

OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

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Delivered at the UTS graduation ceremony
for graduates from the Faculty of Business and Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Health
Greenhalgh Theatre, Kuring-gai campus, Wednesday 23 April 2008, 10.30am

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Faculty Deans, staff, distinguished guests, families and friends and most importantly graduands. I wish first to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land the Gadigal and Guring-gai people of the Eora nation upon whose ancestral lands the University now stands and their ongoing relationship to the land to this day.

Today is an exciting day for you — your graduation — and I congratulate you the graduates on your achievement. This ceremony today marks both the end of one journey and the beginning of another. For some of you this is your first degree and graduation — for others this ceremony is not perhaps your first but is recognition of further studies that you have undertaken. Indeed for me there are some familiar names in the program as I see some of my colleagues graduating with higher degrees and it a great pleasure for me to be here to witness this recognition of their achievement today. I also pay recognition to your families and friends who have supported you throughout this journey for like many things in life achievements such as these are only made with the support of those around us. Throughout my studies and career I am conscious of the support that I have received from those close to me.

I am honoured to have been asked to deliver this occasional address today but must admit to some trepidation when I realised that there would be graduates of the Nursing, Midwifery and Health and Business in today's ceremony. I gave some thought to what I could say today that would be of both meaning and interest to all of you.

In doing so I reflected on my own career and studies and recognised that in many ways I had crossed between business and nursing in that time. Indeed if I look at my education my first degree some thirty years ago included a major in economics and my most recent study some three years ago was at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. And as you may note while you may be graduating today this may not be the last time that you will study!

So what are the commonalities between Nursing, Midwifery and Health and Business? Certainly there would be some that would say that these two areas are quite diverse and different and in terms of their practice that can be so — but if we consider Health as a business then it can be seen to be a large business. Indeed the NSW Health system is now one of the largest and most complex industries in this country. Large and complex businesses need leaders as does the delivery of quality health care.

A number of you today are being recognised for your doctoral studies and in looking at the areas of research for your studies it is apparent that some of you have already shown leadership. But leadership is not restricted to those who take on senior roles or further studies. We all have the opportunity to demonstrate and practice leadership in our lives. By putting into practice the skills that we learn at university through critical inquiry and analysis we demonstrate leadership. My initial education as a nurse was as part of an 'experimental' program — this was in the 70s before nursing had transferred to the universities and we were part of a small program that saw us complete a university degree and undertake nursing education at the same time. We were often spoken of by the longer standing staff as those university nurses and were often asked in a somewhat exasperated tone why we had to ask so many questions. We were not willing to accept the status quo but sought to understand what was happening and why it was happening rather than just accepting that this was how it was. Without questioning we will not advance either ourselves or our knowledge in the broader world and as graduates I would hope that you will never stop questioning and seeking to expand both your own knowledge and that of your respective disciplines.

Leadership does not change whether you are working in business or a practicing clinician — it is the context that changes. If I look back over my thirty years in health I note a number of things.

There is a greater emphasis today on work life balance — the importance of family and friends and ensuring time to be with those close to us is more clearly recognised.

The impact of technology has seen us all become more 'connected'. I can now travel overseas with my blackberry and be in contact with my office on a continual basis. We all have access to a wide variety of information via the internet and need to be able to make judgements about the validity and applicability of what we find. We also see the development of virtual communities of practice bringing practitioners from diverse parts of the world together in virtual discussion and exploration of areas of common interest.

The workforce of today is far more diverse and changing than it was when I began my career. This diversity brings with it both challenges in recognising and managing the diverse needs of a workforce but also the diversity of our community brings challenges in the provision of health care and services.

No matter where you may find yourself in the next few years you will have an opportunity to demonstrate leadership. This will be demonstrated by the way you behave and how you model behaviour in your everyday work life. This is not only about what you say but also what you do.

A key element of leadership is the creation of relationships. In both health and business those who seek to lead need to develop relationships with those they work with in order to successfully lead. In addition we also have to develop relationships with our customers or in health our patients and clients in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

As leaders though and having had the benefit of the education you are celebrating today I would hope that you will demonstrate a couple of other features of leadership. I encourage you to seek for innovative ways to change, grow and improve and in doing so be prepared to experiment and take some risks. At the same time be prepared to learn from your mistakes. Sometimes the most important achievements can come from the most unexpected places. Just as we are today celebrating your achievements make sure that you continue to celebrate your own achievements and those of others in the future.

You have learnt much during your studies and today represents a culmination of that effort. At times you may find yourself in situations that perhaps cause you to wonder if what you have learnt has equipped you for what you need to do — be assured that the principles and underlying concepts that you have learnt will stand you in good stead — in my career I have worked in remote communities in the Northern Territory, rural towns in NSW and cities as I do now but the foundation skills and knowledge that I learnt at the beginning of my career have remained with me throughout my many different roles. I have also learnt many new things through those different roles and have always found that there was something I could take with me into my next role.

I congratulate you and encourage you to not only be proud of your achievements today but to continue to grow in learning and knowledge as you apply what you have learnt today in the wider world. I would like to leave you with a quote from Nelson Mandela:

We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You who are a child of God, your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you."

Thank you.