

SPEECH TO GRADUATES IN LAW, COMMERCE, ECONOMICS AND  
BUSINESS, MAYNE HALL, 23 MAY 2000 at 6.00PM by Hon Justice  
M.A. McMurdo (President)

## Introduction

Your Excellency the Governor, Chief Justice, Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor,  
Members of the Senate and Academic Staff, graduates, ladies and gentlemen.

How delightful to be part of such an exciting and happy occasion. Congratulations  
to all you glowing new graduates on your intellectual efforts. With the conferring of  
your degrees this evening you have achieved just reward for hard work. I  
particularly congratulate the Honours graduates and the Medallists.

One of my first employers, Public Defender Bob Bavington, likened the change  
from student to professional to that of caterpillar to butterfly. (I am not, of course,  
suggesting you were grubs!) Tonight's ceremony then is akin to the breaking out of  
the chrysalis as you tentatively prepare to spread those still moist wings,  
completing the metamorphosis into a different and wondrous life form.

Your parents, friends and supporters, many of whom are here tonight, also  
deserve some congratulations. I know they have shared many anxious moments  
and in their own way they, too, have put considerable effort into your degree; they  
have earned a little of your reflected glory and the right to watch you spread those  
wings.

Tonight is particularly enjoyable for me because I missed my own graduation  
ceremony from this University's Law Faculty 24 years ago; I was away on circuit in  
North Queensland working as a judge's associate. Because I am a law graduate of  
this University, it is a genuine pleasure for me to address tonight's graduates,  
especially the law graduates.

## Statistics

I thought it may be useful to reflect on and compare the way of the world at about  
the time I graduated with the present and to use that comparison to attempt to  
predict, to some extent, the future.

In 1976, the University of Queensland law school was the only graduate law school  
in Queensland. There were 76 law graduates of whom 13, or 17 per cent, were

women; in Commerce, there were 132 graduates, of whom 22, or 17 per cent, were women, and in Economics, there were 124 graduates, of whom 24, or 19 per cent, were women. There was no Graduate School of Management or Department of Tourism and Leisure Management, which now confer Business degrees.

This year the University has conferred degrees on 128 Law graduates, of whom 68, or 53 per cent, were women; 412 Commerce graduates, of whom 199, or 48 per cent, were women; 129 Economics graduates, of whom 47, or 36 per cent, were women and 375 Business graduates, of whom 226, or 60 per cent, were women.

### Trends More Graduates; More Female Graduates

You do not need to be Einstein or de Bono to recognise the important and obvious trends demonstrated by these statistics.

Firstly, there has been an enormous increase in the number of graduates from the Faculty. In 1976, there were 332 graduates; this year that figure has more than trebled to 1034, far exceeding the population growth. This clearly demonstrates that more people are completing tertiary education, resulting in a better educated society (although I concede some critics of modern tertiary education may dispute that latter assumption, a topic worthy of an evening's debate on its own.)

The second obvious and encouraging trend revealed is the very substantial increase, both numerically and proportionately, in the number of female graduates. Interestingly, the newest degree, Business, has the highest proportion of women graduates at 60 per cent. As a lawyer, I am delighted to see that the Law Department has so many women graduates. I like to think that the positive role models provided to young women by the appointment of suitably qualified women judges at all levels of the judiciary has been a significant factor in achieving this pleasing change. Commerce and Economics are also creditably represented in their proportion of women graduates, who no doubt have been encouraged by the achievements of inspiring women in finance.

This trend will allow society to benefit from more female participation at the most prestigious and powerful levels of the workforce. Gender equity, the advancement of suitably qualified women and the consequential influence of this on society will continue to be an important influence on the future.

### Further Statistics

What else do we know of tonight's graduates? To whom am I speaking? Of the 128 Law graduates, the vast majority of you are Australian (whatever that may mean in 2000); 4 are from the United Kingdom; New Zealand and Malaysia are each represented by 3 graduates; Taiwan, Hong Kong, Canada and Africa each have 2 graduates; the Caribbean, Denmark, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Poland and Vietnam are each represented by one graduate.

In the Commerce School, 221 graduates are from Australia; 65 from Singapore; 27 from Taiwan; 26 from Malaysia; 24 from Hong Kong; 7 from Vietnam; 6 from Indonesia; 5 from The Philippines; 6 from South Africa, 4 from both the United Kingdom and New Zealand; 3 from Fiji; 2 each from South Korea, China, Europe and one each from India, Papua New Guinea, Poland, Portugal, Sri Lanka, Sweden, the USA, and Western Samoa.

