

Occasional Address by Dr. Ambrose So
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Dear graduates:

I'm not going to congratulate you. As you are already immersed in congratulations tonight, and I'm afraid too many will drown you.

Neither do I need to wish you good luck, as you have already received a big fortune. Your university education provides a fertile ground in which you can plant your dreams. And you have taken a necessary step, because, realistically, in today's global economy, one needs a college degree to compete.

Having noted the value of a university education, I wonder if you have ever heard of "the three fallacies of a university education". Let me briefly review them for you.

Half of what you are taught ... you don't learn.

Half of what you are taught and learn ... you forget.

And half of what you are taught, and learn, and remember ... will turn out to be wrong!

Therefore:
(if you did remember some basic arithmetic!)

Only one-eighth of what you have been taught may eventually be useful to you.

Of course, this fraction is not intended to be precisely correct, and certainly would be varied in different individual cases.

But the three fallacies, in addition to a humorous look at the weaknesses of the human brain, pose a clear warning:

You will encounter serious difficulties if your education stops now, or if it stops at any point later in your lives.

What is the solution to this dilemma?

The solution is a simple phrase, though not a simple concept.

The solution is called Lifelong Learning.

It is a fairly self-explanatory term, but let's look at it closely so that we can extract more relevance for you at this stage in your lives.

Do you really need to keep learning? Isn't it more important to be able to find the knowledge, rather than to have the knowledge?

After all, isn't everything that you need to know available on Wikipedia?

Anyone believing that has my sympathy.

But I am also guilty from time to time of taking a short-cut, so let's look at the definition of Lifelong Learning from Wikipedia.

According to Wikipedia, Lifelong Learning is "the ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. The term recognizes that learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom but takes place throughout life and in a range of situations."

Three of these words are quite important to keep in mind regarding a workable description of Lifelong Learning: it is ongoing, it is voluntary, and it is self-motivated.

Many aids to Lifelong Learning have been created, and you will encounter these throughout your lives. Institutions such as open universities, distance learning or e-learning, online academies, "executive" degree programs, adult education, as well as various credentials that are available to be earned regardless of your age.

Even the United Nations has a program to encourage Lifelong Learning throughout the world – it is called "The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning".

But these formal approaches to Lifelong Learning are not the most important part. What is most important is the commitment to the "ongoing, voluntary and self-motivated" pursuit of knowledge.

Dear graduates, it is a privilege for me to be the Occasional Speaker tonight. But this privilege didn't come by chance as it has taken me many years of learning before I arrived here as a speaker.

I graduated from The University of Hong Kong in 1973, majoring in mathematics and physics. I, however, ended up in a career related to gaming and tourism. This was never in my dream before. 35 years have passed and I am still in this industry, as I have learnt how important the industry is to the development of the economy and to the welfare of the people. Ambitions are not carved in stone. I'm glad to be a part of Macau's growth story. I'm glad to have found a new dream.

After 25 years of work, I went on to study my doctoral degree at Southern Cross University.

No matter how busy I am, I keep on practicing calligraphy. I have never dreamt before that my childhood interest in calligraphy has ultimately led me to be involved in activities promoting Chinese culture today, including strengthening the cultural and social ties among Hong Kong, Macau, China and Portugal.

All my political and business titles will be gone one day, only my cultural identity will persist. This is the essence of Lifelong Learning. Learning something that you are deeply fond of will help characterize you and create a unique YOU.

In parting, I would like to leave you with a beautiful quote by T.S. Eliot:

“What we call the beginning is often the end.
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.”

Dear graduates, tonight’s graduation is only one of the many semi-colons in your life-passage of learning. So I am not going to congratulate you or to wish you good luck. I will challenge you instead. I challenge you to be a dreamer, a doer and a lifelong learner, and that you will contribute to the making of a better world!

Thank you all.