

## OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

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Delivered at graduation ceremony for graduates from  
the Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Science

Great Hall, City campus, Monday, 3 May 2004, 10.30am

### **Professionals in Society**

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Faculty Deans, staff, distinguished guests, graduates and your families and friends.

I wish to acknowledge the Eora and Guring-gai people, traditional owners of the land on which UTS is built.

Today should be a day of celebration and great pride for each of you, having survived the best efforts of the University of Technology Sydney to find a chink in the armour of your intellect and of your determination to graduate. You are now unleashed upon the world, unsuspecting as it may be, to practice your profession.

This is an exciting time to commence a career as Australia enters a period of growth and optimism after the recent recession. There is an increasing need in Australia for professionals of high skills as the nation faces a future characterised by rapid changes in social values, technologies and economic realities. It is a time in which the professionals need to exercise leadership in charting the forward paths for this country, as an integral part of their responsibilities to the community.

However, the world today seems to be littered with professionals - professional activists, professional golfers, even professional con-men. The word has become debased by common usage to mean everyone who earns their living by personal skills and endeavour.

In truth there is much more to it than that.

Professionals are groups of people who share not only common knowledge and skills built upon a formalised framework of learning, but also a common and articulated set of values and ethics....which clearly delineate the true professional in our society. Do these old-fashioned values espoused by professionals and professional societies have any relevance in the modern, materialistic world?

Without doubt the answer to this question is yes....they are indeed more relevant today than they were in the nineteenth century, or in any time past.

For modern society is increasingly dependent.. almost totally dependent in many fields..on the competence and ethics of professionals. Just as the professions are faced by explosive growth in knowledge within their own field of practice, the community at large is faced by an overwhelming avalanche of the sum total of the knowledge of all professions, and has increasingly to trust those specialists to use their knowledge in the interests of the community rather in the self-interest of the profession itself. Whether we like it or not, the actions and activities of each individual professional is seen by the community as the actions of the profession in total,...and the pervasive nature of modern communications media ensures that those actions are widely publicised, particularly if they represent a failure to meet the community's expectations.

In the complex society in which we live, there is a critical need for professionals to integrate their activities with that of other professions, and to communicate...and perhaps justify...those activities to the community. Communication skills and broad knowledge are therefore critical competencies. Particularly important to the economic and social well-being of Australia are the competencies that you have in the scientific, technological and engineering fields. The foundation of Australia's economy into the twenty-first century will be the development and production of sophisticated technology based products and systems, and the synergy between science, information technology and engineering will be of paramount importance to our success as a nation.

You who are graduating today have an important role in the realisation of this.

The status and rewards of a professional are deeply rooted in the community's trust in the competence of the professional. The continued maintenance of this trust is therefore critically dependent upon each of us maintaining that competence in the conduct of our professional practice. In these times when the technological base of our knowledge is changing with great rapidity, as are the community's expectations of us, the role of continuing education assumes increasing importance for the professional.

Thus today does not mark the end of an era of learning... merely a gateway to a whole new range of learning experiences, a gateway to an arena in which you will not be judged only in accord with the standards of your peers as you were over the past few years, but will be judged in relation to both the standards of your peers and the standards of the community.

Of course learning in this unstructured environment can be not only educational but also fun. I can clearly remember turning up for work with a bright new PhD, and rapidly discovering that my boss was able to out-manoeuvre me at every corner.

That was when I learned Golden Rule No 1: Age and cunning will beat youth and intelligence every time...and now from my aged vantage point I use this competitive edge to keep ahead of the enthusiastic graduates!

Today is an occasion for me to congratulate you on your success, and to give you that last but unavoidable bit of advice: life and your career will be full of challenges, and the success of your career will depend on how and how well you meet those challenges. The enjoyment of a

professional life is that endless stream of challenges that hide around every corner; challenges which stretch our ability..... the only ones worth tackling.