Turning to the Economics graduates, 89 of you are Australian; 7 are from Singapore; 3 are from each of South Korea, New Zealand, Taiwan, the UK and Vietnam; 2 of you are from each of Malaysia, South Africa and the USA, and one is from each of Belgium, Canada, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Africa, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Western Samoa.

The Business graduates comprise 233 Australian graduates; 34 from Singapore; 19 from Taiwan; 11 from Malaysia; 6 from each of Papua New Guinea and Hong Kong; 4 from the United Kingdom and from Commonwealth and other Pacific Islands not otherwise mentioned; 3 from each of Indonesia, Philippines, South Africa and Vietnam; 2 from each of Belgium, El Salvador, Fiji, Micronesia, Niue, Norfolk Island, Poland, Tahiti, Tuvalu and one from each of Canada, China, Germany, Hungary, India, Iran, Ireland, Japan, Laos, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Thailand, The Netherlands and the USA.

### Further Trends Globalisation and UQ as a Centre of Global Education

This fascinating information indicates two important trends likely to continue into the future. Firstly, it confirms that the buzzword "globalisation" is having an important and direct impact on life in Queensland. The Faculty of Business, Economics and Law is a veritable United Nations, with a quite different make-up from 1976, when I graduated. The statistics provide concrete proof of this University's leadership role in global interdependence and cooperation, preparing its graduates for a future not necessarily based in Brisbane or Queensland, but for a working and thinking life of continuing education anywhere in the modern world.

The second trend demonstrated by these figures is linked to the concept of globalisation. The Faculty of Business, Economics and Law is providing an internationally-recognised and desirable educational product to the benefit of the

individual and the Queensland, Australian and International communities.

### Indigenous Matters

I was interested to know how many indigenous graduates are included under the heading "Australian". It seems there are only five indigenous Australian graduates this year, two receiving law degrees; 2 in Business and 1 in Commerce. Whilst I warmly congratulate those graduates, the number remains disappointingly low; we have many outstanding tertiary educated indigenous role models but we need many more.

Reconciliation within the Australian community and a greater understanding, appreciation and tolerance of indigenous and other cultures will continue to be an important characteristic of future Australian society. A related challenge that must be met is to ensure the rule of law which we all enjoy and take for granted has equal application to the lives of those residing in isolated indigenous communities.

### Technological Change

Although not demonstrated by the statistics, we all recognise technological change as one of great significance for the future. In 1976, word processors were the cutting edge technology; how wonderful it was to be able to correct a document without entirely re-typing it . Word processors were only used by secretaries (invariably female); university students (especially women) did not generally learn to type; I say "especially women" because if young professional women were able to type, they were likely to be lumbered with secretarial rather than professional tasks. Nowadays, students learn computer typing skills at primary school and expect to use those skills for life. This may change again as voice activated word processing programs become more sophisticated and less expensive. Nowadays, most students have access to their own PCs; they rely on the Internet for research and to communicate with lecturers and fellow students.

The lawyers present will need no reminder of the usefulness of this technology in legal research. Austlii, the legal research site developed jointly by the Law faculties of the University of New South Wales and the University of Technology Sydney, provides free on-line access to Australian legislation and case law. It has developed a similar site for the UK and Ireland, which is called Bailii (British and Irish Legal Information Institute).

One of the limitations of technology has been that computers, unlike humans, cannot think. The US company Intelligenesis Corporation claims that, on 1 July this

year, this will all change, with the release of Webmind, a form of computer intelligence said to be capable of reading and comprehending text and acting on what it learns. Webmind will sift through information about financial markets to spot trends and make predictions about market movements after forming opinions about the accuracy of the opinion-givers. Understandably, the financial world is interested; the US Navy is considering its use as the operating brain behind a battleship; the CIA thinks it could be used to declassify sensitive documents. Its inventors claim it has the potential to be one of mankind's greatest inventions. One of its offshoots will be an intelligent internet search engine to study the customer's Web surfing interests in order to refine and personalise internet search results. Webmind's creators claim to be ethically sensitive to its potential and do not intend to allow it to be used for military or destructive purposes.

Many experts are sceptical about this artificial intelligence project and claim that a true thinking machine will need far more powerful computers than presently exist. When and if such a computer is developed, it will have a wide-reaching impact, possibly of sci-fi proportions.

