

Les Luck

Australian Consul-General Hong Kong

Saturday 17 May 2008, 3.00pm

Graduates from: Faculty of Arts | Faculty of Education | Griffith Business School | Griffith Health | Science, Environment, Engineering and Technology

Chancellor, Leneen Forde,
Vice Chancellor and President, Professor Ian O'Connor,
Members of the official party,
Graduates...
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's a great pleasure to be a part of what is such a special occasion for so many of you. I'm also pleased that Griffith – one of Australia's great Universities – has chosen to hold this graduation ceremony here in Hong Kong; the first time it's done so in eleven years.

Recognising hard work and networks

So, let me first offer my congratulations to the new graduates.

After all the hard work – and I'm sure there were some sleepless nights – you now get to realise that all of the effort has been worth it. Well done.

You join the growing number of Hong Kong graduates who've chosen to undertake a quality degree program delivered by an Australian university through respected local partners.

And you join more than 100,000** Australian alumni in Hong Kong – students who've graduated from universities in Australia.

Twenty-two** Australian educational institutions, including Griffith University have established alumni bodies here.

They provide networks that can not only assist your professional careers but can also contribute to the strengthening of relations between Australia and Hong Kong.

Congratulations should also go to your families and friends, and in some cases employers who are supporting you here today, for the support they've given you during the many long nights and weekends of study.

Obtaining a high-quality degree requires not only your hard work, but also the dedication of others who offer encouragement along the way, so today we celebrate their support as well.

And on a day of great excitement I know how keen you are to get to the celebration part so I'll try to keep my comments brief.

Education and Internationalism

As I glance around the room with everyone looking resplendent in their academic dress, I also see plenty of happy, excited faces; some nervous; and certainly a great many with a look of relief.

I also see a great deal of diversity, and that's evident in the disciplines you've each chosen.

There are graduates in Business, Commerce, Engineering Technology, Hotel Management and Languages and Linguistics, and there are some graduating with Masters Degrees in Business Administration, Drama Education and Public Health.

I'm confident that, backed-up by the qualities that an Australian education brings, you're now all well-equipped to make your own valuable contributions in whatever path your life takes you from here, or wherever it takes you from here.

Now, when you stop and think about it, that is a pretty exciting and compelling thought.....Wherever it takes you.

No doubt many of you will already have firm ideas and clear plans. Or you may have actually locked-in arrangements for the first years of your career.

That's all to the good.

But, reflecting on my own experiences of formal education and subsequent career, let me suggest that there is much to be gained – personally and professionally – by keeping an open mind about the different paths you might travel in attaining high levels of career satisfaction and achievement.

To put it another way, being too fixed in your ideas and your specific goals can sometimes lead to disappointment.

In any event, the rapidity of change in today's world, and increased exposure to the forces of "globalisation" - and a consequent sense of interdependence across nations and global communities - compels flexibility and adaptability in those seeking to make their mark in the modern world.

To give a brief example from my own experience, I hardly expected - when the planes hit the World Trade Centre in New York and the bombs went off in Bali - that I would soon be required to develop expertise on contemporary terrorism and the dark ideas that drive it. Yet that is what happened: an unexpected change of course in my professional responsibilities, yet it led to some of the most satisfying, if challenging, work of my career.

It was also a reminder of how the phenomenon of globalisation – in this case the rapid transmission of extreme justifications of political violence – can bring seemingly remote events right into our lives.

In your own experience, SARS and the Asian financial crisis some years ago revealed the same kind of interdependencies between communities; and how important it was to pursue remedies vigorously, through international engagement.

Hong Kongers have always understood these realities; perhaps better than most. Operating to global standards and disciplines, adapting to the influences of both East and West - and seeking opportunity in international collaboration - has made Hong Kong what it is.

My point is that new graduates should plan for ambiguity and uncertainty in their careers. They should anticipate rapid influence from forces and events which may seem distant. And they should expect that their responses will entail a facility for working across cultures. Again, this will be second nature to people who have grown up in Hong Kong.

But as much as the uncertainties of rapid change and globalisation will be part of the future I believe there are also some important constants in professional life.

No doubt continuous exposure to the international environment, in diverse cultural settings, has shaped my own appreciation of these. But I believe that they have general relevance to those embarking on their careers, in whatever field. So, with your indulgence, I offer some unsolicited advice.

To my mind, the need for flexibility and adaptability should never obscure a keen sense of one's own values and aspirations. Tactical agility should not come at a cost to strategic purpose.

In a world of unprecedented access to media and communications technology, perceptions can even more easily become "reality". It will always be important to reach beyond the hype and emotion of particular issues to determine underlying reality. Your academic training has emphasised the importance of objective enquiry and this should remain a tool for life.

At the same time let your intellectual curiosity, honed by years of academic training, feed an open mind and an appetite for continuous learning.

In your dealings with others – allies and adversaries – be a good listener. Try to understand the legitimate interests of others and how they might mesh with your own interests and objectives.

Never discount the human factor. I remember trying to forge agreed positions among many countries at United Nations meetings in Geneva. What paid off was talking extensively with as many different delegations and constituencies as possible.

Consideration and consultation at a personal level counts for a lot. It won't always make the difference when deep interests are in play. But, with all our diverse backgrounds, interests and professional responsibilities, we are all human. More often than not our similarities will trump our differences.

To finish up, there are a couple of quotations about the meaning of education which might resonate with you as you celebrate this milestone:

"Education is the most powerful weapon which can change the world" (Nelson Mandela)

"Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one" (Malcolm Forbes)

Conclusion

Wherever your journey now takes you, your life lessons will be different to mine but come from the same humanity in which we live.

Griffith University, its academic staff and the endless hours of study you've put in until now, have provided you with a quality and innovative education.

We should acknowledge that for the Chancellor, and the academic leaders and staff at Griffith, your graduation marks an important achievement.

But, for you, this should be the springboard from which you launch the next stage of success in your role as citizens of the world.

The fact that you chose to study with a foreign university has already set you on a path suited to the rigours of life as international citizens.

Our future is in your hands.

Congratulations again on the hard work and dedication which has brought you to this point.

I hope you maintain your links with Australia.

And finally, I wish you every success for your professional future and for a life of learning.