



Emmanuel College Papers

Convocation Service and Dinner
12 February 2023

Professor Pauline Ford

Edition 28 – February 2023

Acknowledgement

Emmanuel College acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which the College is located, the people of the Turrbal nation and Jagera/Yaggera nation.

Our community lives, learns and grows together on these rich lands and waters that are, and have been, a place of gathering for thousands of years.

Emmanuel College is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the lands, waters and seas, and their significant contribution to society as the oldest living civilisation in the world.

Emmanuel College endeavours to promote reconciliation through education, respect and engagement.

The Author

Professor Pauline Ford is Deputy Provost, The University of Queensland. Prior to that, she was Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) (Acting) and previous to this, Head, School of Dentistry, becoming the first woman to lead a School of Dentistry in the Australia New Zealand region. Professor Ford graduated from The University of Queensland in 1989 with BSc (Hons) (University Medal). After nine years in general dental practice, she returned to UQ and undertook a PhD before joining the academic staff in 2005 and has since completed a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education and a Masters in Public Health. Professor Ford's research activities focus on oral health and its role in general health and wellbeing, with an interest in the social determinants of oral health. The majority of her research work is with groups who may have difficulty accessing appropriate oral health care, such as people with mental illness and the homeless community. Her research interests are the health behaviours associated with adverse oral and general health outcomes, such as tobacco use, poor diet and infrequent engagement with health care.

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This speech was delivered at the Convocation Service and Dinner held at Emmanuel College on 12 February 2023.

Good evening everyone, it is an honour to be invited to speak with you all today.

I would like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet today and pay my respects to their Ancestors and their descendants. The Traditional Owners have been creating and sharing knowledge, cultures, histories and languages on these lands for tens of thousands of years.

Emmanuel College has a long history and connection with The University of Queensland, being established in 1911 and relocating to the beautiful St Lucia campus in 1955. As Emmanuel College residents **you** are now and will always remain a part of that history and connection.

Whether you are a new or returning student, I congratulate you on the hard work, dedication and determination that has led to you being here today.

I'd like to offer particular congratulations to the student leaders who have been commissioned this evening. Your commitment to these important roles is a wonderful example of the generosity of spirit, compassion and sense of community that is at the heart of Emmanuel College. I started my UQ journey long ago. I won't tell you how long ago, but to give you a hint, it was the year that mobile phones were introduced, the internet was created and we were listening to bands such as the Eurythmics, usually on a cassette played in a Walkman.

So while things were very different then, some things haven't changed. Like the excitement and apprehension of starting university and moving away from home to live in a college. Many of you will have come from other cities, states or countries to be here today. I came from a regional town in North Queensland straight from high school to study dentistry. No-one in my family had gone to university before. It was quite scary, not knowing what to expect, what I was supposed to do or where to be. I really didn't appreciate it before I arrived but I was so fortunate to be going to a residential college here on campus.

My fear and loneliness certainly didn't last long! At the very first orientation activity I attended at my college I met someone who would become a dear friend, not just during our uni studies but to this day. There is no doubt that you will also make wonderful connections with other students studying in your university courses, but there is absolutely nothing that compares with the care and support you receive and the strength of the bonds that grow from being part of a college community. And of course the social events!

I am so grateful for the career path that my UQ degree in dentistry has allowed me to take. Looking back, it wasn't just the degree I benefited from, it was all those incidental opportunities that I chose to engage with. For me, it was getting involved with research while an undergraduate that opened my eyes and opened doors to career paths that I'd never contemplated before. I am sure I would never have followed the path I took that led to the immensely rewarding career in academia I have had if I had turned down the opportunity to do that undergraduate research program.

What will your sliding door moment be?

Your future may seem both exciting and uncertain, but one thing is certain: your education will equip you with the skills, knowledge, and attributes necessary to meet the challenges that lie ahead. The world is changing at an ever increasing pace. Just think about the disruption that generative artificial intelligence is creating right now. This technology has the potential for untold benefits for individuals and society, however, there are also great risks. None more so than in the education sector. I'm sure you would want to know that your doctor for example, not a chatbot, was able to meet the requirements of the medical degree.

But of course it's not black and white. It depends on how we use technology.

A university education is not just about acquiring knowledge, it is also about developing character and personal growth. Understanding the importance of ethical decision making, integrity and

accountability. It is these attributes that position you to make a positive impact on the world. Each one of us has the potential to make a positive impact, and I encourage you to use your education to make a difference.

Let me share with you the advice of former United States President Barack Obama when he came to UQ in 2014. His words remain so relevant today:

‘Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones that we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek’.

You here today are the change makers and the leaders of tomorrow. I am very confident the world will be in good hands.

During my academic career, I’ve had the enormous pleasure of getting to know many cohorts of students, guiding them through the challenges and achievements of their studies, seeing them grow professionally and personally, and then graduating and becoming proud alumni and leaders of the community.

The path is never straight though and you are likely to fail as well as succeed as you wind your way to graduation in a few years’ time. And that’s ok. We can learn and grow so much when we fail.

Always remember that you are not alone on this journey. We are here to support you and help you succeed. Whether you need guidance, mentorship, or just a friendly ear, we are here for you.

It won’t be all hard work and study, and I’m sure you will all be looking forward to the fun of the week ahead. It’s a wonderful time. The trick is to find a happy balance that works for you.

So, I’d like to leave you with my three top tips for getting the most out of this amazing opportunity you have as an Emmanuel College resident.

First, be open to new experiences and embrace opportunities. You just never know what friendships they may begin, doors they can open or exciting destinations they might lead to.

Second, take care of your mental and physical health: as well as supporting your overall well-being and happiness, healthy behaviours such as exercise and getting enough sleep reduce stress and are strongly associated with better academic success.

Third, and most importantly, treat others with kindness and respect so we can create an environment where we all feel safe and can reach our fullest potential.

On that note, and in closing, I’d like to share a quote that is a guiding principle for me. The author, poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou was the source of a lot of wisdom over the course of her inspiring life. She said:

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will *never* forget how you made them feel.”

I wish you every success and I am confident that you will find your time here immensely rewarding.