Meanwhile, an artificial intelligence program called the Electronic Judge is being tested on straight-forward cases in the Brazilian State of Espirito Santo as part of a Justice on Wheels scheme to speed up the overloaded legal system. A judge feeds in the answers to multiple choice questions and the program prints out its reasoned decision. As a judge who regards herself as neither a complete luddite nor a clone of Judge Judy, it seems to me it would be at least as fast for the judge to consider the issues in these straight-forward cases and give a reasoned decision. I must be missing something!

Barristers in the UK can now be booked on the internet through a Web site for which they pay up to 3 per cent of their brief fee.

The UK Community Legal Service has established a government legal website offering legal help on the internet, accessible through digital television, games consoles, in supermarkets and at railway station kiosks.

The use of computers to file and lodge court documents and to present and record evidence in Queensland courts is only a matter of time and funding.

The latest Proctor, the magazine of the Queensland Law Society, has on its cover husband and wife Peter and Ann Janssen. Both are law graduates from this University; Ann is also an Economics graduate and an MBA student. They are directors of Toowong-based LegalMart, a legal service which provides on-line legal advice on commercial matters such as the provision and formulation of legal documents; it claims to be the world's first e-commerce legal company. The concept is a clever one which should increase public access to justice. The average cost of a contract to consumers is \$300 and the most expensive is \$695.

LegalMart has specialist affiliates in superannuation, debt collection, franchise, general commercial law, wills, conveyancing and family law. It currently employs 10 people and has ambitious expansion plans. It receives 135,000 hits per month and was recently voted in the top 50 Web sites and the top law site. LegalMart is an interesting example of professionals successfully combining their skills in law and business with technology.

## The Constants

I have mentioned some of the changes since my graduation. There are also many constants. A successful future will depend on combining the best of the past with positive change. One constant is that, as in 1976 when I received my degree, you and I remain part of a privileged section of our now globalised society; privilege brings with it responsibility. Your degree is proof of your intellectual capacities. You have the opportunity to use those intellectual capacities for life-long leadership. True leaders have a vision for their business, company, law firm, university, community, or world and set out to realise that vision. Each of you has within, the power to use intellectual rigour and professional skills to effect positive change; to develop a global community based on democracy; mutual respect and interdependence; gender and racial equality; racial and religious tolerance; conflict resolution through mediation and communication and ecologically sustainable economic growth; in short, to create a vision the complete antithesis of recent developments in Fiji. It will be a challenge to ensure that Brisbane and Queensland have a significant role in this global community. This University, for example, has shown vision in developing its knowledge base in bioscience and technology, a major factor in Brisbane's selection as the site of the first Smithsonian Institute outside the USA. Such vision is turning Queensland from the brunt of southern jokes and references like "the Deep North" into recognition as "the Smart State".

The second constant is to remember that, like me in 1976, you are joining professions; as such you have responsibilities to your community, whether local, national or international, to act ethically and, where necessary, place the community good before personal financial gain. The ethical decision may not always be the *best decision for business* but it is the *best* decision. The lawyers amongst you know of your special ethical responsibilities to your client and to the court.

There are many other constants: I see a few familiar faces who lectured me at University; this beautiful Hall; the fine sandstone buildings around the Great Court with their fascinating carved gargoyles and the splendid pomp and tradition of this majestic ceremony. Such things are reminders of the permanency and strength of this great institution, the University of Queensland, but without the ability of its leaders to combine the best of the old and new and to lead towards a positive future vision, this institution would flounder. You, tonight's graduates, are proof of

its present success.

It is, as I said at the commencement of my address, an exciting night. The conferring of your degrees recognises your achievements so far. I am conscious that most of you are on the verge of new professional lives and are about to embark on momentous career and personal choices; the butterflies will test their new-found wings. There will be challenging times ahead. I see the greatest of those challenges as ensuring Brisbane and Queensland continue to play a strong role in the global community; to deal justly and compassionately with the growing gap between rich and poor and to meet the dichotomy of more people without jobs whilst those with jobs work ever longer hours.

There will also be moments of great joy and satisfaction. One of the secrets to not only surviving but also enjoying life is to always find some time for yourself and the things that give you a sense of wellbeing; "time poverty" has become the lament of the working person. Our personal relationships remain precious, both at home and in the working environment. Find time for yourself, for those personal relationships and for everything that gives you peace, contentment, spiritual satisfaction and joy.

Live your life, it is yours, only you can do it. But live it by using your proven intellectual strength, ethically and through fair dealing, to show leadership in its widest sense and to create your vision for an improved world.

Spread those wings. May they beat hard, fast and long and carry you far through life's long and glorious journey.

Happy butterflying!