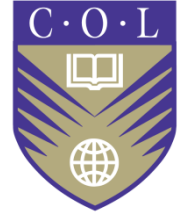


Embracing Change Forever



*Massey University
New Zealand*

Convocation 13 May 2010

Address to Convocation

*Sir John Daniel
Commonwealth of Learning*

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor:

It is an honour and a pleasure to be your convocation speaker.

I begin by congratulating the graduates on their achievements. Some of you have taken the extra-mural route, some of you have studied on campus, but all of you have had to work hard over months and years in order to receive your degrees today.

I express your and our appreciation to your relatives and friends. Having a student at home or in the workplace makes demands on parents, partners, spouses, children and colleagues. You also have had to make adjustments and sacrifices in order that each of today's graduates could succeed. Thank you for your patience, understanding and support.

May I also commend the staff of Massey University for their dedicated work? Each of the graduates will have cause to treasure the help and inspiration that they received from particular members of the staff, particularly when they encountered moments of difficulty.

Chancellor, you have conferred an honorary doctorate on Emeritus Professor Don Bewley in recognition of the tremendous contribution that he made, over several decades, to the development of Extramural studies at Massey University. I wish to add an international dimension to your appreciation of Professor Bewley's work.

My good memories of visits to Palmerston North go back to the early 1980s when I was President of the International Council for Distance Education. Professor Bewley, who is such a wonderfully courteous and cultivated gentleman, welcomed me to Massey and to New Zealand's distance learning community. We had many contacts over the ensuing years and he became for me – and for many – the international face of distance learning in New Zealand.

His 30-year career at Massey was remarkable, not only for his long and distinguished tenure as Director of Extra-Mural Studies, but also for his work as a teacher and scholar and for his impact on teacher education across south-east Asia.

He became Director of Extramural studies just as the world of distance education was to be transformed by creation of the UK Open University and the multiplication of similar institutions dedicated solely to offering higher education at a distance.

Professor Bewley observed these developments and learned from them, while remaining a persuasive spokesman for the dual-mode formula that Massey had chosen. He knew that it was easier to operate a university that focused only on distance education but he showed, very successfully, that the methods espoused by Massey were right for this country.

His broad-minded views made him one of the leading figures in the worldwide distance learning movement and he took a special interest in the professional development of its practitioners, particularly in the Pacific region.

My own thanks are due to Professor Bewley for being involved in the creation of the Commonwealth of Learning, which I lead. His was a key input to the report that persuaded the Commonwealth Heads of Government to establish the Commonwealth of Learning when they met in Vancouver in 1987.

They created it in order to foster distance learning in the developing countries of the Commonwealth. The question was whether it would do this by preparing distance education programmes for them or by helping them to create such programmes for themselves. In the words of the adage, should the Commonwealth of Learning give them fish – or should it teach them to fish for themselves?

Professor Bewley urged that the Commonwealth of Learning should help each country to develop its own capacity and it has been doing that successfully for 20 years.

As they have developed their own distance learning programmes many countries and institutions have looked with admiration at the Extramural studies programme of Massey University. You are one of the oldest and most successful examples of combining campus study and distance learning in the same institution.

I am honoured that you have invited me to address Convocation as you celebrate the 50th anniversary of Extramural studies. The programme began a few years before the creation of Massey University itself and was, along with Agriculture, one of the two defining elements of this institution.

Although Massey University is now a complex, multi-campus institution operating across a wide range of disciplines, those early features continue to define its uniqueness. Extramural students account for half your student body and you lead the country in serving the land-based industries.

Just as distance education is expanding rapidly everywhere, so the agro-food sector is experiencing a resurgence of importance worldwide. These two core programmes are an excellent springboard for expanding your international impact within your exciting vision for 2020.

Why did Massey University build itself on these two foundations? After all, fifty years ago neither agriculture nor distance learning were held in much esteem by the traditional academic community. You owe a great debt to two early leaders and to those who have built on their legacies.

I refer first to your founding Vice-Chancellor, Sir Alan Stewart. Over nearly a quarter of a century he nurtured teaching and research in agriculture as a vital way of serving the people of New Zealand through

their economy, and he fostered extramural studies as a means of transforming their lives wherever they were.

Second, I note the impact of Dr Charles Beeby, a giant of New Zealand's education history who, as Director of Education, faced down the opponents of distance learning and ensured that it played a major role in the training of thousands of your country's teachers. His influence extended beyond these shores to the shaping of UNESCO, whose education sector I was privileged to lead fifty years later.

Many people, including Professor Bewley and others in this hall, have built on the legacies of these two farsighted men. Sir Alan once said, and I quote: *"Massey doesn't conform to the standard pattern in many ways. The University is young and so can more easily embrace change and retain a less conservative attitude. I hope this can continue forever."*

Forever is a long time, but you have ensured that the University has embraced change for half a century. I congratulate you and urge you to continue with the innovations that make Massey New Zealand's defining university.

It is traditional for convocation speakers to end by sharing with the graduates some personal reflections about life. I often find that people put out pretentious platitudes on these occasions, so let me simply suggest to you that life in the 21st century calls for self-directed learners. All today's graduates – most particularly those who took the extramural route – have embarked on the path to self-directed learning in your time at Massey.

You have had to develop the qualities of self motivation and perseverance necessary to succeed in a study system that puts the responsibility for learning largely on you. Those qualities of self-organisation and tenacity will serve you well. Perceptive employers place special value on graduates who have studied at a distance because of the personal attributes they have developed alongside the knowledge that they have acquired.

The fundamental dogma of Massey University and of all universities is that knowledge is important. Treasure it and seek it throughout your lives as you direct your own learning inspired by another vital academic principle, which is systematic scepticism. Only by constantly questioning received wisdom will you embrace change forever.

This was well expressed by John Stuart Mill 160 years ago when he wrote: *"It often happens that the universal belief of one age, a belief from which no one...could be free without an extraordinary effort of genius or courage, becomes to a subsequent age, so palpable an absurdity that the only difficulty is to imagine how such an idea could have appeared credible."*

I leave you with that thought and I wish Massey University and all its graduates every success. Thank you.