

## Speech to Graduates in Law, Environmental Sciences, Science, Arts, International Business And Politics, Education, Art And Music, Griffith University Graduation Ceremony

### INTRODUCTION

Chancellor, Ms Leneen Forde AC, Vice-Chancellor, Professor Webb, Members of the Academic Staff, Distinguished Guests, the most important people present, the Graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is always a delight to be part of such an exciting and happy occasion as a graduation ceremony and to bask in the intellectual warmth and energetic glow which emanates from new graduates. Congratulations to you all on your intellectual efforts which are recognised with the conferring of your degrees this afternoon. I particularly congratulate the honours graduates, those receiving higher degrees, and the university medallist.

Your parents, friends and supporters, many of whom are here today, also deserve some congratulations. It is important I say this because my sister and brother-in-law are in the audience to see their son and my eldest nephew receive his second degree. They, like many others of you, have earned their little bit of reflected glory this afternoon.

On occasions such as this, I like to find out as much as I can about my audience: it tells me to whom I am talking and shows future directions.

### THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN

This afternoon there are 478 eligible graduates, of whom 198 are men and 280 are women. The highest number of women graduates, over 70 per cent, is in Education, followed by Arts, Music and Art. There are roughly equal men and women graduates in Environmental Science, International Business and Politics and Science. And I noted that there was one more PhD awarded to females than males, proportionally significant when there are only nine recipients of this important and prestigious degree.

Don't worry! This address is not to diminish the achievements of you wonderful male graduates but simply to reflect and compare the changes that have already occurred as we look towards the future.

Twenty-five years ago, when I graduated in Law from the University of Queensland, that Law School was the only graduate Law School in Queensland; now there are five. Interestingly, that was the very year this University opened its doors; in that quarter of a century, Griffith University has developed a reputation for excellence and innovation. In 1976, over the whole year there were 76 law graduates of whom only 13 or 17 per cent were women; in Commerce there were 132 graduates from UQ of whom 22 or 17 per cent were women and in Economics 124 graduates of whom 24 or 19 per cent were women. Though I do not have the statistics, I suspect that even then women dominated the graduate numbers in Education, Arts and perhaps Music and Art. It is disappointing that only a little under 30 per cent of this afternoon's law graduates are women; this is atypical and is probably only because of the small number of graduates in Law, just 14, the main graduation ceremony being earlier in the year. For many years now, across all law faculties in Queensland there have been roughly equal numbers of male and female graduates.

These statistics demonstrate significant changes in our society. First, there has been a substantial increase both numerically and proportionately in the number of female graduates. For far too long women have been denied the opportunity to contribute fully and the workforce and public life has been largely deprived of half its talent.

We now recognise the powerful contribution of previously underestimated women artists like Grace Cossington Smith and musicians like Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann, who are posthumously enjoying a wave of popularity.

Women from all fields, not just the law, have been encouraged by the fine example set by this University's Chancellor, Ms Forde, who completed her degree as a young widow with five small children. She became, in time, a partner in a leading Queensland solicitor's firm but not content to merely enjoy the fruits of her labours, she established the Women Lawyers Association of Queensland, a support network and lobby group for women which remains active 22 years later. Ms Forde continued as a trailblazer as Queensland's first women Governor. She has certainly been a support and inspiration to me since we met 24 years ago when I was a young lawyer. I am pleased to have the opportunity to acknowledge that and to embarrass her today!

Other outstanding female role models exist in Arts, Education, Environmental Science, International Business and Politics, Science, Art and Music.

Gender equity, the advancement of suitably qualified women, and the consequential influence of this on society will be an important factor in the development of the economic, social and political lives which you are now entering.

INCREASED ACCESS TO TERTIARY EDUCATION

The second positive trend demonstrated by today's graduates is the increase in the number of graduates generally. Although this ceremony is not traditionally the major one in the university year, 478 graduates are eligible to receive degrees this afternoon. At 6pm this University has another ceremony for a similar number of graduates. Over the last 25 years there has been an enormous increase in those completing tertiary education and we are becoming a better educated society.

