

UniSA graduation address September 30 at 9:30 am 2025

Douglas Gautier

Let me firstly acknowledge that we meet today on the traditional land of the Kaurna people.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge Chancellor John Hill, UniSA Council members, staff, new graduates, families and supporters.

I am deeply honored and grateful for this award of an honorary doctorate by this University. An institution that has stood by the importance of creative arts and humanities within the university and to the community - when these disciplines are increasingly under threat across the western world. Sadly, at a time when civilization needs them most.

Here at this University – under the banner of “UniSA Creative” – architecture, planning, art and design, journalism, communication and media, film, TV & visual effects, and creative industry- studies, have flourished.

Your website tells us that “Creativity is the core and that the creative economy isn’t slowing down and neither should you”.

How right that is. A recent UNESCO study of the global creative economy noted that Asia Pacific is by far the strongest internationally in this sector, in terms of investment, output and jobs. How fortunate we are to be part of the Asia Pacific region – it is our future; it is your future. And we should embrace the possibilities with energy and enthusiasm.

The creative arts track record of this community is strong. Media and creative organizations founded here in Adelaide have had international successes and there are people who began their careers here and are now contributing to creative initiatives all over the world.

You have every right and reason to be ambitious and optimistic about your professional futures.

This city for some time has been a creative hub that punches above its weight – with key people who work to ensure it stays that way.

Three of them are on the platform with me this morning.

Your Chancellor John Hill – one of our best State Arts Ministers and former Chair of the film commission.

Michael Abbott – Arts Philanthropist, scholar, and Asian cultural specialist. Former Chair of both the Art Gallery of South Australia and the Festival Centre.

And Professor Batty who will help drive the creative arts initiative at the new combined University.

In the wider community we are blessed with great cultural Champions such as our Governor H.E. Frances Adamson and our Lord Mayor Jane Lomax Smith. The list goes on.

In my own case, I count myself as fortunate to have grown up and be educated here, and to have worked in this community. I had a great start in the Dunstan era which set me up well for international possibilities in media and the arts.

For the last twenty years I headed the Adelaide Festival Centre – regarded as one of the most innovative arts hubs in Asia Pacific - And why? Because at the heart of it, there were creative young people like you, who brought the Centre to life, and who continue to do so. It's one of the reasons why we are Australia's only UNESCO Creative City for Music and why we are the preeminent Festival city in this country.

In my capacity as CEO and Artistic Director of the Festival Centre my associations with UniSA in Australian/Asian cultural engagement – particularly with the OzAsia Festival, the Hawke Centre and mentoring Arts Admin students have been for me, productive and rewarding experiences.

International respect for Adelaide as a creative hub, led directly to my current appointment. I am responsible as CEO for developing the new Royal Arts complex in Riyadh Saudi Arabia- which will combine music, theatre, cinema, a traditional arts academy, visual arts, and an arts library alongside a museum of world cultures. The role of the creative arts in Saudi is regarded as a vital ingredient in the building and development of their communities and the nation's international cultural reputation.

And likewise, we should be confident of, and ambitious for, the role of creativity and the arts in this country. And continue to believe in their contribution to good civic society, and social cohesion – along with their intrinsic worth – dare I say it – arts for art's sake.

Your choice of disciplines here and your future contributions are fundamental to this hope. You have already made a strong commitment and investment. I salute you.

You have had to deal with the iniquitous and misguided JRG scheme which discourages many from pursuing paths into creative arts and the humanities, but thankfully – it didn't discourage you.

I wish you all the very best for your future achievements at home and abroad. There has never been a greater need for the tolerance and understanding that most often accompanies cultural diversity and creativity.

In closing, I again thank the University for this honor. Personally, of course I am very pleased, but I also am encouraged that the creative sector has been recognized in this way.

We all have high hopes for the future of creative arts and humanities at the new combined university – to continue and grow the significant arts legacy that UniSA has forged over many years – ensuring that this city continues as an important creative hub and continues to produce great creative talent such as yourselves.

Thank you all.