

# **Address to UniSA Graduation Ceremony**

## **Adelaide Convention Centre, 19 March 2014**

*Professor Gerry Griffin*

Deputy Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, members of the University of South Australia community, distinguished guests, and particularly graduands, parents, family and friends:

It is my great pleasure to address today's ceremony. It is an even greater pleasure to formally congratulate all students who will shortly graduate in this ceremony. I extend my warmest and strongest felicitations to you all. You have worked hard to reach this point. At this ceremony we celebrate your achievement. We also celebrate the part played in your success by your families and friends, and, for part-time students, your employers, colleagues and mentors. Today, you officially join the UniSA community of scholars and professionals around the globe.

Regardless of discipline, your status as a full- or part-time student, or which part of the world from which you come, there can be no doubt that graduating from the University of South Australia is a fine achievement. UniSA has been one of the success stories of the Australian Higher Education system. In its first 23 years of existence it has zoomed up through the international rankings and is making a magnificent contribution to the economy, the life and the culture of both South Australia and Australia. And of course, as indicated by its thousands of international students from more than 100 countries and the fact

that it holds annual graduation ceremonies in Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, its contribution internationally, particularly to the Asian region, is also remarkable for such a young institution. So, I applaud you for graduating from such a quality institution.

Now, of course, you leave university and will need to meet the inevitable challenges and threats of life in an increasingly complicated and interconnected society. I do not mean to suggest that my generation has not had its successes. Indeed, taking a broad historical sweep, life has been reasonably good for the past few decades. Did you know, for example, that here in Australia, as measured by Gross Domestic product, we are a full 10 per cent better off than we were in 2008 – despite the Global Financial Crisis? Or that in Asia hundreds of millions of people have achieved middle-class status? And of course, as the international relations students among you will realise, our major achievement was to not fight World War Three!

However, there are indeed major issues and problems facing the world to which all of new graduates can and must contribute. In my experience, the best and most creative solutions to these issues and problems often involves conversations across industries and certainly across disciplines – between professionals from science, technology, the social sciences, business, the humanities and the arts.

Today, at this ceremony, we have graduands from a number of different disciplines and backgrounds – you all have important roles to play in developing solutions to the problems we face now, and in the future. Let me offer just one example from the Health sector. We now have a generation of obese Australians that, for the first time in decades, is likely to have poorer

health and shorter lives than the preceding generation. How does society respond to and hopefully resolve this problem? Working on their own, Health specialists are unlikely to be fully successful. Those of you graduating today in disciplines such as journalism, media studies, communications and aboriginal studies must interact with and contribute your creative thinking to your colleagues in Health Sciences to achieve a viable resolution.

In the future, you will face a plethora of such challenges, and, given your education, society will rightly call upon you to provide answers to those challenges. I would go further, however. I argue that, as an educated elite, you actually have an obligation not only to contribute to the resolution of these challenges but to also play a role in helping to define the scope and priority of those challenges.

How do you make these societal and organisational contributions and, here today, can I offer any guidance to assist you in this process?

My suggestion, which I strongly commend to you, is to be a proactive participant within your sphere of influence. This means that:

- You must form and express your views.
- You must actively influence your communities and organisations.
- You must offer solutions as well as criticisms.
- In short, you must be a contributor and, where appropriate, a leader.

Inevitably, some of you will have more opportunity to exercise influence than others or to play on a larger stage in life. But always, always, be a player and a contributor. You simply must grasp the opportunity!

For the first 10 years of my academic life I lectured to a large introductory-level class, usually around 300 students, approximately the same number of graduands here today. I quickly learned that to maintain their interest I had to focus on one key message, perhaps even repeat it, and certainly finish within time limits. So please pardon me if I follow the same process here. My take home message for you is simple: our rapidly changing nation and world places increasing demands on individuals, communities and organisations. Those individuals, communities and organisations which respond creatively, critically and in an inter-disciplinary way, will be the ones that will thrive and grow. And you, as graduates of the University of South Australia, are ideally placed to respond to these needs of your organisations and communities. Life is opening up for you. You must play your part. So my key message is encapsulated in that delightful Australian expression – “have a go”.

My hope, and belief, is that your studies have provided you with a solid base on which to build future professional achievements, and to make a contribution to your communities and to society as a whole. The actions you take in your personal and professional lives will, together, have a great effect on your family, your community and the world around you. The future is very much in your own hands.

Graduates, you have every reason to be proud of your achievement in gaining your degree. Your families and friends, and the scholarly community of your university, the University of South Australia, are certainly proud of you. Congratulations to each of you and my very best wishes for your future lives and careers.