

## Occasional Address

**Wilson Hall, University of Melbourne, Saturday March 18 2017, 11.00am**

**Associate Professor Helen Cahill**

*Associate Professor in Student Wellbeing and Deputy Director at the Youth Research Centre, MGSE*

You have been learning all your life. And here you are, gathered to mark a significant accomplishment in your progress through formal education.

It is a time for congratulation, and for reflection – for looking forward, for looking back, and for looking around you.

If you look around you, in the theatre of this space, the theatre of graduation, you can wonder for a moment – what did it take? What did it take for each person here to work through their life challenges, and their learning challenges, and to complete the degree that they are here to receive? What will they do when they leave? What will they make happen in their futures?

If you look back on your own life, you will trace the positive influences that have enabled your own accomplishment. The parents, carers, friends and family members that helped lay down the track for you, the teachers both formal and informal from whom you have learnt, and the intellectual heritage gathered through centuries, by other scholars, and accumulated and shared here, with you, in the academy.

It is in looking back that we can see how privileged each of us have been to engage in tertiary studies in this world class university. In many countries in the world, the majority of young people do not yet get to complete a secondary education, let alone have access to a university.

In considering the contribution that can be made through a tertiary education, The University of Melbourne enshrines its aims for you in the graduate attributes. It aims to prepare graduates who are academically outstanding, practically grounded and socially responsible; graduates who have a regard for human rights, social inclusion, ethics and the environment; graduates with the research and reasoning skills to be influential citizens with high leadership potential. Is this you? What will you do to make this come true?

In planning towards 2025, this university names three grand challenges for itself. I invite you to consider them at this time of graduation. They are Understanding our Place and Purpose; Fostering Health and WellBeing; and Supporting Sustainability and Resilience.

As you think forward, ask yourself– how might you play a part in addressing these grand challenges? As graduates of arts, education, business, economics and creative arts – what contributions might you make to ethical engagement about our place and purpose in the world? What contributions might you make to the second grand challenge - fostering health and wellbeing? In our world, poverty and mental health are amongst the greatest health challenges affecting humanity. Depression alone is estimated by WHO to become second leading cause of disability in the world by 2020 (WHO, 2003). The World Bank estimates that one in five people still live in extreme poverty on less than \$2 a day, mostly in developing countries in southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. However, more that 30

million children are growing up poor in the worlds' richest countries – countries like Australia.

If we think of the third grand challenge – that of Sustainability and Environmental Change– what role could you play in the social change needed to enable humans to become the caretakers of their planet? WHO identifies that climate change is greatest health risks of the 21st Century. It is also a grave risk for conflict.

None of us will have big enough shoes to address these grand challenges – alone – but look around you, each of us have the power of 'we'. Collectively, you represent the disciplines of the great communicators. What becomes possible when the great communicators work together for social good?

The University of Melbourne argues that the opportunity to pursue knowledge for its own sake is one of humanity's loftiest endeavours, thus rendering it a special privilege. But with privilege comes certain obligations.

What are these obligations? I invite you to think on this as part of your graduation experience.

You graduate into time of great opportunity, but also into changing and troubling times. Never before has the world so much needed people of keen mind and good heart, citizens who will ask ethical questions, and bring their capacity for learning to the fore. Citizens who will lean in together, to craft new solutions to problems old and new, that press together in ever-confounding ways.

As you think into your own response to the obligation that comes with education, I encourage you, as does this University, to 'dream large'. For if you dream large about your obligations, about how you can contribute to these three grand challenges of sustainability, wellbeing and purpose, you will find ways to contribute in your own sphere of influence. You will realise that the difference you will make is not only determined by the jobs you will be paid to do. You will also make a difference in the micro moments of everyday life.

Many of you are about to leave the university. Some of you will be lucky enough to return. As you leave today, I encourage you to take with you the motto of University of Melbourne: 'postera crescam laude'. It can be translated as, "We shall grow in the esteem of future generations". I urge you all to use your learning here-attained to help you serve the rights and needs of future generations.

## **Vice-Chancellor's Introduction**

*Presiding Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen:*

*We are fortunate this morning to have as our guest speaker Associate Professor Helen Cahill.*

*Helen is Associate Professor in Student Wellbeing and Deputy Director at the Youth Research Centre in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. She is a leading researcher in young people's learning and mental health.*

*She is also a graduate of the University of Melbourne, several times over, completing her Bachelor of Arts, then her Masters in Education and finally her PhD. After eight years working as a high school teacher and coordinator with the Victorian Department of Education, and seven years as a full-time carer, she became a Research Fellow at the Youth Research Centre in 1994. She has published widely on student wellbeing, presented often at international and national conferences, and earned numerous important research grants, including a current ARC Linkage grant investigating resilience education.*

*Helen is an engaged scholar, working energetically to support teachers in developing the social and emotional skills of children and young people, and promote respectful relationships.*

*It is a pleasure to invite her to speak this morning. Please welcome Associate Professor Helen Cahill.*