



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

**Chancellor Anne Giardini, O.C., O.B.C., Q.C.
Convocation Address Fall 2018**

I am delighted to see you all here to participate in or bear witness to this—Simon Fraser University’s most important ceremony, a time when we gather to celebrate achievement, success and the conferral of well-earned honours.

Graduands, this is your day, and I, along with many others could not be prouder. There are many reasons to tackle and complete a university degree, diploma or certificate. And for the chance to interact with keen thinkers, and to engage with other students.

And because this is an investment in yourself and in what you can bring to the world. Writer Dina Nayeri says, “a person’s life is never a bad investment ... there are no creditors at the door, no debt to repay. Now there’s just the rest of life, the stories left to create, all the messy, greedy, ordinary days that are [yours] to squander.”

Another important and enduring reason is that a university education encourages and rewards curiosity and supplies you with what is often called a well-stocked mind.

I am not sure if anyone told you this on your first day of classes, but by now you will have discovered it for yourself: your SFU professors love it when you earn an A, and at least as important as that is when they see in you the spark of genuine curiosity about something in the course topic, and see your newly-inspired curiosity lead you to becoming authentically engaged with a problem, challenge or conundrum.

Curiosity is one of life’s most rewarding attributes. The effort of being curious pays dividends every day.

First, if you are curious, you are seldom bored. Your thoughts are good company.

Second, curiosity will lead you to form friendships and other bonds of great and enduring strength because you will be one of those people who is genuinely interested in others. It turns out that people love it when you are interested in them. Try it now. Turn to the person next to you and say, “You are fascinating.”

Third, when you are curious, you are more likely to seek out and keep the kind of employment that engages your curious mind. That is employment worth having.

Fourth, curiosity will make up for any lack of other abilities. After all, we all have areas that aren't our strongest. Even Albert Einstein was modest about his natural gifts, saying, “I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.”

And curiosity will make you a problem-solver. Here's an example I found on the Internet.

Imagine you have a tiny piece of chalk, smaller than a pea. So small there is only enough left to draw a line a couple of metres long. Your challenge is to use it to create a circle fifty metres across. You will be faced with problems like this all your life. How to stretch a finite budget, for example, or how to run a car on energy from hydrogen or the sun, or how to persuade a team of people to work willingly and collaboratively late into the night.

It turns out there are many ways to use that fragment of chalk to form an enormous circle. You could drop it into a pond with enough force that the ripple would form a perfect circle of fifty meters.

You could use it to mark out a circle in sand. You could make a dotted line for your circle, marking a dot every metre. You, being naturally curious, can likely come up with other solutions.

One of the rewards of curiosity is a bit of a paradox. After a while you find that a course of enquiry doesn't take you down the road to that simple, satisfying, single answer you had hoped to find, but to ... more questions to be curious about. As the eminently quotable Dorothy Parker said, “The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.”

Today we engage collectively in an act of profound imagination as we invoke your future. This is the place and the moment when your transformation occurs from student to the future you.

Don't, by the way, let anyone tell you that this part of your life has not been 'real' life. Your years as a student are as tangible, human and as leafy with meaning as any you will experience in the days ahead.

Because you are or are about to become SFU grads, I have every confidence that you will flourish in the days to come. You will be innovative. You will be attentive. You will be creative.

