

SCU Graduation Occasional Address

The Honourable Don Page

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11.30 am, Saturday, 28 November 2015

Whitebrook Theatre, Lismore Campus

Chancellor, thank you for that very kind introduction.

Vice-Chancellor, Graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this land and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

I also acknowledge Member for Lismore Hon Thomas George & his wife Deb (and other MP's and Mayors). I would like to publicly acknowledge and thank my wife Lizzi for her wonderful support and assistance over the years.

I thank the University Council for conferring an honorary University Doctorate on me today. I am truly humbled by this great honour.

I would also like to thank SCU for the invitation to present the Occasional Address today.

Firstly, and most importantly I congratulate the graduating students on all the hard work and effort you have put in to enable you to be a graduate in your chosen discipline. I would also like to acknowledge your family, friends and university staff who have provided support and assistance along the way.

It is a particular personal pleasure for me to be here today twenty one years after Southern Cross University became a stand-alone university. I was on the Council when SCU became a university in its own right. It is very gratifying to see how the university has grown since those early days when I had an additional special role as Chairman of the Advisory Committee which established the Bachelor of Tourism degree.

SCU has grown from a university having 4000 students in 1993 on one campus to over 9000 students today on three campuses. Prior to the establishment of the UNE in Armidale in 1956, there was not one regional university in Australia. My grandfather, Dr Earle Page, as a very promising regional student from Grafton, won a Sydney University Scholarship, commenced university at 14 years of age and graduated top of his year in medicine at age 21, was passionate about providing educational opportunities for regional students. Later on he became the first Chancellor of UNE, which as I said, at that time, was the only regional university in Australia. He would be smiling today to see we now have eleven universities in regional Australia, including of course Southern Cross University.

Providing regional people with ready access to tertiary education has always been a high priority for the Page Family. Students in regional areas, even today, often find it difficult to access tertiary education close to where they live even though they are just as entitled to that

education as any other student in Australia. The figures tell the story. 31% of people aged between 25 and 64 living in a metropolitan area hold a bachelor degree.

This compares to only 15% of people from the same age group living in regional areas. Importantly, students who attend a regional university are far more likely to stay in that area when they graduate, whereas regional students who study at metropolitan universities rarely return to the regions. So regional universities not only provide greater opportunity for regional populations to gain a degree, they also increase the number of professionals filling the needs of regional communities. In the same way that geography should not be a barrier to education, neither should age or socio-economic status. Regional Universities also offer the opportunity of tertiary education to more mature age and lower socio-economic students than their metropolitan counterparts. There is also more support for these students at regional universities. Southern Cross University has an impressive record in supporting its students and has been voted number 2 in Australia for the past 3 years for overall learning experience.

In addition to improving access to tertiary education for regional students, I have always had the view that those who have had the benefit of a good education should use that education not just to benefit themselves financially, but at some stage throughout their lives give something back to their community by making an extra contribution beyond their professional one.

My key message to all graduating students today is to encourage you to make some contribution to your community beyond your job. Our communities need volunteers and you will derive huge satisfaction from helping others. As Ghandi said *"You can find yourself in the service of others"*. A past NSW Senior Volunteer of the Year Award recipient, Megan Etheridge said and I quote, *"Volunteering allows me to feel like I'm adding value to someone's life, but importantly I've come to realise that it's also adding value to my own"*.

Australia has a very impressive record for volunteering compared to other nations, whether it be through surf lifesaving, the rural fire service, where we have over 73,000 volunteer fire fighters in NSW alone, or in a myriad of other organisations across our country who look after people in need.

Some of the people here today are already doing volunteer work and we thank you all for the wonderful work you are doing.

Having encouraged you to become involved in some form of community service, I also recognise that armed with your degree, your top priority in most cases will be to "get out there" and utilise your degree.

Sometimes community service has to wait until you are in a position to do it. But for many of you, at some stage during your working life, opportunities will arise for you to help someone in need. Whether it's offering to do pro-bona work for a victim of domestic violence, or helping an under-privileged student attend a class excursion, you will be making a difference to someone's life that will have lasting benefits.

I was interested to note the latest Australian Wellbeing Survey conducted by Deakin University found that individual happiness comes down to three key things:

1. A good personal relationship with your partner;
2. Financial security; and
3. Having a sense of purpose.

For me, when I was younger finding a sense of purpose was the most elusive. It wasn't until I became involved in public life and the community that I felt I achieved it. The most rewarding aspect of my role as Member for Ballina for 27 years, was being able to help people in need. Whether it was helping an elderly parent who had a disabled child, or securing funding for drug rehabilitation programs, or correcting a bureaucratic injustice that had turned someone's life upside down, or just knowing you had changed someone's life for the better; that all provides its own special personal reward.

The Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield said it would be good for more people to go into orbit, seeing the planet on which seven billion people live every day - seeing the world as one place and noting that we are all in this together. He also encouraged people to think about what they are trying to achieve in their lives, and what risks we are prepared to take in order to produce a better outcome. He said he managed to

overcome his fear of something going wrong in space by deciding that we are all going to die anyway at some stage, so he might as well die doing something that gave him a sense of purpose.

Whilst Chris Hadfield is encouraging us to look at the big picture and develop a sense of purpose, it seems to me in this age of social media that we are increasingly looking inward rather than out at the world around us. It is somewhat ironic that because of technological advancement we can all access information from around the globe like never before, yet as individuals, especially through social media, we are becoming more and more pre-occupied with ourselves and our social media network.

It is up to parents and policy makers to make sure teenagers in particular are getting enough information about what is and what is not 'real' in cyberspace, as well as methods to cope with the social and emotional pressures of social media.

From living my life so far I've made a few observations about people I admire.

I admire people who are open and prepared to communicate and discuss important ideas with others. I admire the 'givers' in our community much more than the 'takers'.

I admire people who truly listen. There is a difference between hearing people and listening to them just as there is between hearing music and listening to music. Really listening to people is just the first step in understanding them and enhancing our own emotional intelligence.

I also admire people who treat other people well, regardless of their background, politics, or social standing. You can tell quite a lot about a person by the way they treat people who are not important to them. For example how people treat wait staff in a restaurant.

I admire people who are generally positive about life. It's better to define ourselves by what we love rather than what we oppose. As they say, it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.

So to summarise, I would encourage all students to use your education to try to make our community a better place and to look for opportunities to develop a personal sense of purpose. Such an approach will enrich your own lives and deliver significant community benefits.

I congratulate you all on graduating today. It is a significant achievement. I hope it is one of many in your future endeavours. I wish you all the very best in whatever path you take beyond the university and remember the opportunity of a lifetime only lasts as long as the lifetime of the opportunity. So go and seize the day!

Again, thank you for the great honour you have bestowed on me today.