

OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

**PROFESSOR JOCK COLLINS, BEC (HONS), MEC (SYD), PHD (W'GONG),
PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, SCHOOL OF FINANCE AND ECONOMICS,
FACULTY OF BUSINESS, UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY**

UTS GRADUATION CEREMONY FOR
FACULTY OF BUSINESS

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The Challenges and Opportunities of Cultural Diversity.

Introduction

The Chancellor, Sir Gerard Brennan, The Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice President (Academic), Professor Peter Booth, the Registrar, Dr Jeff FitzGerald and the Acting Dean, Faculty of Business, Professor Bill Ticehurst.

It gives me great pleasure to address this xx graduation at UTS. I have been employed at this university, and its antecedent, Kuring-gai CAE, since 1977. The graduation is always the most moving and compelling moment of academic practice. It brings together students, their families and friends, and the UTS academic community in a time-honoured process of certification, ceremony and celebration.

I would like first of all to congratulate the graduates that sit before us on the left hand side of the hall, and their families and friends that sit on the right. A university degree is a very important commodity in contemporary society, where education is a key to opening work and life opportunities. Those graduates here before us today are reaping the rewards of long years of hard study, of juggling study with family and life outside UTS. For many students who are part-time, this means also fitting in work with family and university for six years or more. Clearly, the sacrifices, work and effort that go into successfully completing a university degree are very large indeed.

Most students couldn't make it through without support of family, friends and loved ones. For those family and friends here this is a great day for you all. The ceremony is as much for you as for those you supported over a lifetime or, in the case of friends or partners, a shorter period of time. Congratulations one and all gathered here today.

Cultural Diversity

The theme of my talk to you today on the occasion of this graduation ceremony relates to the challenges and opportunities of cultural diversity. I could not help but notice the great cultural diversity that characterizes this group of graduates. Those of you who know anything about our university, will know that, like the city, state and nation that it serves, UTS is characterized by cultural diversity. Its staff and student body are culturally diverse and UTS is committed to responding to the challenges and opportunities of cultural diversity.

One manifestation of this embracing of cultural diversity within UTS is seen in the fact that the Deputy Chancellor, Paolo Totaro, who presides over today's ceremony, was the foundation chair of the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission (now called the NSW Community Relations Commission). In this role, Paolo Totaro helped pioneer multiculturalism in Sydney and NSW. In a neat bit of closure, his daughter, Paola Totaro, is a journalist with the SMH who only eight days ago ran a large story in the Herald based on a report that I have recently written, **Gangs, Crime and Community Safety: Perceptions and experiences in Multicultural Sydney**. The title of this report hints at the challenges of cultural diversity for a global city like Sydney. In my short address today I want to canvass more broadly issues related to cultural diversity and the challenges and opportunities that go with the territory. And since you are business graduates, I want to focus on some of the economic dimensions of cultural diversity and how they might impact on your working future.

Before I do that I would like to outline some of the dimensions of cultural diversity in Sydney today. Australia is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world today. This stems from two aspects of our social history. The first is that the indigenous peoples, who have been in Australia an estimated between 40,000 and 70,000 years, are very culturally diverse. In the region that we now know as Sydney, for example, the *Eora* people have a presence dated in Sydney for 20,000 years. But they were not alone. The *Dharug*, the *Gundungarra* and the *Tharawal* Aboriginal peoples or tribes also living in what we now call Sydney. There were over 200 Aboriginal languages and 400 Aboriginal dialects in Australia as a whole.

The other major source of Australian cultural diversity is immigration. Having excluded and marginalised Aboriginal peoples, the new white settlers had to turn to immigration to fill jobs and to populate the new colony. Convicts were the first called on, but when transportation ended it was immigration that was called on to fill labour and people shortages. In 1947, Australia embarked on the post-war immigration program that was to literally change the face of Australia. Arthur Calwell, the first Australian Minister for immigration, had a slogan: *Populate or Perish!* He also promised to continue the white Australian policy that had been introduced with Australian Federation in 1901, saying that nine out of every ten immigrants would be from the UK or Ireland.

