

UNISA Graduation Occasional address

It is an honour to be invited to give the occasional address during the year when this university celebrates its first 25 years- while recognising that some of its component schools have a history of 120 years or so. No need to feel new.

This is an occasion for each graduate and each family to look to the past few years with a sense of satisfaction and of achievement. It is also an occasion to look to the future.

What will it hold? What will I become? What will I achieve?

We all know that this is a time of constant change, that the old securities of jobs for life have gone, that many of the very occupations for which you have studied may not exist in current form in a decade or so. How then can this occasional address possibly offer you anything which will give you guidance?

I was recently challenged as to what my take-home message would be for you.

This is my message: wherever your life's course takes you, whatever occurs in your professional career, strive to be an engaged and active member of your community and of society.

Apply the learnings from your professions in making a contribution to the world in which you live and work.

There is no way that you can, with any certainty, know exactly what you will be doing in twenty or forty years. But your university education should have equipped you with the capacity to continue to learn, to consider and to analyse, to respond to changing circumstances.

I am profoundly grateful that the University of Sydney in 1950 offered me an opportunity to study philosophy, ancient history and economics, before I subsequently undertook studies in social work.

My career in public policy, the capacity to critically examine issues and options, owes much to that early grounding in learning how to think.

I returned to work in a public hospital in Victoria when my youngest daughter was four and attending pre-school. I was shocked by the problems I

encountered- by patients with no health insurance or capacity to pay for long term care, by no income supports for sole parents...the list was long.

I turned to my professional association and other bodies to find out what could be done. I had to learn about the history and the politics of health financing (and understand the 1967 constitutional amendment which had been required to set up the existing health insurance system).

In the course of time I found common cause with economists at the University of Melbourne who were developing options for new and more comprehensive forms of hospital and medical insurance. I gave evidence to sundry Senate and other Committees of inquiry.

Ultimately, I turned full-time to social policy analysis as my professional career, building on from direct experiences in hands-on professional practice.

I was invited by incoming Prime Minister Gough Whitlam to go to Canberra in 1972 to establish a new social policy statutory body.

For me it has been a long and winding path from a toddler living a tent in a fettler's camp beside a railway line in the Hunter Valley in the Great Depression in the early Thirties to representing my country at the United Nations, from education at home by correspondence to spending the best part of forty years involved at the highest level in advising Government from inside, and later critiquing policy from a standpoint in the community.

The current generation of graduates needs to be similarly ready to build on from direct practice, to be able to explore problems and solutions, to be flexible, and to respond to new challenges. Be ready to engage with civil society, to explore the environments in which you practice, to wonder what solutions there may be which could lessen the extent and significance of the practice problems with which you must daily engage.

In retirement I remain engaged. I work with a number of extraordinary women with the National Foundation for Australian Women, and other groups, on projects- one is an annual gender analysis of the Commonwealth Budget¹ to see how fair it is in its impacts on women and girls, most particularly those in disadvantaged circumstances.

¹ <http://www.nfaw.org/budget-2015-2016-gender-lens/>

We have established, in association with the University of Melbourne and the National Library of Australia the Australian Women's Register², an on-line biographical register of Australian women and their organisations, so that the contributions which women have made to Australian society are not lost to public memory or acknowledgement.

The scholarly worth of the Register has led to the University of Melbourne recently strengthening its own commitment.

I have a few more projects to develop yet...perhaps a critical analysis of election undertakings, which will be more or less useful according to whether promises prove to be core or non core.

So there is my message- the world lies before you, meet it full-on, be engaged and welcome its challenges and its rewards. #

There is much for you to do to make the world a better place all through your lives.

² www.womenaustralia.info