

SCU Graduation Occasional Address

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Whitebrook Theatre, Lismore Campus

Mr d'Almeida, Vice Chancellor Professor Peter Lee, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen and graduates.

The following phrase seems to have become one of the top used and abused phrases of 2016, so to paraphrase, there has never been a better day to graduate! Time to breathe a collective sigh of relief, and that's just from the extended families and friends never mind you lot over here!

Depending on your career path from now on you may have completed your last all-nighter, no more cramming for an exam, no more hoping against hope as to which questions will turn up on the paper!

So congratulations to you all. This is an amazing day and you will remember it for the rest of your life.

I should point out that despite being in Australia for nearly 7 years my Irish/Scottish accent or the words I use sometimes leaves people bemused or

confused - Did he just say that? What did he say? So today on my way through this address I'm deliberately going to slip in some words from the Scottish dialect. It might keep you awake. See how many you can spot!

I am from the Celtic fringes, born in Belfast, Northern Ireland of an Irish father and Scottish mother, which is a common complaint in that part of the world, left NI as it was tearing itself apart through sectarian conflict and studied Geography at Nottingham University. Geography it seems has always been important in my life. It was a Geography teacher who first spotted I needed glasses, while at high school it was a geography teacher who suggested I thought about doing a PhD; my first paid academic job was in a Geography Department; after which it could be said the rest is history!

So let's have a bit of a BLETHER around life and career with a bit of geography, marketing and entrepreneurship thrown in.

It is over 30 years since I sat where you are now as a graduate with my BA in Geography and then again, 3 years later, (as I obviously loved it so much!) when I was awarded my PhD for a study of business regeneration from a geographical perspective. The first reflection I would share with you is that looking back those many years between then and now have passed in the blink of the eye and so to, I have to warn you does career, life and love! You, collectively, have so much potential, you are poised to make a contribution across so many areas of our society here in Australia and perhaps, for many of you given our globalized world, now or later in the international arena as well. There is such excitement in this

moment today and we are here to mark your achievements so far and to acknowledge what you may still achieve.

I was amused by something I saw on social media a short time ago which turned out to be a quote from the writer Kurt Vonnegut which stated 'True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country'. Take a look at the people sitting next to you and think about that! Especially if you house shared with them and know all their secrets! Especially if you have been out on the RAN DAN with them!

Do think about time as you go through life, it is the most precious commodity we have, the biggest challenge you face after today is how you are going to spend that time. 'Time is like a river. (Let's not debate Einstein's view) You cannot touch the same flow twice, because the flow that has past will never pass again. Enjoy every moment of your life.' So keep swimming in that river of time...it's much better than the alternative.

Since graduation I have spent a lifetime in universities and thoroughly enjoyed it with the opportunities it has presented me to teach, research, write, talk and travel the world meeting many different people many of whom remain firm friends after so many years. The opportunity to work in many countries around the world, as diverse as Jamaica, Canada, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, China, Japan, and observe the diversity and complexity of humanity together with its highs and lows.

There are so many memories to look back on which enhance the experience of life beyond anything I could have hope for. My experience is by no means unique in the academic world. Behind me sits a very distinguished bunch of people, who have contributed greatly to society through a range of careers, but let's face it, what sits in front of me here is potential, hope, the future is yours. If I can channel Robin Williams in that wonderful movie Dead Poets Society, Carpe Diem – Seize the Day and wherever your life takes you 'make good memories' as you go along.

As for career advice, most of the current evidence points to a rapidly changing world in which a 'job for life' is long gone and you can expect to have a number of careers in your lifetime perhaps even a number of jobs at once aligning with the thinking of portfolio careers or liquid lives. This is not unusual for some people already as I observed in studying the lives of craft workers in Scotland who as well as their craftwork they often also had a role as a teacher and or other part-time job running a shop, café, post office or being a tourist guide. Far from being onerous, this for many was a satisfying lifestyle, - variety being the spice of life ...with an associated freedom that is to be treasured within any working life.

My first 'summer job' as we used to call them was working on a farm which mostly grew vegetables but also keep pigs. Most days were spent with sacks tied to my lower legs and slowly crawling up and down rows of cabbages and removing weeds and ensuring the plants were doing well. The attractions of this rather mundane start to my 'working career' if I can call it that were the hearty

farmhouse lunches and the attractive farmer's daughter. She was a STOATER. Both of which motivations were severely compromised one lunchtime when the farmer announced we would be castrating piglets that afternoon. An experience I will, you will be glad to hear, provide no further reflection on today!

