

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA  
GRADUATION CEREMONY**

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

**Professor Leanna Read, DUniv, FAICD, FTSE**

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

I am honoured to address you at this important occasion. And most importantly, my congratulations to the stars of today's ceremony – each and every graduand of the University of South Australia.

To have completed your course successfully is something that you, your family and friends can be immensely proud. You are graduating from a wonderful university that is already world-renowned despite its young age, and I believe is poised to become a top Australian university.

As you graduate today, I am sure you are filled with excitement and a sense of achievement, but perhaps also some nervousness as to where your career will head.

I would offer two predictions: Firstly, there will be many forks in the road in your career path, and secondly you may not have even imagined your ultimate career – indeed, that career may not have even been invented yet.

And it is your university education that has positioned you for such an exciting and privileged future. You have learnt independence, the ability to solve problems and think critically. These are skills that will help you throughout life and equip you for many possible career paths.

Let me relate to you my career path as an illustration.

I was not born into a life of wealth or privilege – but a university education has been the route to what I now consider is a very privileged life.

My parents grew up in the depression, through World War II and never had the chance to even finish high school. I could not possibly imagine that I would one day graduate from university. Indeed, my first ambition was to be a hairdresser.

At my graduation ceremony after completing an Agricultural Science Degree, I did not feel that I was a leader or very clever, but I did realise that my university education had endowed me the capacity to think for myself and solve problems. I went on to do Honours and a PhD because research offered the unique opportunity to go to work each day and do something that no one has done before!

My career directions after that are characterised by encountering many forks in the road, and success came from being prepared to take the riskier path. You can never be 100% certain of which fork to take, but when I look back, it was the decisions to take the risky forks in the road that have taught me most.

Let me give you a few examples:

The first was whether to leave a postdoctoral research position at CSIRO to take up an academic position at Adelaide University. The CSIRO position was very enjoyable, safe and productive, but I chose change. I still remember the fear that I felt walking into a totally empty laboratory at the university and realizing that I had to fill it myself, and support the salaries of my technical staff. But I now realize that I could never have learnt so much by staying in the safe and comfortable environment of my postdoctoral fellowship.

The second fork in the road was the opportunity to become the inaugural head of a new research institute – the Child Health Research Institute, at the relatively tender age of 34. I remember someone discussing financial balance sheets with me – and I asked “what’s a balance sheet”? I soon learnt!

The third fork in the road was my decision to start up a biotechnology company – TGR BioSciences. It was a big learning curve for me – from the public sector into private enterprise. But I was driven by putting science into practice and that inevitably led me to the biotechnology industry. Today, TGR BioSciences is a successful company that develops innovative assay kits for sale to the pharmaceutical industry and research laboratories worldwide.

From this potted history, you will see that I started my career as an agricultural scientist, moved to leadership roles in the medical research field, founded and headed a biotechnology company and I am now a professional company director. Along the way, I acquired a range of skills in which I have never had formal training – such as finance, patent law and corporate management.

I mentioned earlier that your ultimate career may not have even been invented yet. And so it was for me - when I was graduating from my agricultural science degree, I could not possibly have imagined I would one day found a biotechnology company – the industry did not exist then!

The key point is that it was my university training that endowed me with the core skills that allowed me to make the right choices when I came those forks in the road.

And so it will be for many of the new graduands here today.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you the very best for your future careers, and leave you with a word of advice from Yogi Berra, one of America’s greatest baseballers: “If you come to a fork in the road – take it!”.