

29 March: Occasional Address: Dare to Dream

Emeritus Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik AO

It is with deep respect I acknowledge the Kurna People on whose land we meet today.

Graduands congratulations. Today, as you officially commence your own journeys, I want to take you on an epic journey - one in which I have been involved for some 47 years.

Anything meant to last has strong foundations, and our university UniSA, was built on the strong foundations of its two antecedent institutions - the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT) and the South Australian College of Advanced Education (SACAE).

In 1972 a group of leaders from the Aboriginal community coopted the Department of Community Welfare, and together they convinced the South Australian Institute of Technology to mount a special program to enable Aboriginal people to work within DCW. This was an amazing feat, a real grass roots victory. It also made SAIT the first tertiary institution in the country to mount a program for Aboriginal Australians; more importantly, it believed in social justice and equity for my people -the First Australians.

The Aboriginal Task Force program was launched in 1973 in the School of Social Work as a once off. two year non accredited, national community development program; people came from across the country to study. It was the first time such an opportunity was afforded them. They were very brave men and women journeying into the unknown, but

they DARED TO DREAM. They took risks often uprooting families, to follow their dream. Sometimes we have to take risks to realize our dreams.

This first cohort excelled much to the surprise of many, resulting in another intake in 1975, the year I commenced employment in the program. By 1976 these students were enrolled in the Associate Diploma in Social Work. On graduation they used their qualifications to enrol on degrees courses in SAIT or Adelaide University. One of the contributing factors to success was the support systems we developed which has proven to be the blue print for the Indigenous Higher Education Sector.

The 70s was both dynamic and interesting. The Women's Liberation Movement was at its peak, university fees were abolished, women enrolled in universities in higher numbers through special entry provisions. So we too, capitalised on these opportunities and rode on the same tide as the women's movement. We DREAMT BIG.

You have grab opportunities when they arise, or create them for yourselves.

The Aboriginal Task Force became a School with its own accredited awards and in 1983 it offered the first bachelors degree in Australia that saw our ancient knowledge systems and sciences taught within such hallowed walls.

In 1977, successful negotiations between Aboriginal Leaders and the South Australian College of Advanced Education resulted in the launching of the Aboriginal Studies and

Teacher Education Centre (ASTECC). It too was a highly successful program and went on to become a school. In the early 80s it initiated an accredited teaching award for traditional bi-lingual Aboriginal students living across the APY Lands.

In 1990, SAIT and SACAE amalgamated to form UniSA. Our two schools merged to become a faculty, then in the late 90s it became the David Unaipon College named after the great Ngarrindjeri man from the Coorong who was an author, musician, minister of religion, mathematician and inventor in the style of a 'Renaissance man'. You probably know him as the man on the \$50 note.

The Unaipon College no longer exists. So to borrow from Ecclesiastes, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven". The lesson here is that things will come into our lives and then they leave. Why? Because they are learning experiences. We must ask ourselves what lessons have we learned from these experiences.

In this instance the Aboriginal Task Force proved from little things, big things grow. There are now Aboriginal programs in every university across the country based on the principles of the Aboriginal Task Force. We have lecturers, professors, Deans, Pro Vice Chancellors in universities across Australia.

Thirty thousand Aboriginal students have graduated from universities and our enrolments and graduation rates are growing. Between 2001 to 2015, statistics show that

over twenty three thousand have graduated. There are currently 15,585 of our students enrolled in universities. We have students studying in the ten top universities in the world, and our second Rhodes Scholar will be at Oxford University in September.

What a legacy!

Graduands I hope you leave here today as are as proud of our university as I am

I wish you well and hope you too will DARE TO DREAM and make a difference in your own right!