**Graduation Speech Notes – UWS September 2014**

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Academic colleagues, special guests, ladies and gentlemen and most importantly, graduands.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the campuses on which UWS students and academics live, work and learn. Out of recognition that the UWS campuses occupy their traditional lands, I acknowledge the Darug, Gandangarra and Tharawal peoples and on behalf of the University of Western Sydney I thank them for their support of the work of the University in Greater Western Sydney and beyond. Today we recognise the value of a life of learning. Those who have inhabited this land before us have passed on a legacy of love for learning. I pay my respects to Elders past and present and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the audience today.

Let me start by congratulating each of our graduands on the significant achievements that today represents. We know it hasn’t always been easy along the journey. Money is tight when you are a student. It’s tough being a student when you also have to work and care for family at the same time. Many of you have sacrificed much to reach today’s milestone. And we know you didn’t do it alone. Family, friends and partners are here today to share in your achievement and we recognise their role today too. We want to say that we are extremely proud of you, of all that you have achieved and of all that you will achieve, for today is just the beginning!

I was talking with a taxi driver the other day and as he drove me into the Parramatta campus he said “Wow, this university is doing really well, isn’t it!”. As you know, taxi drivers are the font of all wisdom and yes, indeed, UWS is doing really well!

You may have seen the giant banner on the side of one of our Parramatta buildings letting the world know that UWS is in the top 100 universities in the world under 50 years of age. That’s quite an achievement for a university that is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. We are the home to multiple national awards for excellence in teaching and we recently received the maximum 5 star rating from graduates of UWS for the quality of our teaching. We also received a similarly high 5 star rating from our graduates in recognition of the quality of the generic skills and capabilities that study at UWS has provided them as they move into the world of work.

On the research front, earlier this week I was looking at the long list of international research collaborations that UWS currently has with prestigious universities such as Oxford and Cambridge in the UK, Jiao Tong University in China and a number of very prestigious institutions in the US and across Asia. UWS is certainly a University who’s time has come and you, our graduates, should feel extremely proud of the fact that you graduate from a University that is making its mark in the world in so many ways.

As I look at the various qualifications represented in this evening’s ceremony I am reminded that we are graduating global citizens who will be working at the national and international level, contributing to economic growth, developing stronger organisations and building the knowledge economy as a result of what you have learned here at UWS.

So what is it that will mark you out as graduates of distinction as you prepare to make your mark in the world?

I propose three markers that will set you apart as you embark on the beginning of this important new chapter in your lives.

**1. You will be graduates who value the lessons of the past while looking for the continuing possibilities of the future**

When the Native American pueblo potters design their pottery, the designs are characterised by decorative lines encircling the vessels. These lines or circular motifs signify the path lines of life but if you look closely, you will always find a small gap in the lines of authentic, traditional creations. These breaks may, at first, look like a mistake – perhaps the potter’s hand slipped of she just forgot to join the lines. But no, that ‘ceremonial break’ or ‘line break’ as it’s called is a very deliberate symbol. It has been a feature of Pueblo pottery for nearly a thousand years and it signifies the release of the spirit of the potter. It reminds us of the continuing possibilities of life.

The traditions and lessons of the past are very important. They remind us of where we have come from, where our roots lie. Around the room today, together we represent a rich tapestry of cultures and backgrounds. But while it is important to look back to remember and learn the lessons of the past, your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to take your place as leaders in your respective communities in the future. This means being thought leaders, leaders of policy in government, community leaders and importantly leaders in the lives of the next generation as you contribute to the lives and learning of those who walk in your footsteps.

**As leaders in the 21st century you will encounter what some call ‘wicked’ problems – these are** the seemingly insoluble problems that we see in such areas as the economy, society, environment, politics and policy. They are wicked because the old solutions and the old ways of dealing with problems simply don’t apply.

– if you always do what you’ve always done you’ll always get what you’ve always got

The great thinker and mathematician, Albert Einstein once commented: **The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination.**

You can tackle the problems you will face in traditional ways

* **or** you can look for creative ways to apply the capabilities you have developed at university, apply your creative and critical thinking skills, capacity for innovation to address the issues.

**In summary, then, you will be marked as a graduate of distinction because you value the lessons of the past, look for the continuing possibilities of the future**

A second marker of distinction is that as a graduate of UWS you will

***2.* Be the change you want to see *in the world.***

Mahatma Gandhi

UWS is a very special place – with 60% of students first in family to attend university

 75% of students live in Greater Western Sydney

* It is indeed a university of the people, for the people.
* On repeated occasions over the past 3 years I have had reports from external consultants who have come on campus, talked with students and staff and said **“it’s amazing how everyone has such a strong sense of the mission of the University – to be a university of opportunity and excellence”.**
* Regardless of internal disagreements, the one thing that unites us all is a shared vision of the change that education can make to people who may not have considered that university was for them.
* I’ve seen students develop confidence and belief in themselves when they see that maybe, just maybe, they might be able to succeed at uni.
* And now you have done it.
* Never underestimate the role model that you will be to others in your family, in your community who will look to you as an example of someone who dreamed big, and became the change they wanted to see in the world.
* That’s a powerful legacy that you now pass on to others who will follow in your footsteps.

So, you will be a graduate of distinction as you …

**1. Value the lessons of the past, look for the continuing possibilities of the future**

***2.* Be the change you want to see *in the world.***

**3. Find your element, Live your dreams**

A few years ago Sir Ken Robinson authored a book entitled ‘The Element: How Finding your passion changes everything”.

It’s about not settling for second best, it’s about following your dreams and living your visions.

Steve Jobs commencement address to Stanford University students in 2006 : *Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.*

And as you step into the future today, there will be many lessons from the past that you will take with you. You will no doubt forget the content of the lectures and all that reading, but I can guarantee that you will not forget the life lessons that will stay with you. Lessons about the importance of the relationships that you will take with you. When you talk with UWS alumni, invariably they will tell you how significant their alumni connections have been many years after graduation. It’s amazing how you come in contact with people who went to the same uni as you did, perhaps did the same course. I urge you to keep in contact with your alumni colleagues. You never know how valuable and helpful they will be down the track.

As you step into the future you will take with you values that are part and parcel of the UWS experience.

**Einstein once commented: Try not to become a person of success but rather try to become a person of value.**

At UWS we value integrity, strong connections between learning and teaching and research – that is what defines a university learning experience. We value strong community engagement, we have a powerful social justice commitment – these are all values that will stand you in very good stead for the future. We value not just the economic benefit of education but the social benefit and the broader environmental benefit of education as a powerful catalyst for change in our society.

You are now part of that change and I hope that your study at UWS has made some contribution to helping you find your element, your larger purpose in life.

So, summary as graduates of UWS you are distinctive not only for the certificates you walk away with this evening but for the fact that you are global citizens who …

1. **Value the lessons of the past, look for the continuing possibilities of the future**

***2.* Are the change you want to see *in the world.***

**3. Are committed to finding your element, your passion, Living your dreams and helping others to do the same**

Well done to our graduates. Today you join more than 150,000 people who have graduated from UWS, and counting – that’s phenomenal for a university that is one of the youngest in Australia.

**You have every reason to stand proud and be the change you want to see in the world.**

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