

## Catherine Carter, University of Canberra Occasional Address

Faculty of Arts and Design, 26 March 2025

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Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, and of course, graduates – thank you for the honour of addressing you today.

I wish to begin by acknowledging that we gather today on the land of the Ngunnawal people.

I pay my respects to their elders past and present and recognise the enduring connection they have with this land.

I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the leadership and guidance of University Chancellor **Lisa Paul AO PSM**, Vice Chancellor **The Hon Bill Shorten**, Council Members, Senior University Executives, **Professor Julian Knowles**, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Design, staff, students, families and supporters.

Graduates, today is a day of recognition and celebration.

The essays, the exams, the moments of self-doubt...

The nights when the coffee ran out before the assignments were finished...

Those days are behind you.

You got there. You made it. Congratulations.

When I graduated, I certainly didn't remember much of the speeches. I just wanted to be handed my degree and head off to the after party.

So, I know whatever I say will soon be replaced with thoughts of what comes next.

But if you do remember just one thing, I hope it's this...

Career researchers predict that your generation will have as many as **17 jobs across 7 careers** in your lifetime.

This may sound dizzying.

It certainly contrasts sharply with the straight-line career paths of past generations.

When we think of history's brilliant minds and creative geniuses, we are drawn to those who weren't just talented – they were relentless.

**Michelangelo** lamented of being “hunched up” and in constant pain – “bent taut as a Syrian bow” is how he described his four years painting the [Sistine Chapel](#).

**Marie Curie** wasted no time after her wedding, stepping back into her lab wearing the dark blue dress she had chosen, not for tradition, but because it would serve as a lab coat for years to [come](#).

**Leonard Bernstein** had memorised the entire repertoire of the New York Philharmonic so that he could step in with an hour's notice when principal conductor, Bruno Walter fell [ill](#).

Relentless discipline. Dogged determination. Unwavering focus.

That was then. But how will you pursue mastery in a world where **job-hopping** is the norm?

I didn't have what many people would consider to be a "real job" until I was 25. Up until then I spent my time travelling the world and working in pubs.

But I was always intensely curious.

I read voraciously. I liked listening to others' ideas. I liked challenging my own thinking.

Curiosity led me from one career – as a policy advisor and an industry advocate....

To another – hosting my own 'ideas factory' called Salon Canberra.

With every twist and turn of my career, I found that being genuinely curious and engaged opened doors and created connections.

Each time I stepped into something new, I didn't always feel 'ready'. But curiosity gave me the confidence to ask questions, connect with people and learn what I needed along the way.

And guess what? People like you when you listen!

And that builds community.

Why does this matter?

Because the pursuit of mastery is not a solo endeavour.

We must work within a web of collaboration...

To work across borders...

To foster creativity in diverse teams...

To tap into collective intelligence to solve problems.

We must adapt and change and learn constantly.

To iterate and ideate faster than in human history.

AI, machine learning and digital tools can accelerate the pursuit of mastery in ways previously unimaginable.

We can refine some skills more rapidly. But the value of others is eroding before our eyes.

Mastery no longer means knowing everything about one thing.

It means knowing how to connect the dots across many things.

It means knowing when to plough on – and when to pivot.

The thing is... the masters knew how to pivot.

Michelangelo wasn't just a painter. He was a sculptor, architect, poet.

Marie Curie's lifetime work earned her Nobel Prizes in both chemistry and physics.

Leonard Bernstein composed film scores and Broadway musicals, conducted orchestras and was an extraordinary teacher.

Each of these masters found their **golden thread** – the thing that connected their pursuits, that allowed them to pull from different fields, to integrate knowledge and build a profound expertise.

How do you find your golden thread?

By finding your purpose.

In fact, I'd say the modern pursuit of mastery is inseparable from a sense of purpose.

If you are like your Gen Z peers, you don't want a career – you want a calling.

You are seeking work that aligns with your personal values. You want to make an impact and contribute positively to society.

And you have time.

Michelangelo was still sculpting six days before he died, aged 88.

Mastery is not a sprint. It is a lifelong pursuit.

Before I finish, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the families and loved ones here today.

Graduates, look around. These are the people who stood beside you, believed in you and cheered you on.

They are just as proud of you today as you are of yourselves.

The world your generation inherits is one of incredible opportunity – but forging your own path will require courage.

You are the first to truly grow up online.

You can access more knowledge in a day than most people could access in a lifetime.

And yet, there are things you can't find online.

Authenticity. Leadership. Purpose. Determination. Courage.

These are qualities that you must cultivate within you to pursue mastery.

And they cannot be cultivated with ChatGPT. You'll only find them within yourself.

So, as you walk out of here today with your degree in hand, remember that your education doesn't end here. Your pursuit of mastery starts now. And that's a journey only you can take.

Congratulations to each and every one of you.

Thank you.