

Convocation Address

Graduates, parents, distinguished guests and friends, today has truly been a long time in the making, and I congratulate each of you in your success in seeing your ambitions through to this day. Though many of us finished our final exams, presentations and defences several weeks ago, today is the day that we will all remember as the end of one chapter of our lives, and the beginning of the next. Many of us have been working towards finishing our degrees for five years, and others of us even longer. However, now in retrospect, it seems like no more than a year ago that I was standing in this same convocation mall wondering if SFU was the right school for me. Now, five years, almost to the day later, I can confidently say that I did indeed make a good choice – and I sincerely hope that every new graduate here can say the same.

As each of us begins the exciting yet daunting process of writing that next chapter of our lives, we should all keep in mind what our time here at Simon Fraser has offered us. Though each of us has undoubtedly read countless books, taken innumerable exams, written a multitude of papers, and filled-in an incalculable number of bubble sheets, the most important lesson, I believe, has revealed itself from between these tasks: In addition to learning the content of the books we have been assigned, we have also been given the opportunity to learn, at least in part, the content of our selves.

I hope that I speak for all of the new graduates when I say that our experiences at SFU have offered us the opportunity to learn about ourselves what no book, paper, exam or bubble sheet could ever teach: that enjoyment is actually born in challenge, that hardship essentially fosters character, and that true personal freedom is in fact nothing less than individual commitment to one's own goals and objectives.

It is by virtue of offering these truly higher learning experiences to students that I can qualify my choice to attend SFU, not only as a good one, but one that will positively affect me for the remainder of my life. Though our time here as an undergraduate or graduate student is necessarily limited to just a few years the learning that has been its hallmark need not be.

So, as much as today is unquestionably a day of celebration, it is also one that foreshadows a future of commitment to the challenges and goals that have their roots firmly planted on the top of this hill. In his seminal work on the psychology of optimal human experience, positive psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi had the following to say about community, commitment, challenge and happiness:

A community should be judged good, not because it is technologically advanced or swimming in material riches, it is good if it offers people a chance to enjoy as many aspects of their lives as possible, while allowing them to develop their potential in the pursuit of ever greater challenges. Similarly, the value of a school does not depend on its prestige, or its ability to train students to face up to the necessities of life, but rather on the degree of the enjoyment of lifelong learning it can transmit.

To echo these sentiments, I can only hope that each of us has found the requisite challenges during our time at Simon Fraser to ignite the flame of lifelong learning, and motivate the development of our potentials so that we may pursue ever greater challenges, and always be striving to be our very best selves.