

**REMARKS BY KIEN PHAM'S AT THE VEF FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE
DECEMBER 2005 AT THE BECKMAN CENTER, IRVINE, CALIFORNIA**

Good morning Fellows. Good morning Family and Guests:

I have a great temptation to speak to you in Vietnamese because my wife told me that I sound more respectable and romantic in that language.

But I must resist that desire and share my thoughts with you in English this morning. In general, English is a more precise language and may be that's why it is not as romantic as Vietnamese.

I am happy to see all of you here. Many of you have to put aside or rearrange your personal affairs to be here. We know that and we appreciate your doing so.

This annual event is an important component of your training in the U.S. I hope by the end of this gathering, you will not only agree with that opinion but also give us ideas on how we can organize a better conference for you next year. I urge you to pay attention to the speakers, renewing old friendship and build new ones.

At the end of the conference, I hope you can stay here to attend the New Year's Eve party hosted by our Chairman Fran Jao and his wonderful wife Cathie. It will be your chance to show off your singing talent.

STAFF AND NEW FELLOWS INTRODUCTION

Before I give you a full report, I would like to introduce to you staff members of the National Academies and VEF who are here today.

Dr. Ray Gamble, Director of Fellowship Programs
Dr. Peggy Petrochenkov, Senior Program Officer
Ms. Gwen Roby, Program Coordinator
Ms. Peggy Wilson, Visa Officer

Dr. Lynne McNamara, Director of Programs
Ms. Kari Gazdich, Program Officer

We want to welcome 3 team members from VEF-Hanoi:
Ms. Vu Quynh Nga, Program Manager

Ms. Bui thi Phuong Hoa, Program Assistant
Ms. Bui Thanh Thuy, Office Manager

In addition, I would like to ask all 2005 Fellows to stand up. These people have survived the first semester in graduate school. Congratulations. Please give them a warm applause.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

This morning, I would like give you a summary of VEF programs and issue to you a personal challenge.

First, you are doing well in school. We do not yet have data for 2005 Fellows, but the 2003 and 2004 Fellows are doing very well academically. As of this spring, more than a third of you received straight As. Another third got B+. Only three Fellows were struggling in school with a C average, and we have been working with their academic advisors to provide assistance.

Given the English language barrier and your past college training in Vietnam, we know you have tried very hard to achieve those results. And we salute your efforts.

As many of you have discovered, getting a Ph.D. in the U.S. is neither easy nor smooth-sailing. Last month, the Council of Graduate Schools completed a 10-year study on attrition rate, that is the drop-out rate, in Ph.D. programs across many disciplines.

In subject fields relevant to you: Engineering, Physical Sciences and Life Sciences, during the first two years, the attrition rate run between 15% and 21%. I am guessing these people got a master's degree and exited their graduate program.

During the subsequent two years, meaning the third and fourth years, an additional 15% of the initial Ph.D. pool dropped out.

Now the next piece of information is more interesting. All of those who remained in the Ph.D. programs appear to complete their degree. But for some of them, it took 10 years. I am sure you know some of these special professional students in your department.

From the initial pool of Ph.D. students, roughly one-third completed their Ph.D. in five years. For the rest, it took longer, some, as I said, up to 10 years.

So, what did we learn here?

Number 1: If you are an ordinary student, there is a roughly 30% chance that you will not get your Ph.D.

Number 2: If you are an ordinary student, the chance for you to complete your Ph.D. in 5 years is about 30%.

But of course, you are NOT an ordinary student. You are a VEF Fellow and should be extraordinary!

So what do you need to do?

You need to avoid becoming a part of the first 30% group which is early attrition, and try to become a part of the second 30% group which is early Ph.D. holders.

As Chairman Frank Jao said earlier, we believe in you and we think you can accomplish that objective.

VEF ALLIANCE

I want to also report to you the results of the VEF Alliance. It has been an incredible success.

