

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
85th Congregation for the Conferment of Bachelor's and Master's Degrees
10:00am, 15 November 2018, University Mall

Speech by Professor Rocky S. Tuan
Vice-Chancellor and President

Dear students, congratulations. Today marks your graduation and the beginning of a new chapter in your life. Do you remember the goals you set for yourselves when you were first admitted to CUHK four years ago (for some of you it may be further back)? When I, after living in the US for many years, assumed office as Vice-Chancellor and President almost a year ago, I was informed of the 'Four Do's of University Life' in Hong Kong. They are: 'To be a member of a student society committee', 'To pursue a romantic relationship' or 'To fall in love', 'To live in a university dormitory', and 'To get a part-time job'. There are also at times a 5th 'Do' – 'To take part in overseas exchange'.

I am curious - were those the objectives you set for yourselves when you started here at CUHK, and if 'yes', have they been fulfilled?

On the other hand, I am certain that many of you have more aspirations than the 'Four Do's', and may have already taken steps to realize some of them, while leaving others at the back of your mind. In fact, I'd like to suggest that, on this special day, you should share with your friends some of your thoughts on how you've achieved your goals!

Today, for my part, I would like to share with you the stories of three CUHK students I have come to know.

A few months back, I attended an overseas-studies scholarship presentation ceremony and dinner. At the dinner, I met a CUHK student from the Faculty of Education, who wished to pursue a teaching career. He shared with me his serious concern that the youths of today rely almost exclusively on the internet for information and that, as a result, interpersonal interactions have been usurped by digital and virtual reality, which leads to a compromised ability to deal with real-world challenges and mishaps. Therefore, he has resolved that his professional goal will be to develop innovative teaching or pedagogical methods to change the situation.

I was very impressed with his dedication and passion, and am convinced that he will indeed get there. Personally, as an educator and a university administrator, I also share this passion. The passion and determination of this young man justifiably assured me that education in Hong Kong has a bright future.

Last month, I officiated an awards presentation ceremony honouring CUHK's students who stand out in non-academic achievements. My idea of launching these new Outstanding Achievements Awards is to recognize students who have gone the extra mile to help themselves or others by effecting a change, taking up a challenge, or overcoming an obstacle, thereby making the campus or the community a better place.

I talked to many of the award recipients after the ceremony. One student waited patiently for me for almost an hour, and when I finally met with her it was already early evening. We had a conversation outside the Pommerenke Student Centre. She told me that she had had a mood disorder before, and had in fact attempted to take her own life. Now, with those days behind her, she is determined to do something for her fellow students who have the misfortune

of being mired in serious mood disorders. She knew from personal experience the needs of someone who is really vulnerable. She also believed that, while what she could achieve by herself might be limited at first, her conviction would ultimately guide her in getting the needed resources. She rallied her classmates to form support groups for students who need help. She also actively proposed to the University ways to strengthen peer emotional support. In spite of her outward calm, I clearly felt her burning passion within. I was deeply touched by her selflessness and dedication.

The third story is one I read on a social media platform on which many CUHK students shared their stories. A student wrote that he used to be quite impressionable, and ended up majoring in a discipline he was not particularly interested in. Of course, he soon found that to be frustrating. He therefore tried in the second year to transfer to architecture; unfortunately he failed despite his efforts. Eventually, he was accepted into the urban studies programme, a field related to architecture. As a student in urban studies, he had the opportunity to participate in overseas field trips, which substantially broadened his horizons and transformed him into an active learner and keen observer of society. Through his experience, he made up his mind to improve living conditions of the homeless and the aged through urban planning. He believed that even a minor change can have a lasting impact on society. This student said, 'I don't want to be confined by social norms, and even though I may not achieve my ambition to become an architect, I am grateful that I can realize my goal as an urban planner.'

Dear students, you may ask, 'I am graduating; what do these stories have to do with me?'

I believe there are many more stories like these among you. You must have had dreams, aspirations, and stories of your own. Today you are leaving the University, but I hope you will cherish your own stories, as well as the big and small objectives you have set for yourselves. Please hold on to your aspirations and passion, and be steadfast in your pursuit of what is beautiful and good. Do not stop learning and pursue the truth.

Ronan Farrow is a young American investigative journalist whose exposé of Hollywood sexual scandal unleashed the #MeToo movement that swept the world. Mr. Farrow was presented with the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. He once said:

'You will face a moment in your career where you have absolutely no idea what to do — where it will be totally unclear to you what the right thing is for you, for your family, for your community. And I hope, in that moment, you'll be generous with yourself, but trust that inner voice. Because more than ever, we need people to be guided by their own senses of principle — and not the whims of a culture that prizes ambition, and sensationalism, and celebrity, and vulgarity, and doing whatever it takes to win.'

Interestingly, another quote from Ronan Farrow goes like this:

'For every young person I meet, I learn an idea!'

What a great observation, and wonderful news for us University teachers! We do learn from our students.

Finally, I would like to share a story about myself. My interest in science began when I was a primary student. One time, when I was in Primary 2 or 3, I was playing on the beach when I saw a tiny crab burrowing its way into the sand, only to re-emerge from another hole not far

away. I was really intrigued! How could such a little creature manage to adapt itself so well to the natural environment? I must find the answer to this mystery! I went to the US for higher education, and after graduation from college, pursued graduate studies at the Rockefeller University in New York City. The professors there gave students free rein to select their own research topics, and that initially rattled me a bit. Then I began serious soul-search to find out what really made me want to study science in the beginning. It was curiosity, pure and simple. I then told my professor that I wanted to find out how a chick embryo developed a complete set of skeleton within the shell during a mere 21 days of incubation. My research project was very successful (if you want to know what I found out, you are welcome to talk to me!) Little did I know that this research project, inspired by pure curiosity, would lead me on to a lifelong journey of research on stem cells, biomaterials and regenerative medicine, an absolutely thrilling and rewarding trip indeed!

Dear students, I call on you to cherish and remain true to your aspirations, and not to forget the pure and simple reasons that motivated you at the outset. I wish all of you every success, and I look forward to your coming back as alumni to your alma mater to share your life stories in the near future.