

University of South Australia Graduation Ceremony
31 March 2010
The Honourable Justice Robyn Layton

Pro Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Members of the University Council, academic staff, graduands, family and friends.

I firstly wish to acknowledge that this special occasion is occurring on the traditional lands of the Kaurna people.

On this special occasion in which some 333 of you will receive your undergraduate or post-graduate awards, I congratulate you for successfully completing your respective Degrees. This called for hard work and dedication, often with long hours, at times when other members of the community are either relaxing or sleeping. Those are the times when you have needed the stamina and focus of a marathon runner. Your family and friends have every reason to be proud of you and undoubtedly their support has enabled you to reach this fine outcome and this special day.

Each of you is lucky enough to have graduated from UniSA, which has become one of the great university successes in Australia. From its relatively humble beginning in 1991, it is now ranked very highly within the Australian University community. It is the first among universities which have received teaching and learning grants from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

More relevantly to the Business Division in which you have graduated, the MBA Program is in the top 10 of all Australian universities. It also has many other achievements, which are set out on the web site.

Universities are now undergoing an unprecedented level of competition, particularly for Federal funding and funding in general. This University has been able to attract significant research funding, but it is never enough. The University has been particularly strong in creating a range of alternative pathways for women, and for students from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. These features are at the forefront of targets identified by the Federal Government to attract funding. It is no accident that this University already attracts so many of you from countries outside Australia.

The Division of Business also offers great diversity, which is essential when teaching business and commerce. When one reflects on the situation, business and commerce touches all of us, in all aspects of our lives, from the time we wake to the time we sleep. Everything we use, wear, eat and rest on has at some stage resulted from an idea which has been developed, grown or produced and then disseminated by someone. The underlying common principles of business and commerce can be translated and applied to any field of endeavour which is as open ended as human creativity.

I have espoused on many occasions when giving talks or speeches to law students that a Law Degree is one of the most useful degrees a student can obtain. I could say the same for Business and Commerce Degrees, and of course they frequently combine as demonstrated by the degrees available in this University.

Just by way of illustration in my own career as a lawyer, I have had interface with business and commerce in a number of specific areas. I have been involved with the health industry as

a Commissioner of the Health Insurance Commission and also a Director of then Medibank Private. I have been involved in the business of running of freight trains as a Director of the then National Rail Corporation. I have been involved with the businesses of theatre companies and art galleries through my involvement on Boards of the South Australian Theatre Company and the South Australian Art Gallery, as well as private companies. Also, at a personal level as a former solicitor and barrister I have had to run my own business and market myself.

Over the last decade there has been an ever-increasing focus on the ethical standards to be applied in business, particularly corporations in which there can be a mix of shareholders, employees and consumers. There has been an increasing impact on businesses by consumers demanding transparency when purchasing goods or services. This has often been driven by Government regulation. At the same time there has been an increasing reflection by business and commerce on the need to self-regulate. There are protocols or standards which have been developed by certain types of business to ensure that they are conducted ethically and responsibly. You have all been fortunate to have had the general principles of ethics taught to you as part of your Degrees. It is very important in whatever field of endeavour you use your Degree to ensure that those standards are implemented by you in practice. It is important because business and commerce play a vital role in our community, whether it be a local community, a national community or an international community. Our increasingly globalised world means that the effect of bad practices can spread throughout the business world and can infect all countries. The present global economic crisis is a gross example of that impact.

Again using my own experience, business and commerce has a role to play in upholding human rights. For more than 15 years I sat and chaired a Committee of Experts of the International Labour Organization, which is the labour standard-setting branch of the United Nations. That Committee, composed of judicial and legal experts, assessed whether countries complied with international labour Conventions. I am still involved in the training of judges as to how labour standards can be implemented in domestic courts of countries so as to comply with the conventions.

The Conventions set minimum standards of employment conditions and wages. The link between business and commerce and international labour standards is that countries have the responsibility to ensure that employers provide fair employment conditions so that workers are not exploited. If developing countries are to be assisted in increasing their standards of employment conditions and thereby decreasing poverty, they need the assistance of those involved in business and commerce at the international and national level, no matter how small the enterprise.

Turning to the area of marketing. I have also been highly amused that advertising and marketing can give rise to a highly popular television show such as The Gruen Transfer, which can entertain by explaining, criticising and poking fun at the strategies used to sell various products. I have especially enjoyed the competition at the end of the show between two advertisers to devise creative ways to sell the unpopular or totally unsellable product by making it appear attractive and appealing. Whilst I have laughed at the strategies, at the same time, there is an underlying unsavoury reality that marketing and advertising manipulate our lives.

Another feature of recent years is the extent of specialisation which is now available in the teaching of various subjects and electives within a degree. This enables students to identify their interests, assess their strengths and weaknesses and have an opportunity to enhance their

strengths. On this note I will finish with a story which I have adapted from a Professor from Hong Kong who in turn was told the story by his wife.

There was a community of animals who decided that the welfare of their young was a paramount consideration. They made education their top priority. They decided that it was essential for their young to learn competencies to ensure survival. Four core competencies were identified: swimming, running, climbing and flying. At great expense they employed experts in each of these areas to teach them.

After the first term the seals were wonderful at swimming, but very poor at running and climbing. The emus on the other hand were hopeless in swimming and flying, but excelled at running. The koalas were great climbers and the eagles were superb flyers. The kangaroos were given a special exemption so that they could use their tails and their rear legs for hopping at speed which could then qualify as running.

In the second term it was decided that more attention should be given to areas of individual weakness in order to raise the standard of the young animals. Despite tremendous encouragement and coaxing, the eagle could only manage to hop from branch to branch rather than climb. The emus, koalas and kangaroos nearly drowned in deep water. The pounding that resulted from trying to run on a hard surface took its toll on the flippers of the seals so that they only just managed to achieve an average score even in swimming.

By the end of the year the most outstanding student was a sugar glider who scored well in all four core competencies, followed by a snake. Meanwhile, the rabbits and the wombats were not happy with the curriculum because they regarded burrowing as a vital core competency for survival. They then left and started their own school.

The moral of this story is that universities will always be developing in various ways, in order to improve an education system to embrace the different skills, the different levels of competencies for students at different times. It is a constant challenge for educational institutions.

I wish each of you a wonderful day and all of the very best, and hope that you are able to pursue what inspires not just simply your interest, but your passion.