

Good morning.

Welcome Acting Chancellor Mr Peter Prendiville, Vice Chancellor, Professor Celia Hammond, Pro Vice Chancellor and Head of Campus, Professor Selma Allieux, Pro Vice Chancellor International and Research, Professor Peta Sanderson, distinguished guests, members of our faculty, our treasured family and friends and of course my fellow graduands. I stand before you all here today very nervous but proud and honoured to be delivering this address as the School of Nursing and Midwifery celebrates its 15th anniversary. I would like to thank the Dean, Professor Elaine Pavlos, for asking me to deliver the Farewell Graduating speech and to say what a privilege it is to be given this opportunity. When I began this journey three years ago here at Notre Dame University, I could not have contemplated performing such a duty. Notre Dame not only allowed me to fulfil my dream of becoming a Registered Nurse but also gave me confidence and skills in areas I would never have believed possible.

So as I sat down to write this address, I reflected on what attending university here in Fremantle has meant to me and my fellow graduands. What could I say about the experience and this place that has been our home for the last three years? What is remarkable about Notre Dame? Remarkable being the word used by Emeritus Professor Doreen McCarthy at the awards night on Friday to describe Notre Dame and the nurses they produce. Well, I too wholeheartedly believe that Notre Dame is remarkable and unique. As students we have been lucky enough to experience this first hand, through the community spirit, pastoral care and the dedication and inspiration from lecturers and tutors. Not forgetting the unrivalled and beautiful streets of Fremantle upon which the campus resides.

The engaging and supportive community within our university and the emphasis on the student is what has made our time at university special. Camaraderie and a sense of belonging have been ever present in our close-knit cohort throughout the past three years. The guidance and encouragement within our group has been a key ingredient at times for getting us through the trial of a 2200 word essay or the terror of the practical video assessments. I know personally the difference this support can make.

Pastoral care has been constantly evident throughout our semesters. One aspect of this holistic care has been the mentor program, which helped me and many others through our first year. My mentor has been a fantastic support and inspired me to give back by becoming a mentor myself. I have been lucky enough to make some special friends from this experience.

But for me, one of the unique elements of this university has been the dedicated, passionate and unerringly supportive lecturers and tutors that we have encountered throughout our three years of study. From the first year experience of Human Anatomy lectures with Adil Vakil whose creative explanation of the workings of the human body are second to none and often involved impromptu props from the audience. I seem to recall a scarf being used once to demonstrate how the uterus is positioned in the female body!

To our second year when a touch of Hollywood was brought to us by Ben Hay through the Golden Awards for our practical assessments for Advanced Nursing Medical Care. The ultimate goal being to achieve a golden award for catheterisation, I kid you not... a sprayed golden catheter was the trophy – no expense spared! To our third and final year when we encountered Carol Orr whose passion knows no boundaries for professional practice, processes, procedures and of course policies. All of these elements combine to make our university unique. A place we are proud to be part of and will always hold dear in our hearts. As in the words of a famous nurse, Florence Nightingale, “the first journey is to find this special place” and I believe we did that when we took the first step to enrol in the Bachelor of Nursing degree course at Notre Dame University, Fremantle three years ago.

This leads me to take this opportunity to thank all the people who make Notre Dame the remarkable place that it is, and whom often we take for granted for their continual hard work. The administrative staff, who amongst many things deal with the constant emails and requests from students, the librarians who help us navigate the library, technology and the dreaded APA referencing for our assignments. The pastoral carers, the groundsman who make this university look so beautiful, and finally the academic staff who pass on their knowledge, clinical skills and experience to help shape us to grow and develop into the best nurses we can be. Please join me in a round of applause for all the staff at Notre Dame.

My journey began when I had to decide after 14 years of raising my son whether to go back to my old career or take a completely different path and follow a dream that I had way back in senior school. With encouragement and support from family and my best friend I took an exciting but very scary different path. I can honestly say I have never looked back and I have enjoyed every minute of it. I have met some incredible people along the way and made some amazing lifelong friends. I am so grateful to have been allowed this opportunity at a great university and alongside a fantastic group of people.

On behalf of my fellow graduands, I would like to say a special thank you to family and friends. Without their never-ending support, patience and encouragement, today would not be possible. I know some have family nearby and others have family many miles away, sometimes overseas but their belief in us and what we can achieve is invaluable. I personally would like to say a big thank you to my Mum who has travelled from the UK and spent three years on Skype listening and encouraging me, my Aunty from Sydney who has been an inspiration and is still nursing 50 years on, my best friend who believed in me even when I did not, my son who proof read every essay and has graduated this year from year 12 and my husband who survived a very tense household!

Finally, it remains for me to say well done to all my fellow graduands for your determination, commitment and hard work. From the bottom of my heart, I wish you every success in whatever lies ahead. I hope that we cherish our friendships and that our paths cross from time to time in the not too distant future.

Congratulations, graduands of December 2015 – we made it!