The immigration net had to work a little harder than Calwell envisaged if it were to fill the target of adding 1 per cent of to the Australian population growth through immigration. The net always went first to the UK, but always had to look elsewhere to meet the immigration quotas. Displaced persons, war refugees from Poland and the Baltic States, came in large numbers in the last half of the 1940s. Immigrants from northern Europe helped fill targets in the first half of the 1950s. In the second half of the 1950s and the 1960s, southern Europeans, mainly from Italy, Greece and the former Yugoslavia, came in large numbers, with the late 1960s the high-water mark of Australian immigration when nearly 200,000 new migrants came each year. Today we

take about 100,000 per year, but in the decades in between, the immigration net has swung largely to Asia, with immigrants from the Asian region now outnumbering those from Europe. The White Australia policy was, thankfully, buried by the early 1970s.

The result of this immigration program is that Australia today has more first generation immigrants than any other western country with exception of Luxembourg (the small state in Europe) and Israel (who will only take Jewish immigrants). Nearly 6 million immigrants have come to Australia in the past 55 years. Nearly one in five Australians today are born in another country while over half of those living at present in our cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide are first or second-generation immigrants.

The 2000 census lists more than 180 different birthplaces for those living in Sydney at the time the census was taken. Sydney truly is the world in one city. At the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, now just over two years ago, there was a community living in Sydney for nearly every national team that marched around the Olympic Stadium. This had not happened before in Olympic history, and highlights once again the extent of Sydney's cultural diversity.

In 1998 I wrote a book, with Antonio Castello, called *Cosmopolitan Sydney: Explore the world in one city* that was published by Pluto Press. In this book we outline the history and present of sixty different ethnic groups in Sydney, including the indigenous peoples. The chapters cover: history, socio-economic profile, key person profiles, ceremonies, festivals, key places and landscapes, shopping, cafes and the media. It also has maps of where to go and how to get there. Last year I had a part of this book translated into Chinese as part of the UTS Faculty of Business strategy to make a presence at overseas student recruitment sessions and in order to link into the local Chinese-speaking Sydney community. Those of you who speak Chinese can find a complimentary copy of this book, the *Chinese Guide to Cosmopolitan Sydney* as you leave the hall today.

The Opportunities of Diversity

Cultural diversity brings many opportunities, particularly, though not only, in the realm of the economy. The local Australian market is culturally diverse, as is the global market. There is thus a need for businesses to communicate with, and to understand, cultural diversity and how that shapes market demand and economic behaviour. It could be argued that cultural diversity is Australia's greatest comparative economic advantage. When you add the advantages of a culturally diverse workforce to locational advantages such as those that Sydney possesses, it is clear that Sydney is a global city with a cosmopolitan character. The two are related. The cosmopolitan character of the Australian people – with all the languages and religions of the world – attracts businesses such as American Express to locate their Asian regional headquarters in Sydney, in turn further developing Sydney's global character.

One of the four pillars of Australian multiculturalism is that of *productive diversity*, or the benefits that accrue to businesses because of cultural diversity. Many Australian firms, small and large, have been able to demonstrate an economic gain, or a *diversity dividend*, that has emerged because of innovative ways that the cultural diversity of the workforce can be tapped to business competitive advantage.

Of course, the culinary and cultural dimensions of cultural diversity also help make Sydney the cosmopolitan, dynamic and exciting place that it is today. One of the areas of my research is ethnic entrepreneurship. Many first and second generation immigrants have opened restaurants, cafés, take away food shops and green groceries. They have led urban renewal in many inner-city areas of Sydney, and led to the development of ethnic precincts in the city such as Leichhardt's *Little Italy*, Chinatown next door, Cabramatta's *Asiatown* and Auburn's Turkish and Arabic precinct. Immigrant entrepreneurs, small and big, have helped shape the Australian economy in a very significant way.

