

Graduate Speech – Leigh Billington

Faculty of Health

10.30am, Tuesday 5 May, 2015



- Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, distinguished guests, fellow graduates, University staff and guests. On behalf of the graduates receiving their awards today I'd like to welcome you all to sunny Ballarat and acknowledge and congratulate everyone on reaching this momentous occasion in our lives, Graduation Day.
- It has been a long journey. It's taken three or four years for most, five for some who enjoyed the first few years a little too much, six for those who enjoyed them a little bit more or god forbid seven years for all those budding Van Wilders out there. We started off as these nervous but eager, adolescents at the University of Ballarat, and today we graduate from Federation University of Australia as confident, mature adults, well we definitely graduate.
- We've finally made it; we've survived the freezing cold winters and the only slightly less cold autumns, springs and summers and achieved what we have spent all those year working towards. We have put our blood, sweat and tears into reaching this point and spent a small fortune along the way. We couldn't have done it without some (or probably a lot) of assistance from our parents. Just think of that very relaxing European holiday or the brand new car that you sacrificed for us wasn't it all worth. Cheers for that by the way Mum and Dad.
- It seems like so long ago back when we were young first years, chilling out in the back row learning about the most efficient way to complete a breaststroke kick, whilst playing the latest app like Paper Toss or Angry Birds. But we have come a long way from first year; we have grown, evolved and matured.... We have progressed past Angry Birds and we found much better apps like Words with Friends and Candy Crush.
- We've achieved our goal, of finally graduating university, at times I think we all thought we wouldn't get here but we have proved ourselves and those who doubted us wrong. Standing up here today wearing this wicked cool hat and these trendy robes that makes me feel a little bit like Harry Potter, is something that I can proudly say is one of my greatest achievements. This very stylish piece of paper is definitely the most expensive bit of stationary I have ever purchased. My back-to-back U'12 coach's award will have to move over because this will certainly be taking pride of place on the mantelpiece now.

- We've had so many great memories through our university lives. All those O-weeks spring to mind and weren't they fun. Wide-eyed, fresh faced youngest running wild enjoying our new found independence. Partaking in what O-week is after all, all about - the orientation. All those weeks full of solid orientation sessions with my mates is something I will never forget. I don't think I have enjoyed so much orientation before or since those fantastic O-weeks.
- When deciding on which university to attend Federation University of Australia known back then as the University of Ballarat was a no brainer. FedUni has an outstanding reputation for developing its students into workplace ready graduates. All I was interested in was sport and it's P.E, Sports Management and Sports Science courses have an outstanding reputation. And let's not forget the well-renowned social life and extracurricular activities that attracted many to University because what's the point in doing something unless you are going to enjoy it.
- Today we have students graduating in the disciplines of Physical Education, Sports Management, Sports Management Double Degree, Exercise Science and Masters of Rehabilitation. I firmly believe that students from FedUni are much more employable than students from other universities. Class sizes are smaller, teaching is more personal with greater one-on-one and face-to-face contact then you would receive at the larger universities.
- FedUni students also have more workplace experience before they graduate then other universities, this is due to the practical knowledge that all these courses offer. Extensive teaching rounds, professional practice placements and half year internships, which at the time we may have thought was time consuming but looking back has really set us apart from other graduates as the experience we gained cannot be replicated by sitting in a classroom.
- I can already speak from my own workplace experiences that FedUni graduates are thought of very highly. In my workplace alone there are five UB graduates. One is the manager of all Combat and Boxing Sports in Victoria and another is responsible for construction and redevelopment of the Melbourne Park precinct. Not bad for a couple of people studying at little old Mt. Helen.
- University life at Ballarat has been a life changing experience. It has been an amazing opportunity to meet a whole range of new people from all over Victoria, Australia and the entire world. I have met people from Gippsland to Sweden, from the Mallee to the USA and I've even met one from Frankston. It is great in the respect that students from all walks of life come together in one community. It not too large and daunting that someone from Manangatang would be overwhelmed but it's not too small and mundane that the city slicker can still enjoy their morning skim milk latte. I've made life-long friends that I would have never had the opportunity to meet and I'm already looking forward to the catch-ups and reunions many years from now, even with the one from Frankston.
- This is the first small step on a very long life journey, the University and all its staff have done a fantastic job in preparing us for what lays ahead. Whether it is further study, entering the workplace or extended travel plans go out and live your life and be sure to enjoy it. As the great Mahatma Ghandi once said I'm old enough to know better, but still young enough to party anyway.