

Occasional Address
Royal Exhibition Building, 7 December 2018, 5.00pm

Professor Edwina Cornish AO

*Emeritus Professor, Office of the Provost & Senior VP
Board Member, CSIRO*

Thankyou, Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Dean, Professor Harcourt, Professor..., Distinguished Faculty, Graduating students and parents.

Since I received my undergraduate degree here 49 years ago, many of the discoveries in astronomy and astrophysics have entered the culture.

We all know there was a definite beginning to our universe more than ten billion years ago. We all know everything is evolving... from the universe itself, its stars, its galaxies all the way to the intricate evolution of the domain of life.

The matter and energy constituting the universe is predominantly made up of dark matter and dark energy and its nature is consequently unknown. Only about 5% is observable to us in visible light.

Astonishing, all massive galaxies have central black holes -singularities in the fabric of space and time- and the influence of these tiny but massive objects on the large-scale structure of the galaxies themselves is profound. Black holes on even smaller scales have been now observed to merge leading to brilliant measurements of the associated gravitational wave signals.

The advances during this so-called golden age of astronomy and astrophysics are increasingly rapid and the spread of knowledge into the broad cultural awareness is similarly speedy.

The younger generation are intensely focused on habitable earth-like planets around other stars. Based on discoveries made since this graduating class was born we project that every star in the universe has at least a 1-10% chance of harboring a potentially habitable earth-like planet.

There are three obvious cultural perspectives: (1) we may well be able to find other habitable planets to occupy over the long reaches of time that our human civilization may survive (2) we may well not be alone and unique and (3) The more we study Earth and other exoplanets the more we are aware of the huge changes of planet climate, planet surface, planet oceans.... global warming is a relatively small change but we do need to get though it to continue the adventure of our human species

You graduate from this great university as well educated as any similar group on the planet. Be confident that you can achieve wonderful things. In this great multicultural affluent highly educated society in Melbourne you can afford to take risks and explore fascinating adventurous career paths over a lifetime.

When things go well in space missions such as Hubble- as in science in general- it is all sunshine. This is not always so. Character is needed to survive the inevitable setbacks and even catastrophes.

Remember there are victories and defeats and these are important markers in one's life.

What's most important is to understand and remember and be grateful for the very real and fundamentally important inspiration and loyal support of family, friends and colleagues in this great life adventure we are all on.

Congratulations to you on your graduation and best wishes and good luck to you in your future great endeavors.

Thank you.

Citation for Doctor of Science (honoris causa)

Chancellor, Professor Edwina Cornish is nominated for the award of Doctor of Science (honoris causa) for her exceptional contributions to molecular biology and genetics, her pioneering work in the field of commercial biotechnology and her highly distinguished academic leadership.

After obtaining a PhD for her molecular microbiology research in the Microbiology and Biochemistry Departments of the University of Melbourne, Edwina Cornish took up a post-doctoral position in the University's School of Botany. In 1988 she joined the newly established plant biotechnology company, Calgene Pacific (later Florigene.) During this time, she was responsible for developing and commercialising the world's first genetically modified flowers. Her leadership established global research and development and marketing operations in the biotechnology industry which significantly enhanced Australia's expertise in the commercialisation of science.

In 2000 Edwina Cornish was recruited to the University of Adelaide as Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research (DVCR) where she was instrumental in increasing the competitive research funding for the university and the establishment of a number of research centres. Then over a period of twelve years as DVCR at Monash University, she oversaw a dramatic increase in NHMRC and ARC grant funding, and the expansion of research activities and facilities across science, medicine, nanotechnology, engineering and climate science.

Her leadership was recognised in 2012 with her appointment as inaugural Provost and Senior Vice-President at Monash, a position she held until retirement. Edwina Cornish has made a number of valuable contributions to the governance of community and government organisations. She has made similar contributions internationally and continues to serve the community in governance roles with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and La Trobe University.

*Chancellor, I present to you **EMERITUS PROFESSOR EDWINA CORNISH AO** for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa.*