

**Occasional Address delivered at Graduation Ceremony on Thursday
March 30th at 3pm
Mr Ryan Manuel**

Thank you Deputy Chancellor, good afternoon.

So you made it. Congratulations.

Today is a little strange for me. Generally most graduation speakers are scions of industry, people who have already gone out in the workforce and succeeded. I, on the other hand, am much more like you. I have just finished my degree, and now all of a sudden I am trying to figure out what exactly to do with it.

Arts degrees aren't as fashionable as they used to be. I remember the look on my mother's face when I told her I was changing my plans from studying a law degree to studying Arts and Marketing. I believe her response was something along the lines of "well, I am sure the your Arts degree will be useful when you start looking for a marketing job"

The joke, of course, is that the reason I am standing in front of you today is my Arts degree, and the fact that I loved studying. When I arrived at University, I had taken two years off after school, and to be frank, I had no idea what I was doing here, I had done a whole variety of things in my two years, and I was lucky enough to win a scholarship to study marketing. So I thought I would take a double degree instead of just pure marketing. And I struggled. I didn't go to class enough, I worked a couple of part-time jobs, I spent far too much time playing sport and my grades showed it.

But then at the end of my first semester, this question for my final world politics essay just got to me. And I spent two weeks doing nothing but this essay, I was so obsessed over it.

Come submission day, I remember having this strange feeling come over me. I honestly felt that I couldn't do any better and that whatever I got for this piece was actually how good I was. I had always been a bit gutless before that. I had always given myself an excuse so that if I didn't do as well as I wanted to, I had an "out" in my mind. I suppose I didn't have the courage to think that my ideas were good enough to think that I could do well without that excuse.

Obviously, I was lucky enough to get a good grade for that essay. And I remember thinking at the time, "so, all I have to do now is only take things I am interested in and I will be fine".

Five years later, here I am, a Rhodes Scholar.

Which gets me to part one of my speech. The lack of recognition of how hard Arts subjects are. It takes enormous courage to put out ideas, to seek inspiration. We don't know where an idea comes from a lot of the time. We

don't know how to replicate the conditions. Ideas, to me, are a little like playing jazz – you have to put in hours of boring, monotonous, scales (reading) and work. Then suddenly, it hits. And sometimes are quicker than others. But for us, graduating today, what we have is 3 (or more) years of thinking about ideas. Yet we almost have to apologise for choosing to study something which doesn't always have a direct "industry outcome".

The dumb thing is that what we study has many tangible, and important, industry outcomes. I currently work for the Boston Consulting Group as a management consultant, which is about as corporate as you can get given that management consulting revolves around telling businesses what they should do to improve their business performance

When I was hired, I was the only person from SA, the only person who hadn't done maths related subjects at University and the only Arts student. For a while, I wondered why I was hired there. Then the other day my boss was in a meeting and he was talking about bank loans. He was talking about them relating to an obscure political concept he studied at grad school, and as he spoke more and more about this obscure idea the clients' eyes started to glaze over more and more ... until finally, he stops for a minute, turns to them, and goes "it looks esoteric. It's not. It's just difficult".

And that to me is the crux of the issue. As recent arts graduates we have a knowledge of the esoteric but what we really have is an appreciation of, and an affinity for the difficult. When you get down to it, ideas, and more accurately, difficult ideas, are what really makes business work. Markets are generally fairly static. Things don't change much. What succeeds is the novel, the new. The discontinuous. The idea.

So why are Arts degrees not more fashionable? I think much of that is because people mistake complex and diverse themes of study as esoteric. They're not! They're just difficult!!

And historically, that has been widely recognised. The very concept of an "Arts" degree is taken from the Romans and their idea of liberal arts. In ancient Rome, education was free to everyone. However, only "free" men or women (ie not slaves) could take the liberal arts – rhetoric, understanding, reason, thinking. Arts was considered the highest education one could receive, reserved only for the privileged few. I think our current Federal Government has a similar idea.

Which gets me to the final part of my speech, the role of the public sphere. Modern day politics have been shifted towards values. No longer do ideas win elections – values do. The thing is that a value is something intrinsic, personal. No two people can share the same value set. But ideas ... now there is something different. There can be common ideas, public ideas, new ideas. If we disagree, well, it's just an idea. It isn't something personal, something held. Ideas are public goods. They can be shaped, moulded, changed. Values on the other hand are often private, tightly held concepts

which may have short term value as “wedges” for political gain. But rarely do they reach out to others and change lives.

I guess that for me is the final goal of my journey – to one day try and get my ideas out into the public sphere. To do my part, small as it may be, for ideas rather than values. I hope that my time at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar will give me the courage, the belief in myself, and the training, to help me be strong enough to put my ideas out to the public.

So now I turn to you. I urge you to do the same. To believe in your ideas, and in their merit. To put them out there. Your degrees have given you 3 years of training in ideas. You are now as qualified as almost anyone to know what is a good idea and what is a poor idea. So you should have faith in yours. When you get to the workforce, when you continue on with your life, know that if you have an idea, you now have the training, the background and the qualifications behind it. Believe it. Believe in your ideas. Believe that they can make a difference.

I would like to wish you the best of luck in that. Thank you for your time today, and congratulations on your graduation.