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*****SPEECH*****

**Occasional Address, Graduation Ceremony for the School
of Law and School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of
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*****Check against delivery*****

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, members of the academic
faculties, special guests, ladies and gentlemen, and, most
importantly, today's graduands.

First and foremost, please accept my heartfelt congratulations
on such a significant achievement in completing your degrees

here at this fine institution, the University of Western Sydney. It is the culmination of many years of hard work; of ambitions realised; of late nights completing assessment tasks, most possibly dosed-up on caffeine; of staying in on Saturday nights to study when you could have been doing other fun things that fun, young people do.

It is also a testament to the many individuals who supported you on this journey to the point where you are here today, wearing the garments reserved only for people like you. Never under-estimate the pride your parents, family and friends feel for you on this day. Please, take a deep breath and look around you; look down at the gown you are wearing and the degree in your hands; and savour the moment enough. You deserve it.

I would like to thank the Vice-Chancellor for the honour of being invited to deliver today's graduation address. In my life, I've

had the privilege to express my thoughts to Australia's Parliament; to the CEOs of some of the world's biggest companies; to government officials in far-flung corners of the globe; and even the President of the United States; but never a graduation audience. I am delighted my inaugural graduation address is here at the University of Western Sydney, in my part of the world.

In preparing for my remarks today, I counted 3 times I have graduated with a degree, each from the University of Sydney: a Bachelor of Arts with Honours, a Bachelor of Laws, and a Master of Laws; as well as completing the Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice from the College of Law in order to be admitted as a solicitor of the NSW Supreme Court. And there's one thing that stands out in my memory of each of these events: I know there was a guest speaker at each of them, but I cannot remember who they were or anything they said. So I have set myself a challenge today, one that can probably never be

measured, and that is to leave each of you with some thoughts that hopefully either entertain or enlighten, even if just for the next 5 minutes or so.

So, I would like to begin with a confession, one that I have never revealed before, one that may startle and, if I was being the cautious politician I am supposed to be 5 months out from an election, I would keep under wraps. And that is, the truth be told, I was not a very good student.

Sure, I turned up to most lectures and tutorials and bought all the text books on the reading list. But when it came to exam preparation time, I vividly remember staring at pages of scribble in my notepads trying to decipher what I had recorded 3 months earlier. And too often, the only thing I could read clearly was a loveheart in the top corner of the page inscribed with, “Michelle loves [insert name of whatever boy I had the hots for at that time]”. I was the student whom the diligent

students despised – the one who would turn up to hand in an assessment paper at 3 minutes before the deadline; the one who would join the study group and benefit from the excellent subject summaries of others, but whose own contribution was sub-standard; the one who would see the words “Optional Essay” in a course outline and never look at it again; the one who thought no preparation was required for an open book exam because, well, you know, you’re allowed to take in books and they have all the answers, right?

I should give some context: being a university student in the 1990s was a different world to what you have experienced. Back then, we didn’t have this thing called “the Internet”. Most of us didn’t have computers in our homes. And I know you’ll think I’m making this up, but we didn’t even have mobile phones to either talk on or do anything else with. I could wander around the campus and there was not a single location identification device anywhere on my person.

No, a student back then didn't have a lot of the things we all take for granted these days and I feel like a relic explaining the following typical day to you. Much of my time at the Sydney University Law School was spent doing things that none of you had to endure during your degree. Let me give some real examples. In order to gather material for an essay, you needed to search for relevant books or journals using a thing called a "catalogue". This was a series of small, long wooden drawers containing cardboard rectangles the size of a large Post-It note, on which was written the name and location of that item.

Sometimes, one was able to search the catalogue using a more advanced process involving a "microfiche scanner", which involved inserting a sort of film negative into a machine which was around 3 times the size of an old desktop computer, and reading the information on the screen. Yes, these were state-of-the-art researching techniques on a device which was invented in the 1800s and had not evolved a great deal 190 years since.

But the fun didn't end there, because determining the location of the book was only half the battle. In the highly competitive dog-eat-dog world of the undergraduate student, you could be almost certain that a rival student would have found the item first and hidden it – or in some cases, either stolen it or ripped out the relevant pages of an article to prevent anyone else having access to it. And since there would usually be only one copy of the item in the entire university collection, you can imagine the number of times my heart dropped when I would find a journal using my ancient research tools, only to discover like Indiana Jones that someone had plundered the treasure before me.

But wait, there's more. Even if you did manage to locate your prized item, usually it was a reference item that was not permitted to be borrowed. These included the journals containing all the case law. So what did this mean? It meant

queuing up at a photocopier to photocopy the item. And I think I once calculated, after standing on this queue for most of the day, that the ratio of photocopiers to students at the university was 1:5,000. This ratio was flexible, as the copiers would routinely break down and, given they were probably manufactured in the 1970s, they usually required a component to be shipped from a museum in Germany to fix it.

Oh, and the joy when you would finally make it to the front of the queue for a photocopier that actually worked, to have the privilege of pouring half a kilo of 20 cent pieces into the photocopier to copy cases which were often 50 pages long. It was there that I think I formed my views on certain High Court judges based solely on the brevity of their decisions rather than the substance of their judgements. Time really was money.

