

**Graduation Occasional Address, Whitebrook Theatre, SCU Lismore  
Campus, Saturday 11.30am 29 November 2014**

At this ceremony awards will be conferred upon candidates from the following College and Schools:

School of Arts and Social Sciences  
Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples  
Southern Cross Business School

STARTS

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Members of SCU Council, SCU Staff, Parents, Family, and Friends of Graduates and **Graduates**.

I also acknowledge the Widjabal People of the Bundjalung Nation, Traditional Custodians of the land on which this event is taking place, and pay tribute to the unique role they play in the life of this region.

It is indeed a great privilege to be here with you today to receive this award of Fellow of Southern Cross University, and to deliver the Occasional Address.

A procession of Occasional Speakers at these Graduations has contributed a comprehensive collection of insights from their professional careers, which I believe to be a valuable resource for your own career development and for your incubation as good citizens. They can be found on the SCU website.

These presentations cover an eclectic mix of virtues such as acceptance, caring, commitment, compassion, consideration, diligence, empathy, humility, integrity, service and of course, knowledge. You may have

noticed that the virtues of **moderation** and **temperance** are noticeably absent. Thankfully, I hear you say. Perhaps this omission is in deference to your imminent and well deserved celebrations.

Enough of what others have said. Let me add some insights of my own.

You have a long journey ahead of you, you will need to constantly re-energise and refuel. So seize **Inspiration** whenever and wherever you find it.

Can I suggest you start with a large dose of inspiration from Noel Pearson's powerful eulogy for Gough Whitlam - it's a defining speech for all Australians, rich in political history, the ongoing struggle for Aboriginal rights, and the empowerment of a nation through political reform. It's also a very passionate and emotional tribute to selfless public service by a great Australian political leader.

I have described the presentations from previous Occasional Speakers as a veritable **Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy**.

For those amongst us not familiar with this highly popular and successful multimedia science fiction comedy, the **Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy**, which started life on BBC radio in 1978, let me give you a very brief sketch.

The series covers the escapades of a few main characters travelling the Universe, two of whom include Arthur Dent a hapless Englishman, always in dressing gown, sipping tea, and one **Ford Prefect**, an alien journalist and experienced galactic hitchhiker who is visiting Earth, which is about to be demolished to make way for a hyperspace bypass.

In preparation for his visit to earth, Ford skimps his research and bases his name on what appears to be the dominant life form, and the

ubiquitous car of the time, the **Ford Prefect** – if he visited today his moniker would no doubt be Apple iPhone.

My point is not about making sure you do your research, you have clearly already mastered this task. Ford tried to fit in, not to be noticed, to be ‘nicely inconspicuous’ – it’s a deception I would strongly urge you to resist.

You will join a new generation of thinkers, of doers, of builders for our society. There is a compelling need, especially now, for you to be assertive, to be properly informed, to stand up and to speak out on topical issues.

Our modern society is yearning for reliable and trustworthy **leadership**, innovative **public policy** and intelligent public discourse to address the ever growing challenges. Too often we are offered up puerile slogans as a substitute for meaningful public engagement. The use of **political hyperbole**, such as Leaners or Lifters to describe our individual economic efforts, is no substitute for well constructed public policy.

On the issue of Public Policy, in September this year, the Australian Government released its Energy Green paper. Under the section ‘Security, Innovation and Energy Productivity’ the paper says that ‘Australia’s energy security arrangements have so far effectively avoided major disruptions to energy supply’, and that ‘the potential near term shortage in East Coast gas supply and national liquid fuels refining capacity are, however **watch-points**’. This is generally interpreted as meaning a low risk probability.

Some of you may have been following recent news articles that revealed Australia is almost wholly dependent on overseas refineries and shipping for our supply of liquid fuels, and that a serious disruption

to that supply chain could derail the operations of our economy within a month.

How many business graduates here today would offer up a business model with such an inherent vulnerability. I find it disconcerting that at the same time as the Green Paper talks about 'watch points' for two of our critical energy sources, the Expert Panel reviewing the Renewable Energy Target Scheme (**RETS**), have recommended that new investment in RETS be curtailed.

It seems ironic that we would dissuade investment in home grown fuel supplies that would enhance our energy security. The federal government has yet to decide the fate of RETS.

Before I move on, let me draw another galactic pearl of wisdom from HG2G as it is also known.

Shortly before the Vogons destroyed the Earth for the hyperspace by pass we were repeatedly warned by our fellow mammals, the congenial and intelligent Dolphins. Unfortunately their many animated attempts to warn us were unsuccessful and their antics of punching balls with their nose, jumping through hoops and whistling for tidbits were wildly misinterpreted as just having a good time - 'hooping' it up !!

Their real message, which was discovered much too late, was '**Goodbye and thanks for all the Fish**'. OK, but what's the relevance to today's ceremony?

Well, I'm urging you to listen carefully to the seminal messages of our time. To communicate effectively and to sometimes trust intuition, as well as, or in conjunction with reasoned logic to shape your responses. Most importantly, listen very carefully so you can filter out the

background noise and endless chatter that disguises the message. Strip away the rhetorical flourishes and ignore the hyperbole.

Think Climate Change. Is the message not clear enough yet. Surely when the overwhelming body of scientific opinion forecasts a problem of such magnitude for our planet, we, as custodians, have an obligation to act to ensure intergenerational equity.

If this is all a bit glum, let me finish on a more uplifting note.

In the Uffizi gallery in Florence hangs a famous painting by Sandro Botticelli titled **Primavera**, painted around 1482. The scene takes place in what is thought to be the garden of the Goddess, **Venus**, who is featured in the centre background of the painting. Above her head is **Cupid**, the blindfolded cherub god of love. The backdrop is a beautiful garden with a luxuriant mosaic of springtime blossoms. There is a winged genie on the right of the picture, swirling in from the surrounding trees. He is thought to be **Zephyrus**, the springtime wind who has been pursuing the beautiful nymph **Chloris** and in the painting he is embracing her, indeed he has pursued her, politically incorrectly possessed her and now married her, the union giving her the power to germinate flowers, portrayed by blooms falling from her mouth. The painting captures the transformation of Chloris into the very beautiful Latin goddess of Spring, **Flora** who is painted standing beside Chloris. Across to centre left are three women enrobed in white translucent flowing dresses, entwined together dancing in a circle and thought to represent the Three Graces from Greek Mythology of Beauty, Delight and Charm.

Now to the centerpiece of my story. On the far left of the painting is a muscular male youth wearing a traveller's hat, a sword in its sheath,

winged sandals and a crimson robe worn off one shoulder. He is gazing upwards admiring the abundance of the garden. He is believed to be **Mercury**, herald of Jove and in this painting thought to be the emblem of knowledge.

So why am I telling you this, and doing this terrible injustice to this magnificent painting ?

Well, whilst **Primavera** is thought to be an elaborate and complex 'allegory about the burgeoning fertility of the world', I also believe it speaks to us about the gift of knowledge.

Perhaps it is saying knowledge itself enriches the passage of life, that the presence of knowledge facilitates or triggers transformation, or that knowledge is a prerequisite for the germination of ideas, or perhaps even more simply that knowledge is a critical ingredient for the fulsome enjoyment of life, along with love, and the beauty and bounty of nature.

One thing I am most certain of is that knowledge is a gift, one that is being bestowed upon you today, as most worthy recipients, by the educators at SCU.

There is little doubt that it will transform your lives, just as it will enrich the lives of those closest to you and those who will journey with you.

Use this precious gift with good grace and enjoy your journey.

ENDS