As many of you know, school-support matching was mandated in the VEF law. It is in the same law that allows us to bring you to the U.S. We announced the initiative in advance to you at last year's conference. During the last 9 months, we have been negotiating with numerous universities and 101 of them have signed an agreement with VEF to welcome and co-support VEF Fellows. These are level-one, research-extensive universities. Together, they form the VEF Alliance and you can see the school listing on our website.

This Alliance is important not only to VEF but also to Vietnam. We are now working with the Vietnamese Government to help bring more Vietnamese scholars into these schools under similar support terms. The

fruit of this program has been realized by VEF: this school year, the Alliance arrangement has saved us \$1.6 million. That is more than 30% of our annual budget of \$5 million.

Are we there yet with the Alliance? No. There are still many of your schools that are not yet a member of the Alliance and we are paying too much for your education. We need you to help us convince your school that joining the VEF Alliance is a good thing. Without joining the Alliance, your school will not have anymore VEF Fellow while other competing universities will have full access to not only VEF Fellows but other Vietnamese talents.

OPENCOURSEWARE

As you should be aware, together with VASC and MOET, VEF is been pushing the initiative to make open-source educational materials available inside Vietnam. We have begun with OpenCourseWare materials from MIT and will include other resources and universities.

If implemented correctly, I believe that this initiative will transform higher education in Vietnam forever. This program began with endorsement from top Vietnamese officials but the real changes will need to take place at the grassroots level with college instructors and students.

On our part, VEF and VASC are sponsoring a main portal for open-source materials. It is called VOICE (Vietnam Open International Courseware Education). You will be able to access it at voice.net.vn.

We urge you will learn to use the materials yourself and figure out how to teach with that curriculum. We invite proposals from all Fellows on how VEF can support your ideas on the practical use of open-source materials at universities inside Vietnam. We need your creativity, your energy and your commitment. Together, we can make a huge difference in this area for Vietnam.

LEADERSHIP

We are very proud that the OCW initiative was not driven by the staff of VEF. It was in fact led by our Boston Mafia including Quang Hoang, Thanh Son, Tri Dung, and Duc Dung. These Fellows exhibited the behavior of leaders. They saw the opportunity to make a difference, to serve, and they

took action without expecting credits. That is servant leadership and you will hear about that kind of leadership from speaker Joe Tye on Friday.

And we have other Fellows who are acting as leaders. Recently, Thu Thuy and Tien Dung offered a blueprint on improving the VEF Village, your online community. They need to be supported by all of us. On the public front, Nguyen Van Thang and Dang Dinh Thi have boldly expressed their opinions to leaders of Vietnam on educational issues.

For this conference, we have Trung Thong, Hong Phuong, Minh Thao, Duc Dung, Viet Hung, Thai Ha – all rolled up their sleeves to help organize different events. They are acting as real leaders even though most of them are not members of your Board of Representatives.

That brings me to my last point. There is a phenomenal in life called the 80/20 Rule. It is also called the Pareto Principle. In essence, it has been observed that in any aspect of life, 20 percent of the population is always responsible for 80 percent of the results. For example, 20% of the population owns 80% of the national wealth. Twenty percent of your sales force is responsible for 80% of the revenue. Dr. Joseph Juran, a quality pioneer, called that “the vital few and the trivial many”.

Using that 80/20 rule, I am asserting that the future success of Vietnam will be delivered not by the trivial many but by a vital few. And that is the challenge for you as a young talented Vietnamese.

Do you want to be a part of the 20% that delivers 80% of the success, or do you want to be a part of the 80% that is responsible for only 20% of that success?

As I look at you, I believe that all of you want to be a part of the more potent group of people that can make a big difference in Vietnam. To do that, you must go the extra mile to better yourself so you can contribute more to the task of helping your homeland.

This is not a question of what you want to be. It is the challenge of what you want to do. I hope you will pursue greatness for our world, for Vietnam, for your family and for yourself.

Thank you and I look forward to the next four days with you.