionally, a person not necessarily deserving of something gets lucky. If you follow the trajectories of people who do well for others, you invariably find that they finish well above those who select less noble pathways.

So, go with confidence. Go with understanding of your special human moment, relative to our vast our recent pasts. Go with understanding that you have tools at the ready for tomorrow's needs. Go knowing that you—and those of your generation who surround you—are at the ready more than any who have preceded you. Go knowing that the University of Toledo has brought you amazing, bountiful gifts that will fuel the fires of a Rocket-refined, Rocket-ready, and Rocket-ripe future.

As St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, implores us, “Go forth and set the world on fire!” Rocket fire!

Congratulations, 2016!