

Occasional Address Graduation Speech,

Ceremony 18, 2:30pm, Friday 19th April

Alison McLaren, Policy Manager Urban Strategy, UrbanGrowth NSW

Deputy Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor, special guests, ladies and gentlemen and most importantly graduands.

It is both an honour and a privilege to be here today to celebrate your achievements. I congratulate you on the significant accomplishment of the completion of your degrees. You and your families should be very proud.

Graduations are very special occasions and provide us with the opportunity to reflect on the past, the present and the future. Some of the rituals of graduations date back to medieval times and it is wonderful that these have been kept alive. Graduations also show how far that we have progressed. Today we study fields that were only dreamed about centuries and even decades ago and I for one am very pleased that women are not longer burnt at the stake for thinking freely and seeking out an education.

Today you are joining the ranks of a very special club, the UWS alumni and it is a very significant occasion. I have not yet taken the opportunity to study at UWS but my sister, brother and brother-in-law are all proud UWS graduates. You are now part of the elite, the people that society rightfully looks to for leadership and for solutions to the many problems that we face as a community.

I remember nine years ago sitting at my graduation ceremony wondering what the future held and where my journey would take me next. Almost a decade later, I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up. Our modern workforce is dynamic and ever changing and this provides a fantastic opportunity for you to use your skills and qualifications.

Some of you will go on to be leaders in the field from which you are graduating today and others will end up taking a different path completely. Whichever way you end up going, what you have learnt and the skills that you have gained during the course of your studies will benefit you. I have a degree with a focus on Spanish language and culture but I currently work developing strategies to support urban development! Although I don't have much use of Spanish in my current job, learning another language improved my writing skills in English something that is critical to what I do day to day.

Looking back, ten years ago if someone had said I would be standing here in front of you I would have laughed at them. My journey has been very different from what I imagined it would be and I couldn't be happier.

I have been privileged to work with some incredible people and contribute to some amazing projects. The last decade has been one continuous and very steep learning curve and I would like to share with you some of things I have learnt during this time.

I was lucky enough for six years to work with some of NSW's top decision makers including the former Premier. Politics is a tough business and a very unique working environment. One key lesson I learnt during this time is that although it is nice to be important but it is more important to be nice. Respect in the workplace and a genuine interest in your colleagues makes for a happy work environment. Sadly the converse is also true. As you continue your climb up the professional ladder remember to respect all that you work with.

My second piece of advice is to always surround yourself with people you can learn from. At UWS you have been spoilt with a first rate teaching staff and you have never had to look very far to find someone to inspire you to learn further. Although some of you will now embark on further studies for others the educational journey is now less formal. I was 23 when I was elected to council and I did not fully grasp the enormity of the challenge that I had taken on. With the support of others I quickly learned the skills that I needed to represent my community effectively. Both in the workplace and outside it, seek out others that you can learn from. People you work with can help you to build on the foundations that your education has given you and you just never know what you might learn from the person you play sport with or your child's music teacher. By pursuing a culture of lifelong learning you will go from strength to strength.

When you have reached a point in a job where you are no longer learning it is time to move on, whether that be a new role in the same organization or a new organization completely. We work best when we are stimulated and challenged. If I'm bored I cause trouble so I actively seek out roles where I can develop and learn. This also means that I am at my best and my employer is getting the most out of me.

As part of your commitment to learning always question and never stop asking why.

For those of you who regularly spend time with children you will be familiar with the most annoying word in the English language: why. Ten minutes with a four year and it is likely you will have heard the question but why? at least a dozen times. As frustrating as it can be we should always encourage that curiosity and questioning as it is the foundation for a lifetime of learning.

As adults we have a responsibility to not only question but to act when we don't like the answer. Your degree has given you the skills to think critically and the tools to act when you see injustice around you. When you don't like the answer when you ask why, you have a responsibility to try to change it. I hope that you will use your skills and qualifications to help others, particularly those that are vulnerable and less fortunate.

When I graduated my parents gave me a card with a quote from Vincent van Gogh, "Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together." We can all play our part in achieving great things and working to improve the communities in which we live.

As you move on to the next challenge whether that be in the workforce or in further studies be a good role model to your family, your friends and your workmates. Accept the challenges that will be thrown your way and learn from the difficulties that you will face. It will not always be easy, there will be ups and downs, laughter and tears but the skills and the knowledge you have gained at UWS puts you in the best position to withstand the hard times and use the good times to achieve great outcomes.

Once again my deepest congratulations on your graduation. Today we are celebrating your hard work, perseverance and commitment. As you move to the next stage in your life, remember that the destination is important but it is on the journey that we have our greatest experiences. This is particularly true of education. I hope you will remember your journey to today's graduation with great fondness.

Thank you.