## GLOBALISATION

Another future trend that is already upon us is the concept covered by the new buzzword globalisation. Last month I attended an outstanding conference on the topic "Globalising the Rule of Law" which was conducted by Griffith University's Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance. The seminar considered the impact of international law on sovereign nations; international human rights and humanitarian law; world trade and international security, defence and the rule of law.

Globalisation began with the formation of the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations. The ratification of various United Nations covenants and treaties by member nations and their consequential international involvement has furthered globalisation.

The globalised economy has in many ways been forced upon Australia, perhaps to the at least short-term detriment of our primary and secondary industries. The IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation influence the capacity of people in all nations, not just Australia, to control economic decisions affecting their own futures. Multinational corporations thrive under globalisation and become more powerful even than many sovereign states. The United States is more than ever the world's economic and political powerhouse.

Globalisation is also brought home to us by vastly improved communications. The war in the former Yugoslavia, the horrors of the killing fields in Cambodia and the successes and fears of our peacekeeping troops in East Timor are zoomed by satellite into our living rooms in sanitised reality as we observe others lives via satellite television from the comfort of our lounge room sofa.

We can communicate almost instantly via the internet with anyone in the world who can type English and is connected to the world wide web.

Affordable, fast, efficient aviation, a field in which Griffith University's Science faculty has developed a special interest, has and will continue to shrink the world to the benefit of Australia, limiting the tyranny of distance.

It is significant to note that of the 45 overseas students graduating this afternoon,

the majority (29) are female. This confirms that globalisation is having an important and direct impact on life in Queensland. Griffith University is providing an internationally recognised and desirable educational product benefiting both the individual student and the Queensland, Australian and international communities.

Next, the figures demonstrate that the involvement of women in positions of power and influence in society is not limited to Australia but is a global phenomenon.

Globalisation is also reflected in the range of degrees being conferred this afternoon. This University is not merely answering parochial needs but is preparing graduates for a future not necessarily based in Brisbane but for a working and thinking life anywhere in the modern world.

The traditional degrees of Arts, Law and Science are, and will always remain, essential offerings from the well rounded university. But the variety of degrees now available at Griffith University confirms its positive response to globalisation: the Bachelor of Arts in Australian Comparative Studies; in Contemporary European Studies; Languages and Applied Linguistics; in Asian and International Studies; in International Business; in International Studies and in Japan Studies (a fascinating complex and powerful country and culture and one of great future power and influence).

As Australians or as someone educated in Australia you have been privileged to be part of a democracy which recognises individual freedoms and rights, upheld by an independent judiciary whose orders are enforced by an efficient and honest executive. This is not the position in many parts of the world. As you enter the globalised community you should do what you can to ensure that globalisation brings with it not just improved economic conditions but also the genuine recognition and enforcement of human rights. In this respect we are proud of Australia's peace keeping role with the United Nations in East Timor and elsewhere; the role of the modern Australian Army seems to be that of peacekeeper and diplomat and may that long be so!

## INDIGENOUS ISSUES

I was interested to know how many indigenous graduates are amongst the Australian graduates this afternoon, but these figures were not available.

I had the pleasure of speaking earlier this year at a reconciliation forum organised by the indigenous students at Griffith University. I was impressed with their energy, enthusiasm, public speaking, intellectual and organisational skills. Griffith University's Gumurrii Centre, headed by Boni Robertson, who chaired the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence, is showing great leadership in the indigenous and wider general community. The young indigenous students I met will, I think, follow Ms Robertson's fine role model and

themselves contribute significantly to Australian and global society in diverse ways.

Reconciliation within the Australian community and a greater understanding, appreciation and tolerance of indigenous and other cultures has been and will continue to be an important characteristic of future Australian and indeed global society. I make special note of Nelson Mandela's magnificent example in South Africa.

