

Chancellor's Graduation Address

Dr Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi

Ceremony 1: Tuesday, 10 December 2019, 09:30
Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Law

1. Greeting

Members of Council

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sibongile Muthwa

Deputy Vice-Chancellors

Executive Deans of Faculty

The Dean of Students

The Dean of Teaching and Learning

The Executive and senior management and staff

The Professoriate; Members of the Academy

Members of the Student Representative Council and students

University partners and stakeholders from business, government, the faith sector, civil society, and communities

All the students graduating today, your families and friends and those who are joining us by live streaming ...

Ladies and Gentlemen

Molweni

Good morning

Goeie more

On behalf of Nelson Mandela University, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the Summer Graduation of 2019.

2. Introduction

Graduation season is a special and memorable time in the life of the university. Every single ceremony is a unique occasion as we come together to congratulate the graduates of 2019 and wish them well as they enter a new chapter of life.

Today represents the culmination of much hard work, commitment and sacrifice. For many it represents a triumph over significant obstacles and challenges; and for all, it is a time for celebration, for gratitude, and for reflection. As the university community, we salute your dedication, your perseverance, and we celebrate with you today.

Academic success is not a solo endeavour. It may take many lonely hours of study and research, but there is always a community of supporters in the background – family, friends, peers, educators, funders or sponsors. Many of them are here to today to share in the joy and pride of our graduates.

Thank you, to all of you, for the role you have played in the achievements that we celebrate today.

In these December graduation ceremonies, we will be awarding close on two thousand, five hundred (2 500) qualifications, of which more than one hundred (100) are Master's degrees and forty-one (41) are Doctorates. This is significant beyond numbers. Whether it is a first qualification, or a doctorate as the pinnacle of intellectual endeavour – for the university, each graduate capped today represents a new cohort of knowledgeable and skilled people equipped to bring their education and talents to bear on the challenges facing our society. It is significant for each and every one of you too – for what your education will mean to you, to your family and community, and to the world, as you take on the mantle of a graduate of Nelson Mandela University.

In your thinking about what it means to be an alumnus of this university, you might look to the words of our namesake Nelson Mandela and his thoughts about the role of universities and graduates. Although his words here were directed mainly to the Academia, they also speak to the kind of leaders that society needs and expects to emerge from our institutions of higher learning, and so I believe they are just as relevant to the university as they are to you, as graduates – then, and now.

I quote:

“In this world under threat, colleges and universities remain our best hope. Your central mission, the pursuit of truth, must lead the way. We depend on you for leaders who care for, are engaged in and will serve the community, who are schooled deeply and broadly, in all corners of knowledge. We depend on you to point us toward solutions to our problems. That is what our scholars and teachers and students have always done, must always do, for, no one else will.”

3. Future readiness

Much has changed since Madiba spoke those words in 2005. The pace of change has certainly accelerated; and will continue to do so exponentially. What has not changed is the need for leaders with foresight, capable of anticipating and planning for the future in a rapidly-evolving world that is increasingly unpredictable and complex to navigate. This is palpable in the current challenges we face as a country and globally ... absence of visionary and transformational leadership.

Daily we read more and more about the Fourth Industrial Revolution and all the questions that surround its impact on the way we as humans will work, produce, live and relate to each other in future.

As we near the end of this decade, there are countless reports, studies and forecasts considering what the world will look like in 2030, 2050 and so on – socially, economically, politically, and environmentally. In the same vein, as a university, we are transitioning from the Vision 2020 strategic roadmap that has brought us to this point; and working to design where we want to be at the end of the next decade.

My message and my encouragement to the graduates today, is to undertake a similar exercise – to reflect on what has brought you to this milestone and consider where-to-next in your life journey as you imagine and shape your future against this backdrop of complexity, unpredictability, and the certainty of change.

I would like to suggest that you frame this in two questions:

Firstly,

Where you would like to be in 2030? What kind of world do you want to be living in – and how are

you going to contribute to shaping that world?

Answering this requires you to exercise the skills you have learned in your time at university – your ability to question, to analyse, to think critically, to plan ahead and act with foresight, creativity and adaptability.

You will need to build on these skills and the knowledge you have gained, to cast forward and make decisions, and be ready to adapt, innovate and be flexible, as the future you have imagined, and are attempting to shape, unfolds itself before you.

Secondly,

How does being a graduate of Nelson Mandela University set you apart, distinguish you from the 1000s of other graduates seeking to make their way in the world?

What will you take with you from your time at Mandela University?

Consider what you are taking away with you not only in terms of the knowledge and skills gained, but also the development of your values and character. Regardless of the changes ahead, regardless of your next steps in work or studies – it is your core values and attitudes that will set you apart and provide the immutable foundation for all that you do.

