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**CENTRAL QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY
GRADUATION CEREMONY
21 MARCH 2013
ROCKHAMPTON, QUEENSLAND**

**ON THE CONFERRAL OF THE HONORARY
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY**

CAPRICORNIA CORNUCOPIA

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC, CMG, Hon. D. Univ (CQU)

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THE HON MICHAEL KIRBY AC, CMG, Hon D.Univ (CQU)*



REGIONAL, RURAL & GLOBAL EDUCATION

It is a great privilege for me to graduate today. I thank Central Queensland University for conferring on me the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University.

I did not win this honour by burning the mid-night oil. At least, I did not do so locally. To be made a Doctor of the University is a special honour. The degree acknowledges that it is hard to pigeon hole the recipient in a particular discipline or

* Justice of the High Court of Australia (1996-2009); One time Chairman of the Australian Law Reform Commission (1975-84); Chancellor, Macquarie University, Sydney (1984-93); Gruber Justice Prize (2010).

category. That is exactly how I feel. Although universities are so named because of the breadth and variety of the disciplines they teach and nurture, all too often scholars and students are locked into the silos of particular studies. Desirably, tertiary education should emphasise cross-pollinisation and learning from one another. It should yearn for universality. Yet the reality is often exactly the opposite.

Mind you, it is difficult, at this ceremony, to address all the congregation of graduates and citizens, with words suitable to every discipline that is taught at CQU. It would be easy enough for me to offer a congenial address to lawyers, historians and philosophers – disciplines with which I have long associations. However, the first law graduates of CQU do not arrive until 2014. So today, my remarks must be relevant to engineers, accountants, biomedical scientists, information system technologists, experts in jazz and popular music, nurses, scientists and applied scientists. The range of studies at CQU is broad and admirably varied.

I congratulate the University and the teaching and administrative staff for bringing the graduates to this precious day. Creating universities in major cities of regional and rural Australia is an important vote of confidence in the future of those cities and the regions they support. Rockhampton, on the Tropic of Capricorn is such a city. It gives a living expression to the commitment that tertiary education is not only a privilege of the sandstone universities in the capital cities of Australia. It is a right that is increasingly available to all Australians in cities such as this, with local talent and perseverance. And with overseas students who elect to join us and learn with us.

WITH THANKS AND PRAISE

For many this will be the first graduation in the family. I thank the parents, partners, siblings and others who have eased the path to this day. I also thank the teachers who have shared their knowledge and devoted their energy to bringing this cohort of graduates through to success.

A university education is the mark of a person who has submitted to disciplined studies, while others were at work or play. Let us all think back on our teachers: all of them. Back to the very first day when we entered our first school. How much we owe to those early teachers. And to the teachers and scholars at this University. The university teachers have prepared us for the next exciting phase in our lives. Imparting knowledge by teaching is a noble calling. We should never forget our debts to our schools and universities and for the stable institutions of Australia that provided us with a safe and supporting place in which to expand our minds and our hearts.

GIVING BACK

From those to whom much has been given, much is expected. So what can be said on this occasion which is not trite and predictable? Three lessons I have learned in my long life and career I will now share with you. Much more could be said. But three will have to do.

First, everything in life, our occupations and other activities, is changing rapidly and unpredictably. How different the world is today from 1959 when I first graduated. The orthodoxy of those days has largely disappeared. Our country has changed in its population and in its values. Many changes have been for the better: the treatment of Aboriginals, of women, of non-Caucasian people, of gays and people with disability. Much more remains to be achieved. The same can be said of every discipline and of this University. CQU in Rockhampton is an institution on the go.

Earlier this week I heard the President of the English Law Society, Lucy Scott-Moncreiff, describe the disappearance of many legal jobs in the last decade because citizens today can search so easily online for relevant knowledge. Lawyers must now truly add something different and valuable. The same is true of all other disciplines. Even jazz music will change.

Innovation is essential. Success, in today's world, is by no means sure. The President of the English Law Society is a woman: the fourth woman president since the first took office in 1990. She practises what she preaches. She works in a "virtual firm". Most of her business partners work from their homes. Costs and professional incomes have come tumbling down. Hopefully, this will ensure that market forces drive new graduates into legal services previously out of the reach of ordinary citizens. It will be an uncomfortable ride in the years ahead. But a university degree will be the best assurance, in law and every other vocation, that the holder will survive the bumpy journey.

