



Government
of South Australia

**Occasional Address at a
University of South Australia
Graduation Ceremony**

Adelaide Festival Centre, King William Rd

Friday, 18 August 2006

Hon Mike Rann MP

Premier of South Australia

Minister for Economic Development

Minister for Social Inclusion

Minister for the Arts

Minister for Sustainability and Climate Change

(Check against delivery)

Chancellor of the University of South Australia, David Klingberg, Vice Chancellor, Professor Denise Bradley, Members of the University Council, academic staff today's graduands, their family and friends especially those who have joined us from interstate and overseas, ladies and gentlemen.

I acknowledge we meet on the traditional lands of the Kaurna people and that we respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

About 20 years ago not long after I was first elected to Parliament I went on a trip to the United States.

Looking forward to a career in politics and being a keen student of American history I made a point of visiting Monticello the historic home and burial place of Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson left precise instructions as to what should be inscribed on his tomb and those words struck a chord with me when I stood before his grave that day.

The epitaph reads

“Here was buried Thomas Jefferson
 “author of the Declaration of American Independence
 “of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom”
 “and father of the University of Virginia.”

To me, it was remarkable that he chose to make no mention of having been Governor of Virginia, or Ambassador to France, or Secretary of State, or, indeed, the third President of the United States.

Yet there on his grave proud and bold and forever this hugely accomplished man cited the fostering of his home-state university as one his great achievements.

Today perhaps more strongly than ever before I feel that Jefferson had his priorities right.

Because in accepting the honour you've just bestowed upon me and in celebrating the achievements of the students gathered here this morning I'm reminded of the history and continuing contribution of this fine institution the University of South Australia.

I make no claim to being the “father” of this University though it could be said I was one of a team of enthusiastic “midwives”.

Soon after being appointed Minister for Employment and Further Education in 1989, the then Premier, John Bannon, called me in to his office and gave me my first major task.

And that task was to carry out the restructuring of the State's university sector in line with the radical Dawkins reforms at the Federal level.

The reform process up to that point had been difficult, complex and controversial.

Here in South Australia, our five tertiary institutions were to be combined in some form or another and one-, two- and three-university models had all been proposed.

Eventually, the latter plan was adopted and the University of South Australia was officially opened in 1991.

In doing so, it became not just a reconstituted and rebadged collection of schools and faculties but a single, united and vibrant institution with an overarching ethos of excellence and an aim to be a true “people’s university”.

As Minister, my guiding principles during that period were to create a University that, in a sense, was both “old” and “new”.

We wanted a University that built on the long-standing and excellent work of its predecessor institutions the South Australian Institute of Technology and the South Australian College of Advanced Education.

And we wanted it to adopt and adhere to the enduring qualities of all great universities, such as free enquiry and expression, intellectual vigour and academic rigour.

But we also wanted the University of South Australia to respond to the pressing social demand of the day and that demand was for greater access and equity.

I believed then as I do today that the advancement of this State depended at least as much on the confidence and talents of the many as on the brilliance of the few.

And, so, the new University created a curriculum that sought to “invite rather than impede, include rather than exclude”.

Through our negotiations with the broad university sector and through our drawing up of the establishing legislation I wanted to make sure that the University of South Australia would be as open as possible.

I especially wanted it to appeal to disadvantaged people in society and to those who might not otherwise have been encouraged to undertake tertiary study.

This belief had been shaped by my personal and family experience.

The grandson of a London dustman, I left England with my parents and brother in the 1960s in search of opportunity.

We landed in New Zealand, where I became the first Rann ever to go to university.

I studied politics and history at Auckland University where I finished up completing Masters in politics.

My university years which encompassed a period of great political change and activism shaped me profoundly.

And I'm forever grateful that in going to university I was given an opportunity that had been denied to so many.

In line with this, I was extremely proud that the legislation I introduced in 1990 to establish this University was the first in the nation to provide programs specifically to meet the needs of Aboriginal people.

And I'm very pleased that in 2006 "diversity" and "equality" remain among this University's core values.

I'm extremely proud of the progress made by the University of South Australia over the past 15 years.

It's become the State's largest University.

And it has an outstanding record of educating overseas students.

In 2004, this University had more than 10,200 "on-shore" and "off-shore" overseas students by far the largest such enrolment in the State.

The University has also played a pivotal role in the rapid growth in the overall number of overseas students studying here in Adelaide which has risen from just 6000 in 2000 to almost 18,000 last year.

The thing that excites me most about this University, however, is not its rich past and dynamic present but its positive future.

I see it developing both physically and educationally.

This is happening today through the construction of an art gallery at the City West campus as part of the superb new facilities of the Hawke Centre the excellent, general work of that Hawke Centre the University's link to the Adelaide Thinkers in Residence program and its involvement in the manufacturing sector and major projects.

In particular, the Government is proud to be partnering the University in relation to high-tech work on the Air Warfare Destroyers project.

Quite apart from fulfilling its own potential, I also see "UniSA" playing a central role in the achievement of a larger goal.

And that goal is to make Adelaide Australia's undisputed "University City".

Our work in this field has been given a huge boost by the opening of a local branch of Carnegie Mellon University.

And it's taking a further step with the recent start of talks that we hope will see Britain's Cranfield University establish a presence here in an alliance with the University of South Australia.

I see no reason why Adelaide can't develop a national and international standing in university education that rivals the one we today enjoy in relation to arts and culture.

I've been closely associated with the University of South Australia and its forerunner institutions for about 20 years.

I'm very proud to say that I was "present at the birth" of this University.

And it's been tremendously pleasing to see it continuously prosper since 1991.

Indeed, my work with the University has been one of the most rewarding experiences in my professional life.

I especially want to pay tribute to Vice Chancellor Denise Bradley for her outstanding leadership over the years.

It's fitting that her vision and determination have been recognised not just locally but nationally and internationally as well.

In closing, I congratulate the students taking part in this ceremony.

I thank the University Council for honouring me this morning.

And I wish the University all the very best in its ongoing efforts to discover, to excite, to enlighten, and to enable.

Thank you.