

SENATOR PENNY WONG
ADDRESS TO GRADUATION CEREMONY
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
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One of the privileges of being a Member of Parliament is that you are asked to participate in a range of important ceremonies.

Ceremonies which mark significant moments in people's lives.

Ceremonies on Australia Day, where we welcome those who have made a commitment to this country by taking out citizenship.

Ceremonies on Anzac Day, where we honour the sacrifices of those who have defended our country and our values.

And ceremonies like this, where we recognise the achievement of those whose commitment to knowledge and academic excellence will build the future of this country – and the world.

What does graduation mean?

It is obviously the conferral of a degree showing that you have qualified in your chosen field of study.

But the dictionary tells us the word has other meanings too.

Graduation means dividing something up into a series of proportionate intervals – think of a graduated scale.

In the Middle Ages, graduation was a term for tempering the composition of a substance – refining an element to a higher degree of purity or strength.

Graduation has its origins in the Latin word *gradus* – which means “a step.”

Each of these meanings is relevant to this ceremony.

For today you are taking an important step.

You are passing a milestone in the graduated scale of events, decisions and achievements that will make up your life’s journey.

And I am sure that your time at the University of South Australia has refined you, tempered you, and equipped you well for the challenges of the future.

For each of you, today marks a tremendous individual achievement.

It was you who had to do the reading, crunch the numbers, complete the assignments and sit the exams.

It was you who had to think, inquire, and research; to criticise, debate and create.

That is why we are proud of you today – and it is why you should be proud of yourselves.

But your graduation is also a collective achievement.

For you would not be passing this milestone today without the support of your families and friends – the people who have nurtured and nourished you, believing in you and making sacrifices so you could complete your studies.

I want to acknowledge all those special people here today – parents and grandparents, sisters and brothers, spouses and partners, family members, friends and loved ones.

But it's not only these people who have contributed to your achievement.

You are also part of a wider community.

The University of South Australia is a community of scholars and students, researchers and teachers, administrators and ancillary staff – like all of our universities, UNISA is one of the most important institutions in Australian society.

It is not only the formal education provided by universities that is important, it is also the extra-curricular activities with your peers – whether it be involvement in sport and social clubs, or in activities like debating, student media, or the Entrepreneur Association.

Some students even join the campus Liberal and Labor Clubs – look where that can take you!

And now you are stepping into new areas of collective endeavour.

Into professions and careers, into workplaces and local communities – and indeed into national and international

communities of scholars, professionals and experts in your chosen fields.

The rewards for your hard work will certainly be individual:

- interesting jobs;
- challenging careers;
- opportunities for advancement and promotion, and for further study and professional recognition.

But as you graduate you should also think about the fact that you are taking on a special responsibility and a special role.

You have worked hard for this education – use it well.

Remember that those with university degrees comprise a minority in our society – just 15.2 per cent of the Australian population according to the most recent Census.

Many of you will be the first in your families to gain a degree.

This is because the opportunities have not always been there in the past for intelligent, capable and talented people to go to university.

Even today, those opportunities are not available to all who deserve them.

Access to education is important because it can transform lives – and indeed transform societies.

I know this from my own family story.

My paternal grandmother did not even finish primary school in Malaysia.

Her son – my father – had the chance to go to University on a Colombo Plan scholarship, which brought him to South Australia and the University of Adelaide.

After graduating, Dad went back to Malaysia where he has been part of a whole generation of Australian-educated professionals who have helped to build a new society, lifting millions of people out of poverty.

Many of you graduating today will also be returning to home countries which are developing economically and socially, and which face significant challenges.

As university graduates, you can play leading roles in the advancement of your countries.

So can those of you who are graduating into the Australian workforce.

So as you take the next steps in your lives, I ask you to be aware of both the opportunities and the responsibilities.

These include the responsibility to give something back to the people and to the communities that have supported you.

The habits of hard work and self-motivation; of advanced knowledge and research skills; of critical thinking and inquiring minds – these attributes will allow you not only to prosper in your own careers, but also to make valuable contributions to society and to help others.

You've lifted yourselves.

Now you can lift up others, and make the world a better place.

Go well, University of South Australia graduates.

ENDS