It's no wonder that when I finally gathered the materials I needed to even begin to write an essay, I was exhausted. The

frustrating part was that in many instances, I could barely muster the energy to read much of what I had actually managed to find, let alone use it to its fullest effect. Bear in mind that I also worked at a checkout operator in a supermarket in Blacktown from Year 10 through my entire undergrad university career, earning those 20 cent pieces to feed to the hungry photocopier. In hindsight, it truly was a vicious cycle.

But, I cannot lay the blame of my miserable, mediocre student years solely at the feet of a technology deficit. The fact is, I just wasn't organised. My best friend at the supermarket, her name was Vanessa, happened to be a nursing student at UWS. She didn't like school very much but she knew she wanted to be a specialist emergency department nurse and put her mind to gaining entry to uni, which she did. Although we were doing completely different courses, Vanessa absolutely outshone me when it came to university. She knew how to forward plan her

tasks and manage her time. She kept folders of her research materials, labelled them, maintained a chart of her assessment progress, paid her mother to type up her assignments on a typewriter rather than handwrite them. Meanwhile, piles of paper would mount up in my bedroom and Vanessa would often chastise me about how I needed to keep a diary and record things like assessment due dates at the start of each semester, so I wasn't trying to complete multiple essays on the same night for different subjects. I just didn't listen and instead put another Bon Jovi record on the turntable.

I lost touch with Vanessa a few years ago. I did a Google search on her while preparing this speech and discovered that she is now the Nurse Unit Manager of the Sydney South West Area Health Service. Given there are so many ways I can re-connect with her now, I am going to tell her with much pride that she was mentioned in this address as a model student for the graduating class of the School of Nursing.

But most of all, I want to tell her that I finally listened to her – and here's where my life improved and my story for you today ends. Slowly but surely, I learned how to become organised. After taking a few different but interesting career paths in my early 20s, I decided to use my Law degree and landed a job as a graduate lawyer in my first interview. By the time I enrolled in the College of Law, I had a dial-up Internet service at home which meant I could complete the course online and part-time, even if it took 10 minutes to send an email. I became such a good student that I identified mistakes in the College of Law textbooks. In my Master of Laws, I won the first and only university prize of my academic career, even if it was only \$1000 and my husband immediately banked the cheque towards our mortgage.

I had 10 fantastic years as a lawyer in a major Sydney-based law firm, specialising in technology, competition and regulation.

I worked with people who are listed in the Chambers International Law Guide as the best lawyers in their field in the entire world. I won a scholarship for an intensive course in competition and utility regulation at the University of Florida. I worked in Tokyo, Hong Kong, the Middle East, Cambodia, China and many other places in between, doing cutting-edge legal work that has influenced some significant policy debates happening right now, including the roll out of the National Broadband Network in Australia. And, arising from all that, I have 3 pieces of advice I want to leave you with.

Firstly, you only need 2 things to succeed in whatever you want to do in your life. They are enthusiasm, and attention to detail. If you ever find yourself stuck at a fork in the road, or in a situation where you're expected to be an expert when you're not, enthusiasm and attention to detail will take you a long way. These qualities say to anyone: "At least I'm having a go, and I'll have a go until I get it right". And get it right you will.

Second, accept that change is inevitable. Sometimes it might be change that you don't want, sometimes it will be change you desperately need. The inevitability of change is the only certainty in life, so don't be too obsessed trying to find a routine and getting comfortable. I try to reinvent myself at least once every 5 years, whether it be additional learning, a new career pathway, or personal challenge. Right now for me, it's being a new mother to a 13-month old baby at the pointy end of the election cycle. A real challenge!

Lastly, I urge you to maintain a sense of perspective. I know some of you are the first in your families to be graduating from university, and that's an amazing thing. Some of your families, maybe even your immediate family members who are here today, have come from places and experiences that are far from pleasant: fleeing wars, economic turmoil, maybe even seeking asylum. To those parents and families here today, I

have some sense of the pride, relief and joy you must be feeling. My husband was the first in his family to graduate from university, an incredible achievement for a boy who grew up in a public housing area of Mt Druitt and ran away from school on his first day because he couldn't speak English and didn't know what the teacher was saying.

Great things are happening in this country and you will continue to make a contribution to it, despite what some elements of the media will have you believe. We don't have riots in our streets protesting against harsh austerity measures or restrictions on bank withdrawals, nor do we have a youth unemployment rate approaching 80%, unlike some of the old Europe. Australia has the highest credit rating possible from every credit rating agency at a time when many other advanced economies of the world are being described as "basket cases". We have pillars of our society that the United States can only dream of, like universal health insurance. President Obama has gone to the

brink for a Medicare-like system which is a pale imitation of what we enjoy. And we're pursuing new pillars, instituting a scheme where people with a disability can be assured of the funding they need to lead a full and rewarding life, rather than begging for basics. A sense of perspective enables you to recognise these things and helps you to think for yourself rather than have an opinion dictated to you - something I am sure your teachers at here at UWS have been encouraging you to do over many years.

So ends my confession, my redemption, and my advice. My sincere wish for each of you is for fulfilling lives and careers in which you make a positive impact on those around you. I am confident your time at the University of Western Sydney has equipped you for what lies ahead and you will do your alma mater proud every step of the way. My warmest congratulations to you all, enjoy and savour this moment.

Thank you.