This University recognised the vital need for innovation before most others. Its law degree for example is taught wholly online.¹ It reaches out to students who otherwise were beyond practical access to university degrees. The same is true in other disciplines. Those who do not innovate will go under. Increasingly, Australia's universities are teaching potentially huge audiences of students in Asia, the Pacific and Gulf States. These are students who thirst for education from native English speakers. CQU is well positioned to help meet that market. It is good now to see our politicians recognising this potential in our universities. It is a potential to take the CQU model far from Rockhampton so as to build a new virtual Colombo plan, providing access for students to institutions established throughout our nation, to tap the high tertiary standards Australia offers.²

The universities of the future will not be fusty places of cobwebbed libraries and leaking bunsen burners. They will be state of the art technology connected to minds that have already adapted to the true challenge of using techniques of virtual classrooms to bring knowledge to millions who would otherwise have been deprived. Potentially, this will be a great equaliser. With our 'fair go' philosophy in Australia and 'our can-do' attitudes, we are well poised to meet this challenge. It will be good for our relationships with others. It will also be good for our economy.

¹ M.D. Kirby, "Online Legal Education in Australia: The New CQU Law Degree" (2011) 34 *Australian Bar Review*, 237 at 242 – 248.

² S. Maher "Abbott Plan to Boost Online Education", *The Australian*, 27 February 2013, 2. Cf. Michael Porter, "Universities' Future: Sell Real Estate, Go Digital", *Australian Financial Review*, 20 December 2012, 55.

The second challenge that I offer is a connected one. This university will have failed in its mission if today's graduates want, and expect, to milk the same professional cows as their predecessors have done for decades and centuries. Of course, in every society there is a need for the predictable and the followers. But there is also a mighty need for mavericks. I hope that this university, and this graduating class, contains many of them. Maverick people with a behavioural tendency to embrace creative, risk-taking behaviours. People who are bold and goal-directed. People given to a measure of extraversion and openness. Steve Jobs was such a person. Through his amazing inventiveness, he and Apple, the company he helped to found, produced astonishing innovations. When others were shouting "stop", they were pushing ahead. Once in a speech like this, Steve Jobs famously said:

"Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square hole. Ones who see things differently."³

I too want to invoke that spirit amongst you. Such people are not always easy to work and live with. They probably have biological propensities to pursue untested approaches with a minimal fear of failure. They are risk-takers. They make the world move forward. They do so for those content with a "protection mode" and mediocrity. Universities must nurture these people and not smother them with a heavy blanket of conformity.

³ Chris Sheedy, "Rebels With a Cause", *Uniken* (UNSW) December 2012, 6.

One would not want everyone to be like Steve Jobs. But everyone who has undertaken brain-stretching work for a university degree should have maximised whatever Jobsian tendency they have. Go forth from this ceremony to take risks. To challenge orthodoxy. To rock the boat. To be innovators. To push the boundaries. Where necessary, dissent from others who are blind to old injustices and indifferent to inequality and innovation. A university degree is no longer a guaranteed meal ticket for life. Success is not guaranteed. Each graduate must make success happen. Constantly. Repeatedly. Every waking hour. Every living day.

FOR LOVE AND LIFE LONG LEGACIES

The third lesson I offer is the importance of love. Love of family and friends. Of savouring every precious moment and making the most of this tiny insignificant adventure with consciousness that is our individual human lives. This is why the graduates must thank and embrace those who have brought them to this day.

Even graduates who are Anglo-Celtic males are permitted, on this day, to embrace and kiss their fathers and brothers as well as their mothers and sisters. There will be no arrests. A little bit of emotion and affection is tolerated, even amongst Capricornian males on graduation day. The circumspect Anglos and the reserved Chinese Australians are allowed today to tap the DNA love gene. None of us would be here except for others who believed in us. Who helped us through thick and thin. My parents are no longer with me to share this day. But my partner of 44 years, Johan, will share the joy of our graduation. Anyone who disrespects him is an

enemy to love and kindness and to human reality. Frozen minds need to get around new realities.

There must be no more of this medievalism for we the graduates know where that leads. So challenge the orthodoxy of ignorance. Insist on the science of knowledge. That is what a university leaves with us all, as its abiding legacy. It is a legacy that will play out throughout the rest of the lives of us the graduates. We must each of us be the change we hope to see in the world.

For what we have received from this University. For what we will continue to receive through the gifts of education. May we all be made truly thankful.