SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
SPRING CONVOCATION
JUNE 2, 3, 4, and 5, 2009

Convocation Address
By Dr. James McEwen
Vancouver biomedical engineer….

An honorary Doctor of Science was conferred on Dr. James McEwen during the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Applied Sciences Ceremony on Friday, June 5, 2009. The following is Dr. McEwen's convocation address.

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. President, honoured guests, graduands, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honour for me to be awarded this honorary degree. To you graduating today, I know you have worked hard to earn your degree, over many years. But you can take some comfort in the fact that it has taken me 35 years to get here today!

I'm especially honoured that many of today's graduates are from applied sciences, including engineering science and kinesiology, and from education. I'm told I can say a few things to you. But I've also been told that the best speech has a good beginning, a good ending, and not much time between the two.

So my message today is a simple one ... it's about what might await you after graduation if you are curious and keep learning, if y TJ (–)Tj ( )Tj -0.004 Tc 0.004 Tw [(p)-14(eopl)-14(e)]TJ 0 Tc 0 Tw T*

education told me I could create something better. I suspected that with a little ingenuity I could create a new microprocessor-based tourniquet system that could completely get around all of the problems with mechanical tourniquets. Of course, luck played a big role: after all, I was born in the year that the transistor was invented, I graduated from electrical engineering in the year the microprocessor was invented, and I got my PhD in the year that the first microcomputer was introduced.

So, with a little luck, a lot of help from many, and a great education, I was able to see that I was in the right place at the right time. I had an opportunity to be creative, to change a little part of the world in a positive way. I did, and I'm not done yet. My first patent was filed in 1980, the last two months ago. Today, tourniquets based on my inventions are regarded as being safe, everyday devices. Without you knowing it, I've probably helped you, or a family member or friend. For example, have you ever had surgery on your arm or leg? Has anyone in your family had an arthritic joint replaced? Do you know of any baby born with a club foot? Have you ever had arthroscopy for a sports injury? How about any surgery on a hand, foot or ankle? Do you know anyone who's had trauma surgery? Do you know anyone in the military in Iraq or Afghanistan? In more than 40 countries around the world, the innovation I created is being used every day, more than 15,000 times each day, to help improve surgical safety, surgical quality, and the quality of life.

So, as it turned out, my father's polio, and an unexpected surgical accident years later, led to an exciting, fulfilling career. I'm sure that each of you graduating today will face your own unexpected problems in your career. But some of those unexpected problems may in fact be great opportunities for change, opportunities for improvement, opportunities to help others. My advice is simple: Remember the words of Jean Piaget, who said, "The principal goal of education is to create people who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done – people who are creative, inventive and discoverers". I trust that your degree from Simon Fraser University will allow you to do just that, as you begin your exciting new careers.

Thank you.