I hope and trust that your time at this university has helped to shape your values and your drive to, as our slogan says, Change the World. That you will stand out as socially and environmentally aware, responsible citizens who care and want to make a difference in the world that we share.

4. Future view

As I have mentioned, as a university community we are closing out on a decade of Vision 2020 and looking to the next ten years. We remain guided by an overall vision that firmly locates us within Africa, as a centre of African scholarship and leadership, developing the people and knowledge that will take the continent forward.

From my vantage point, I see a university that is actively growing in academic stature. A university that is engaging with the world in a way that reflects our values and our desire to give life to the ethos of Nelson Mandela, in answering the challenges that face our society and pursuing a world that is a better place for all humanity.

Here I can point to some key examples launched this year:

- The Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies through which the university aims to intellectually and practically engage with the legacy of Mandela and develop a scholarship of social justice that enables us to be true agents of change.
- The Centre for Women and Gender Studies, which could not be more timely, in mainstreaming issues that face us all in increasingly violent ways.
- And the Centre for African Philosophy that aims to engage with traditional and contemporary African scholarship and thinking, towards transformation and a living philosophy for Africa.

Our dream of a Medical School has taken careful planning and development of an innovative, transformative model for education and delivery of health care, and we are quietly hopeful that the dream is close to reality, as we await the official outcome of visits and evaluations by professional bodies.

All of these signal to the world the kind of university that we are becoming, how we wish to engage with the world and its challenges. And to be a university that you, our graduates, are proud to call your alma mater.

I encourage you to stay in touch with the university – be an active alumnus and be part of our

ongoing transformation, materially and intellectually. Let your growth in significance and relevance, mirror and shape that of the university.

5. Honorary Doctorate

In terms of a life and career of significance and relevance, we can look no further than Professor Charles R Lawrence of the University of Hawaii: a scholar and activist who has devoted his academic career to the promotion of equality and ensuring that the power of the law is an enabling framework for the eradication of racial oppression and racist hate speech. He is an internationally respected legal scholar, a pioneer of critical race theory, whose work has been influential in the development of our own anti-discrimination laws and jurisprudence on freedom of speech.

I am exceptionally proud that this university will today be the first South African, and indeed African, university to honour the work of Professor Lawrence with an Honorary Doctorate in Laws.

6. Conclusion

Before I close, I would like to acknowledge the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Teaching and Learning, Professor Denise Zinn; and Professor Andrew Leitch, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Engagement, who are officiating at their final graduation ceremonies as their tenures come to an end this year. Both Professor Leitch and Professor Zinn have contributed with distinction to the academic development of Mandela University in their current roles and throughout their careers with the university.

[TURN TO ADDRESS THEM ON STAGE] Your leadership has advanced and guided our thinking on how to shape a distinctive educational philosophy and experience, a vibrant research and scholarship culture at Mandela University, giving life to our mission, vision and values. On behalf of the University community – Thank You.

We also bid farewell today to Professor Rose Boswell, the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts, who is participating in her last Graduation ceremony as Dean. Professor Boswell has shaped a contemporary, inter-disciplinary Arts Faculty geared to equipping graduates to engage with the complexity of life in the 21st Century and the diverse ethical, social and political challenges facing South Africa and the world. We thank you, and wish you all the best in the next phase of your career.

In closing – and returning to my earlier quote of Nelson Mandela’s view on universities and graduates:

When we say that our vision is to be a “dynamic African university, recognised for its leadership in generating cutting-edge knowledge for a sustainable future” – we are not talking about the University as an institution or a set of buildings. Leadership takes people. We encourage and celebrate the leadership of our people in all spheres of human endeavour, and that includes you as students and graduates. Our wish for you is that you use the gifts you have been given, the skills and knowledge you have developed, the values and attributes that shape who you are – to go out and BE leaders in your chosen fields.

I end on a quote by Frantz Fanon from *Wretched of the Earth*: “Each generation must discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it, in relative opacity.” Today marks the articulation of your efforts and aspirations. You have entered a new chapter of your lives, one that will be guided by your ambitions and hopefully, by a shared passion for where you come from. It is important that your generation heed the way in terms of addressing Africa’s postcolonial issues. You possess an unprecedented opportunity: that of mobilising your education, your ambitions, and your successes in the service of the spirit of Ubuntu. Let us strive towards the raising of society in a manner that stretches across the

population, recognises the many intricacies be they, race, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, or ethnicity. As Africans today we have a greater calling. Now, more than ever, the continent is taking significant steps in the direction of equipping its upcoming generation with the necessary tools to tackle this task. It is for your generation to pick up the baton. To be better. To enter a generation of African leaders who cradle the continents people and ideals as you move forth.

Congratulations once again. Thank you.