The Challenges of Diversity

One of the biggest economic and social challenges facing Sydney and Australia as a whole relates to unlocking the barriers to the acceptance of cultural diversity in the economy and society as a whole. Part of this challenge stems from ignorance, part from prejudice.

The market plays such a critical role in the economy, as you business graduates on my left will know in great detail, while those on my right will know by experience. However, the market often systematically fails to respond adequately to cultural diversity. This can happen if a job applicant's accent or dress – a marker of their ethnic difference – is interpreted in a negative or positive way by the 'gatekeepers' who allocate job interviews or the selection panels who decide who gets the job. An accent should indicate multi-lingual skills and knowledge of the cultural mores of different segments of the Australian and global markets. This should be seen as a plus in the global century that we have now just entered.

But all too often, markets fail in this regard. Accents are often interpreted as an inability to communicate and hence as a liability, leading those with cultural capital being penalized rather than rewarded. The consequence is that not only do individuals earn less than their human capital, but also their bosses and the economy as a whole lose out through not tapping to the ultimate the first and second-generation human capital that we have in Sydney. The final irony is that many then blame immigration and immigrants for our economic inadequacies.

In some instances, these decisions arise out of prejudice, more often perhaps they arise out of ignorance. One of the key lessons that each of you graduating today should take on is an awareness of, and sensitivity to, cultural diversity. You, the next generation of CEO's and management leaders, should not repeat the mistake of the last generation by helping to unlock the huge economic potential that cultural diversity brings to Sydney and to Australia.

Of course, the economy must be seen linked to the society as a whole. A better economic performance from our large reserves of immigrant human capital can help sway public appreciation of immigration. This can then help lead to a greater understanding of issues such as immigrant crime. In a cosmopolitan society like Sydney crime will be cosmopolitan. The great danger is in preventing the criminality of a few to be translated by a sensationalist media and political opportunism into the criminality of whole cultures. Widespread tolerance and respect of difference are a necessary condition for cosmopolitan societies to function at the level of the economy and society.

And Finally...

I will close my address to you by remembering a little of my own graduation experience. It was in 1971, when I graduated with an honors degree in Economics at Sydney University. My parents, like most of yours, came on campus for the first time. They were overawed at the pomp and ceremony and no doubt a little intimidated, since my parents, like many, came from a generation where a full high school education was rare and a university education not even thought about. My parents were working class people from Auburn, my father a semi-skilled railway worker and my mother a cleaner and tea lady. They had battled to get me through school and we so proud, no doubt like your parent today, of my achievements.

After the photos and the congratulations after graduation, my parents presented me with a graduation present: a new leather briefcase. I found some amusement in this, thinking privately that here was a present that was a few years too late. Surely I had no use for a briefcase: I had finished my last exam. But my parents showed greater wisdom in choosing that present. In the years that followed, I went on to do a Masters Degree and a PhD and wore out that briefcase.

The reason in telling this story is threefold. First, it reminds me how important graduations are in the lives of individuals and families. Second, it reminds me how critical parental and family support is throughout tertiary education, and how we often do not see parental wisdom when we first greet it. Third, and perhaps more sobering, is the fact that, like it or not, most of you will be thinking of further tertiary education before your life is out. Perhaps an MBA for those who have completed a B Bus degree. Perhaps some new certificates or specializations will be required for you to get that new job or promotion or to move into a more interesting and, perhaps, more highly paid area of work. Perhaps even a Ph.D. Whatever it is, you people are graduating at a time when lifelong education is no longer a cliché but a social reality. And we would like to think that it is UTS where you will take that further education, and recommend it to your friends.

Finally, congratulations again on a wonderful achievement. Make the most out of this day to celebrate with your family, loved ones and friends. Bathe in the magnitude of what you have all achieved. Make plans to see your UTS friends and to maintain your UTS connections. The University is very proud of all of you. Best wishes for the future.