

## **The Occasional Address**

### **Graduation Southern Cross University**

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Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Academic colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen – and most importantly, graduands.

Let me begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of this land, the Widgabal people of the Bundjalung nation and pay my respects to the elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and hopes of Aboriginal Australia. Can I also extend my respect to Aboriginal people here today.

The first and most important thing I must say today is congratulations. My congratulations to each and every one of you on completing your degree at Southern Cross University. The completion of your degree is a great personal accomplishment. Indeed, you and your family should be very proud of this considerable achievement.

I would also like to thank the University for inviting my wife Heather and I to be part of this important occasion with you, your family, friends and partners.

It is an honour and a privilege to be giving this Occasional Address today – the University gave me this honour but you, the graduands, have bestowed this privilege.

I feel very humble because about 34 years ago I sat there, as a new graduand from what was then NRCAE and again, later in 1996 after I completed my

second post graduate study, a Masters in Education at Southern Cross University.

As I sat there 34 years ago having completed my teaching qualifications, there is no way I would have been able to imagine, that today I would be standing here in front of you as the Deputy Director-General, Schools in the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities.

I am extremely grateful that my chosen career has turned out the way it has and I hope that you will enjoy a similar experience in your chosen profession.

Look around you. You will see that graduating with you are the graduates of the Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, School of Arts and Social Sciences, School of Education, School of Environment, Science and Engineering, School of Health and Human Sciences, School of Law and Justice, School of Tourism and Hospitality Management and Southern Cross Business School.

You should also be very proud of your University. Not only has it afforded you the opportunity to obtain your degrees, but in addition, it is now and has been for some years, a truly great university offering diverse courses at a high standard to undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

You - and indeed all graduands here today - will probably be surprised at where your degree will take you. Unlike me who has been with one organisation for my working life, it is unlikely that the disciplinary focus of your studies with which you graduate today will be the focus of your employment in five or ten years time.

A few years ago, Richard Riley, Secretary of Education in the Clinton Administration responded to the challenge of education today when he said:

“We are currently preparing students for jobs that don’t yet exist ..... using technologies that haven’t yet been invented.... in order to solve problems we don’t even know are problems yet.”

Regardless of the unknown challenges, as we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, you will still need to rely on one thing that you have mastered well at Southern Cross University and that is your ability to learn - this will be the mainstay to your future endeavours.

Or as American futurist Alvin Toffler stated:

“The illiterate of the 21st Century are not those that cannot read or write but those that cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”

Education is a largely future oriented enterprise. Amongst its purposes are preparing people to live well in the future: preparing them as future citizens and as future workers. But more than preparing learners for the future, education plays a significant part in constructing the future.

The importance of education can never be understated. Your education will play four universal roles in our society’s evolving stage. Education empowers you to contribute to work and society, it will allow you to exercise and develop your personal talents, to fulfil your civic responsibilities and carry our traditions and values forward.

What and how you have learnt through your tertiary education today will very much influence what the world will be like in the future.

Education is a future making process. Educators, and you as future leaders in your discipline are ‘future makers’.

Early in our 21st century we face a number of challenges or change imperatives. These challenges are numerous but five challenges stand out and are often discussed in the literature on 21st Century Capabilities.

We face the social challenge of maintaining and improving the health and vitality of a democratic society – sustaining decent democratic institutions across the many divisions that any modern society contains, and a strong role for fundamental rights protecting entitlements in areas such as health and education.

A major economic challenge is that globalisation and technological change are also placing an increasing premium on education, and skill development and the nature of jobs available to young Australians is changing faster than ever.

Skilled jobs now dominate jobs growth and people with post school qualifications fare much better in the employment market than early school leavers.

A major technological challenge is that the forces of globalisation entail major changes in all our lives: I refer here to the increasing power of and reliance on science and technology; the incredible connectivity that results; the enormous amount of information, often of dubious quality that is at our fingertips; the convergence of cultures in economic, cultural and social terms, and the incessant circulation of human beings of diverse backgrounds and aspirations.

Intimately and inextricably connected to others, we need to be able to communicate with one another, live with one another and make common cause.

There are major health challenges that include the high prevalence of mental disorders, particularly in affluent countries such as Australia. One in five Australians aged 16-85 years had a mental disorder in 2007 and almost one in two (or 7.3 million people) had experienced a mental disorder at some point in their lives. Type 2 Diabetes, a lifestyle disease, is recognised as a serious global health problem.

Australia, indeed the world, faces major ecological challenges. As the population grows and consumption increases, there is a corresponding depletion of resources resulting in increased competition and conflict amongst humans. Refinements to technology and organisation of labour have also contributed damage to ecosystems that sustain life.

So what skills and capabilities are necessary for us to address these challenges in the 21st Century?

The literature indicates that two broad and interconnected capabilities are pertinent - the ability to think well and the ability to live well.

The literature suggests that included in the ability to think well are the abilities to think critically, (that is the ability to examine, reflect, argue and debate), to think deeply and logically, to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning areas and disciplines, and be creative, innovative and resourceful.

Included in the ability to live well are the abilities to manage one's emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing, to relate well to others and form and maintain healthy relationships, and to have concern for the lives of other living beings.

As I look out across this group of new graduates I am filled with optimism. As you move into your chosen disciplines, the knowledge, skills and capabilities that you have acquired as part of your academic studies at Southern Cross University will be required to respond to these demands of increasing globalisation, demographic shift and the technological revolution that we witness daily. I think we are in good hands.

You will find yourself needing to be able to quickly learn the core content of a field of knowledge while also mastering a broad portfolio of essential learning, innovation, technology and career skills needed for work and life.

And when you apply these skills to today's knowledge and innovation work, you may well find yourself participating in a global network in which, for example, a product may be designed in Italy, manufactured in China, assembled in the Czech Republic, and sold in chain stores in cities around the world.

As I stated earlier, learning does not stop with the acquisition of your qualification this afternoon. It is only the beginning.

This graduation has confirmed not only your ability in yourself, but also the validity of the new way of learning that you undertook.

As you progress through life and career, I am sure you will find a need to return to learning over and over again. When you do return to study, you will find Southern Cross University waiting to serve you.

To the parents, family members, friends and partners of our graduands – such a day lends itself to reflection, and I am sure that you have taken the opportunity to think back on your son's, daughter's or partner's life and the various joys and challenges that have brought him or her to this point.

We all recognise the love and sacrifices of parents in the long journey of raising young people and assisting with their education. The parents here this afternoon have every right to feel enormously satisfied and proud.

For our graduands today, you become part of an informed and educated society.

Congratulations to you all and welcome to the great community of alumni of Southern Cross University.