The challenge we all face in our working lives is to make a difference. One of my professors at Nottingham spoke about it as making a contribution to your chosen field. No matter how modest I think we are all driven to add value in what we do. Along the way in any career you will have the opportunity to assist, to lead, to stand up for others to take something ordinary and make it extraordinary. Those are good moments, to be savored and enjoyed. Not all working life is plain sailing, people can be extraordinary but they can also be very difficult characters out there to work with. You will meet some BAMPOTS. Like all things they come and go and you can learn from those experiences as well – what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. No one is indispensable to any organization, so never think that, people do come and go and the organization will morph and change, it will be different to what it was but it will in all likelihood survive. If you ever find yourself (having a STRAMASH) or at constant loggerheads with your boss, work colleagues and it is damaging you, move on, leave, find a new door to open. You are not defined solely by your past or present and you can shape your future. I see some people who essentially fester for years in an organization nursing some hurt real or imagined, so if you are SCUNNERED better to up sticks and leave. It will be better for your mental health and the organization you leave behind.

During your career you come across people who inspire you, help to shape who

you become; or you may seek out people who can act as mentors to your progression. Mentors are a valuable way to gain insight, achieve perspective and establish a foundation from which to make your next big leap.

My first academic hero, JP Cole, was a professor at the University of Nottingham but I first came across his work while I was in my final year of high school through one of his books 'Geography of World Affairs'. I still have my, by now, yellowing copy. He was actually born in Sydney but spent most of his life in England.

Geography of World Affairs opened my mind to new ideas, to new ways of seeing things, it raised my gaze to the world and caused me to look in wonder. As my lecturer, way before PowerPoint, video clips and digital rich content were every thought of he held my attention through his knowledge, his boundless curiosity and his ability to communicate in hour long lectures. He did this effortlessly but left you hungry to know more. He simply was inspirational, and if my geography teacher at school encouraged me to do a PhD, JP Cole ignited my desire to be an academic.

He introduced new ways to think in geography both at Universities and in high schools. He had a vision even more than 30 years ago he was pointing out that humans are growing out of touch with nature, and thus endangering their own existence.

Like many of the best academics he was quirky, perhaps a touch of his Australian roots and I do recall one occasion when there was a fire alarm drill in the Social Science Building, where Geography, was located. JP decided to vacate the building

through his window rather than using an internal route, the escape was executed perfectly through the window but unfortunately he twisted his ankle on landing; which you may be thinking was not too bad, until I tell you his office was on the ground floor! NUMPTY we might say in Scotland.

You will find a need to be CANNY in your career... I recently read with interest a book by Karie Willyerd and Barbara Mistick. Being CANNY might mean developing skills in an area that will not be subject to automation and positioning yourself as the go to person for solutions in that area. Engage with people. Fine tune that Emotional Intelligence to navigate organizational politics. Nurture cross-cultural dexterity in our globalized world – a fine excuse to travel. Make sure you keep up with technology – adapt and evolve and get used to an increasing use of virtual collaboration. Demonstrate leadership and be prepared to show that leadership before you get appointed to a higher level. Perhaps most of all harness your entrepreneurial spirit and get creative.

Which links me to another of the key influences in my career that of entrepreneurship and marketing. One of the leading academics in this field was Professor David Carson, formerly of the University of Ulster, who was one of the few academics I have encountered over the years whose love of and ability to drink Guinness exceeds my own. With the mantra ‘work hard and play hard’ we enjoyed many pursuits over the years. You might be partying till late, you might have been STEAMIN’ or BLOOTERED, but you made sure you were there at the 9am session the next day to participate. If I retired from the fun at 3am he would typically call out ‘fader’ after me. Only an Irishman could think that! With a

love of SMEs and marketing entrepreneurship which, was closely aligned to working with business, he was well ahead of the current innovation agenda in Australia. I learnt many things from him, including how to handle difficult people in meetings and eventually I succeeded him as Chair of the Academy of Marketing in the UK. Fittingly enough I took over as Chair in Dublin Castle, standing at a podium where the previous speaker was President Bill Clinton. I enjoyed that moment.

So to conclude, our universe is not only unfathomably bigger than expected, it is also immensely more beautiful than any of our ancestors could have imagined. 'There is no shortage of possible futures. JP Cole wrote, the greatest mistake, perhaps, in speculating about the future is to put your money on one particular future and to support it fanatically.' So my final piece of advice is to keep your options open, stay flexible, be passionate, work hard and play hard, extend a hand to those less fortunate than yourself, and try to leave behind something that is intact. I will sign-off with some advice from Lisa Messenger, entrepreneur and SCU graduate and Outstanding Alumnus of the Year in 2009 who wrote in her book 'Daring and Disruptive: unleashing the entrepreneur'.

“Live your life with purpose and passion

Push the limits

Push yourself

Have dreams

Then make them happen

Don't be afraid to fail

Just get up each time you fall

For there is a life out there for you to live

That requires bravery and courage

Someone who's willing to get off their arse and make it happen

Someone who won't let ANYTHING get in their way

Someone who is ready for the challenge and hungry for success.”

Now is the time to be daring...to be disruptive.

Good luck to you all.

AMcA 21/05/16