

OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

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Delivered at graduation ceremony for graduates from
the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building.

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Pro Chancellor
Vice Chancellor

Recently the Sydney Morning Herald ran the headline, “Uni graduates go back to school for work’s sake!” The article claimed that, if graduates wanted to get jobs, they have had to head to TAFE to learn necessary job skills. While this claim was not specifically directed to any university its sentiments are common criticisms of university education as a whole. The claim that universities do not teach job skills is a claim that continuously plagues university educators. Implied in the statement are claims that University education does not prepare graduates for the ‘real-world’ they are entering. The newspapers would like to imply further that because of this universities and their educational settings are not relevant in the twenty-first century.

It is unfortunate that such newspaper articles do not examine the situation beyond the glib assertions of their own headlines. That all universities do not have the same aims in their education might come as a surprise to readers, and for some universities, key indications of their worth may not reside in acclamations of immediate relevance. The general public are mostly unaware of the specific differences in approach to education in universities and do not realise what they support or promote in the choices they make with their children.

I have recently joined UTS as Dean of Design Architecture and Building after many years at a different university in Sydney. What I would like to talk about is the surprising difference in the educational model that UTS provides when compared to its competitors in the Sydney region. This is a story of our approach to your education and why we think this has been a great education to have. While each individual experience of students sitting before me may have differed I suggest that the underlying approach to a UTS education is very relevant for our century and to your future.

UTS has long had the idea of ‘collaborative learning’ or more recently ‘practice-based learning’ as its educational model. That is, that each student engaging in an education in our Faculty has been encouraged to see their education as a collaborative engagement between experiences gained in professional practice and those gained in

the university setting. Linked with this is the idea that study at university focuses on, and will be critically engaged with, the issues and requirements of entering a world of 'practice.' This model is quite unique when compared with other universities in our city. Often universities have actively disparaging students from being employed whilst studying, with many universities, more or less, espousing that an engagement with knowledge in itself is the paramount pursuit for their students.

The unique quality of the UTS model brings with it a complex situation that has demanded your allegiances, as students, both to the rigours of practice – being able to work in a job and be an active member of a professional team – and the rigours of intellectual development – providing you with the scope, intellectual capacity and learning context to critique many of the practices undertaken at work. As well, at each stage in your education at UTS, you have been encouraged to question the relevance of your education through your growing professional experiences.

This is a brave aim for a university to take on. It goes against the more usual ideal of reinforcing educational pedagogies that have emerged from the categorisation of knowledge during the Renaissance. Instead, UTS has presented you with an engaged and vital education, relevant to now. Through your courses you have become very vocal about the education we provide and have actively participated in changes considered necessary for a comprehension of the “changing ‘real-world’ settings,” so acclaimed by the newspaper.

This vibrant educational setting, I believe, has meant that students coming to UTS have been both privileged and tested. You have felt the pressure of competing interests with demands from the work place and from academe. Many students have found the collaborative model has both inspired their great work but also drained them intermittently when the disparate claims of their time reached critical paths. Underlying this is the 'reality' and real-world model that UTS aims to emulate. It has been hard to achieve what you have done so well. We congratulate your successes. The UTS model, is a model of education that can at its best produce the excellence we have recently seen when our graduates have won both national and international awards including Hui Teh, a recently past graduate from the faculty, this month winning the highly sought after Fulbright Scholarship for further study in the USA.

I am convinced that in the time you have been part of the Faculty of Design Architecture and Building at UTS you have gained all the job skills necessary for employment but I am also convinced that you will also have gained much more. You have developed the skills to forge new directions for your professions through your academic experiences; critique combined with the development of your creative capacities is a fundamental attribute to addressing issues so pertinent to professional life.

In conclusion, I hope your friendship with the Faculty does not conclude with this graduation. In the Faculty we need you continued involvement showing us how the changes to your professions will continue to impact on our 'practice focused' educational model.