A related challenge that must be met is to ensure the rule of law, the understanding that the protection of our basic rights by the third arm of government, the judiciary which we all enjoy and take for granted, has equal application to the lives of those residing in isolated indigenous communities.

## TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

We all recognise technological change as one of great significance for the future. I have already noted its influence on helping to turn the world into a global village. It is pleasing to see that this University as demonstrated by this afternoon's graduates has recognised and embraced this change. The Faculty of Education has awarded graduate certificates in computer education and I expect that every graduate this afternoon is computer literate.

When I was a student word processors were the cutting edge technology; how wonderful it was to be able to correct a document without entirely re-typing it. Word processors were only used by secretaries (invariably female); university students (especially women) did not generally learn to type; I say "especially women" because if young professional women were able to type, they were likely to be lumbered with secretarial rather than professional tasks. Nowadays, students learn computer typing skills at primary school and expect to use those skills for life. This may change again as voice activated word processing programs become more sophisticated and less expensive. Nowadays, most students have access to their own PCs; they rely on the Internet for research and to communicate with lecturers and fellow students.

Computers feature also in modern art and I note the degrees being conferred today from the College of Art include Master of Digital Design and Bachelor of Animation. Those of you who have seen *Toy Story*, *Toy Story 2* and *Antz* will have witnessed the amazing creative results of computer technology.

In Music, too, computers are having a significant impact on the composition and presentation of contemporary works.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

It is encouraging to see so many graduates in Environmental Science for it is to

you we look to provide answers to stop global warming, to ensure our cities are well-planned, efficient, attractive unpolluted spaces and that our rural areas do not suffer from soil degradation or our rivers from salinity and blue-green algae. At last the world community is beginning to understand the need to nurture the environment which nurtures it and that its degradation will be shared by humanity.

## SCIENCE

It is to you Science graduates that we look to find solutions to medical problems of aging, cancer, AIDS and other diseases and to find new and improved ways of solving crime. DNA is used not only to convict but also to establish innocence. I was shocked to learn on a recent trip to Chicago, Illinois, one of the US states which maintains the death penalty, that 13 executed convicted murderers have now been scientifically proved innocent.

I also note the graduates with a special interest in bio-technology, a field in which Queensland is recognised as a world leader.

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

It is commendable that the Education faculty has embraced a commitment to life-long education and learning for its own sake in offering the degree of Bachelor of Adult and Vocational Education, a course my young hairdresser is undertaking for just those reasons: we have had fascinating conversations on ethical questions as she blowdries my hair.

## SUMMARY

The future in microcosm is *you*, this afternoon's graduates: an increased role of women in positions of power and influence in the paid workforce and public life; an increase in those participating in tertiary education; globalisation; reconciliation and tolerance of difference; technological and scientific change and a commitment to lifelong learning.

On occasions such as this I like to adopt the analogy of one of my first employers who likened the change from student to professional to that of caterpillar to butterfly, not that I am suggesting you were grubs! This graduation ceremony is akin to the breaking out of the chrysalis as you tentatively prepare to spread those still moist wings and metamorphose into your new and wondrous lifeform.

As you flutter off into the global community remember that you have been privileged and that brings with it responsibility. Use your intellectual skills to provide responsible leadership with vision to effect positive change. Be successful, whatever that means to you, but always in an ethical way: the ethical decision is not always the easiest decision but it is the best decision. The lawyers present

know of your special ethical responsibilities to your clients, fellow practitioners and to the courts.

Find time for yourself and whatever gives you a sense of wellbeing: "time poverty", my 86 year old mother tells me, has become the lament of the working person. At home and in the working environment personal relationships remain precious in this fast changing world; find time for yourself, for those relationships and for everything that gives you peace, contentment, spiritual satisfaction and joy.

Live your life : it is yours alone to live. But live it using your proven intellectual ability ethically and through fair dealing to create your vision for an improved world.

May the gentle sun shine on you as you flutter through life s long and glorious journey!