

I begin by paying respect to the ancient Ngunnawal people upon whose land we gather this morning.

I thank them for their custodianship and for their care of this beautiful country.

And I extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders joining us here today.

Vice-Chancellor Bill Shorten, members of the faculty , family and friends gathered here today, **most importantly - the graduating class of 2025,** graduands from the Faculty of Science and Technology, thank you for inviting me to speak with you all this afternoon.

It is a privilege to be part of this ceremony to mark this milestone in your lives.

Firstly, congratulations.

Today marks the culmination of years of hard work, of study, submitting work and sitting exams.

But by being here - you should all feel so amazing – because you made it.

You will have that important qualification next to your name, from a fantastic university that has been educating students here in Canberra for

the last 58 years, including 35 years as the University of Canberra when it was formally created by legislation in 1990.

As it turns out, that was the same year I graduated from ANU, that other university just down the road!

Studying at uni back then was so different to now.

I bet none of you have heard of a thing called Microfiche (which is a transparent card storing miniaturised documents). You had to use a Microfiche to search for books in a library.

Lining up in libraries to borrow textbooks – only to find someone had got there first and it was gone, meaning you would have to go to another library to try and track it down.

Photocopiers for reading bricks played a big roll back then.

No internet, no search engines, no online texts, lectures where you hand wrote notes and if you tuned out or fell asleep too bad – there was no rewind.

3000-word essays handwritten and driven into Uni, often with only minutes to spare as you dropped your blood, sweat and tears in the wooden essay box outside your faculty admin seconds before it was whisked away by faculty staff (who were always on time!)

These are the scars carried by Uni students from the 90s... But despite all these differences in how we learned – the fundamentals of university haven't really changed that much at all.

Three or four years of intense and specialised study which, at the end - when all the unit boxes are ticked – gives you a golden entry ticket to the world beyond university.

With your degree today you join the 33% of Australians who have a bachelor's degree or higher qualification.

And whilst it's a growing group – you are still joining an exclusive group of Australian's who hold a uni qualification.

The degree you are being awarded with today not only gives you specialised skills in your chosen field, but the university has also prepared you with other essential skills for your next steps: critical thinking, research, analysis, complex problem-solving, presenting and public speaking, working as a member of a team, organisation skills - are just a few!

You're also graduating from a university that has built a reputation for producing graduates who are not only academically accomplished but also

one that produces graduates with great employment outcomes and high levels of employer satisfaction.

An occasional address is a traditional part of most graduation ceremonies.

Occasional - because it's not a regular gig - and address because its main purpose is for the guest speaker to provide inspiration, insights and advice to the graduating class ahead as you move into the post uni stage of your life.

So, sticking true to that tradition I am going to tell you things – give you some advice - that I wish someone told me when I was sitting in the audience like you are today.

Most of you probably know that I am a politician. That I am a serving Senator and before that a Chief Minister of the ACT.

But before that, I did my degree in political science and sociology at ANU and was a community worker for most of my career pre-politics.

I worked in childcare, disability care, advocacy services and - my most unfavourite, for a lifetime animal lover and vegetarian as a deli assistant where my job every weekend was to cook the chickens!

So how did a chicken cooking community worker end up as Australia's Minister for Finance, Minister for Public Service, Minister for Women and Minister for Government Services?

In all honesty, I'm not really sure.

Hard work.

Commitment to the job at hand.

Dedication to public service.

Being in the right place at the right time.

Capability and competence.

Relationships.

And a healthy dose of good luck at times.

Not just one of those factors but all of them combined is probably the best answer I can give you.

And so perhaps the most important thing I can do today is to share with you a **list of life-steers** for you to think about as you leave university life and embark on your next adventure.

Pick and choose from this – some may not be relevant, but others might.

Firstly, **Life is not linear. Life is messy. So, building resilience is important.**

You make think you have your life all planned out but life has a habit of throwing you curveballs.

You can't control the curveballs being thrown, but you can control how you respond to them.

Each curveball and dealing with it will build resilience.

Although it may not feel like it at the time – building resilience is really helpful.

Second, grab the opportunities that come your way.

Every job I have had has led me to the job I have now.

And each job has opened up new opportunities and other choices for me.

I've taken everyone and thrown myself into it.

Even if it was doing something I didn't know or have any interest in.

Say yes to opportunities even if you dont know where they will take you.

Three, mistakes.

You will make them. Plenty of them probably.

No one expects you to go through life without making mistakes.

The key here is to admit to your mistakes and learn from them.

Four, be open minded.

No one knows everything - so having a curious open mind is important.

Always ask questions - there are no such thing as stupid questions!!!!

Spend time feeding your creativity, developing empathy, and sharpening your ethical judgement — because those are the qualities that will set you apart.

We live in an amazing country where we can have different opinions – so, listen and learn from those who have different views to you.

Five, be a decent human.

No-one likes an A-hole.

Embrace qualities like decency, humility and care.

Always show care and compassion to others and never think you are better than anyone.

Basic humanity matters.

Six, Leadership.

There are so many different types of leaders

And there is no right type.

As you develop your leadership style - build your own - pick things you see and like in other leaders as you are shaping your own style.

And back yourself, imposter syndrome is real but it's also a waste of time and energy.

Seven, integrity and Honesty

Whilst a lot of things are out of your control, there is one thing you do have control over and that's the way you conduct yourself.

Your integrity.

It matters – guard it strongly.

And tell the truth, lies always come back to bite you.

Eight, mentors and mentoring.

As you navigate your career it's so important to have people around who simply are there to focus on you, particularly when you need them.

And always pay back your mentors by investing in others by becoming a mentor yourself.

Nine, give back and think about public service.

The world spins around because of people who show up and get involved in their community.

Endless opportunities await and you never know where it will take you.

And we know the days of spending your entire career in one place are long gone, most interesting careers move between sectors: private companies, government departments, research institutions and non-profits.

Time in the public service is worth it – not for ever, but for long enough to understand how government works and to contribute to solving problems that affect us all.

Finally, number 10 – it's the most important

Try to live a complete life.

Work isn't everything, no matter how much you love what you do.

Make time for the people you love.

Make time for rest and personal enrichment.

Do things that have nothing to do with your work.

Travel if you can - it will give you a different perspective on the way the world works.

And always make sure you try doing new things.

You won't regret it.

Finding the right balance in life will bring you happiness and that matters too.

So, a huge congratulations to you all and to your families and friends who have helped you along the way.

You should feel so proud of yourselves and enjoy all the celebrations that today brings.

Everything outside awaits you - so go forth and live your best life.

Thank you.