

**“Making a Difference”
Toast to the Town 11 June 2008**

Thank you Leigh Clifford for the generous toast to the Gown.

Chancellor Ian Renard

Vice Chancellor Glyn Davis

Father Bill Uren, Rector of Newman College

Dame Elizabeth Murdoch

The Honourable Lynne Kosky, Minister for Public Transport and the Arts

And distinguished guests and colleagues – our donors, community leaders, business leaders, friends of the university and our alumni. The world of talent in this room.

Thank you for the opportunity to give a toast on behalf of the Gown. I am very honoured to be doing so but at the same time thinking to myself – what is someone from a small prairie town in Canada doing up here giving a toast to the town on behalf of the University of Melbourne? Nevertheless, it is a privilege to give this toast and I do so on behalf of my fellow deans and colleagues.

In thinking about what I would say tonight I decided to frame my comments around ‘making a difference’. This perhaps explains why I am here. I can say, with much confidence, on behalf of my fellow academics, that we do what we do because we think we can make a difference – indeed this applies to most of you who are in this room tonight. It was a driving force behind my career choices – right back when I decided to venture out from my comfortable white anglo saxon world to teach in an all-black, poor community as a volunteer in

the West Indies. It was the best two years of my life and changed the way I saw the world. From there I came to Australia and began my career as an academic – what attracted me into academia was the ability to work on important problems and hopefully to solve some of them. And many of us as deans continue to work on important problems – I met up with Rick Roush, our Dean of Land Food and Resources on the way to Jakarta a couple of weeks ago. He was off to study the ‘cocoa pod borer – an insect that does major damage to cocoa beans – it has the potential to destroy the livelihood of 6 m small land owners in developing countries. Or our new Dean of Law, Jim Hathaway who is committed to making a difference to the lives of million of refugees in the world through his work on social justice.

But taking on the role of Deans shifts our priorities – the primary way we can ‘make a difference’ is to ensure that we facilitate the research of our academics by increasing the resources available and providing the environment to undertake that research -- and for our students – by providing opportunities for the very brightest Australian and international students to study here regardless of their means, and to ensure that they have a Melbourne experience that will change the way they see the world.

Let me give you a few examples of some of the ways academics in our faculties ‘make a difference’. I’ll start with two young economists in my faculty -- Lisa Cameron and Manisha Shah – they are working on the Water and Sanitation Program in Indonesia. Their involvement comes from wanting to make a difference to the 4 m children under 5 who die every year from preventable diseases that result from poor water quality and lack of sanitation. The program itself is being implemented with support from the World Bank – their role, which is partly funded by the World Bank -- – is to evaluate the efficacy of such a program. They are

evaluating the Indonesian program – this evaluation is critical as they can only affect change in developing countries if they have clear and compelling evidence about what works – and an understanding of the cultural barriers that influence the effectiveness of such programs. So last week Lisa and Manisha were in small villages setting up surveys to collect base-line data so that they can undertake a randomized trial. It is not easy to do this work – they need to speak the language and often are located in less than desirable places. It is a huge project – they are surveying 2000 households; recording diarrhoea prevalence of children under 2 on a monthly basis in all 2000 households. Needless to say their project ‘will make a difference’.

Similarly, look at the work of Professor Hugh Taylor, Harold Mitchell Chair of Indigenous Eye Health. The Chair was established this year with a \$1m pledge from the Harold Mitchell Foundation and a commitment to a five year partnership to work with the University to eradicate Trachoma in Indigenous communities throughout Australia and redress the devastating inequity of indigenous eye health in Australia. Hugh believes, that with sufficient support, active trachoma could be wiped out in Australia within 3 to 5 years – quite incredible.

Professor John Clement tells of his experiences in Thailand identifying victims of the Tsunami disaster. None of us will forget that Boxing Day in 2004. He describes how this experienced was a life-changing experience and one which influenced how he will spend the rest of his professional life. In John’s words “Once home I began to realise the horrors of the job and the toll it had taken upon me. I found it difficult to take the day-to-day issues of work very seriously and I realised that despite more than 30 years of experience in forensic dentistry I had been quite affected by my experiences in Thailand. I still feel immensely proud

to have been able to help ... I feel very strongly about the right to an identity in life and after death .. this commitment was reinforced in an absolutely unambiguous way in Thailand.” So, in the last few years of his career he is redoubling his efforts to ensure that such a fundamental human right is extended to as many people as possible. And has been invited to give scientific advice to the International Commission for Missing Persons in Sarajevo later this year.’

And a bit closer to home – Gillian Wigglesworth from the Arts faculty is undertaking research on Aboriginal Child Language Acquisition. Her research investigates how indigenous kids in relatively remote community learn language; its relationship to learning in schools – it is important to understand this because the school teachers who teach in these communities only speak English and the kids generally only speak a form of Creole and their own indigenous language. Understanding how these kids acquire a language is important as Australia comes to grip with how we can improve the educational opportunities of our indigenous population. It is also important to ensure that the indigenous languages survive in Australia.

What our students are doing is truly inspiring too –they are also making a difference to the local and global communities in which we live.

Our Faculty over the last three years sponsored the Students in Free Enterprise program. I must say that this has been one of the highlights of my time as dean.

Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) is a global organization that encourages University teams to develop sustainable projects which bring

greater opportunity to communities in need. Here at Melbourne they started as a small group of 6 students in 2005 and now total 80 (across faculties and across year levels). They work on problems that cross the disciplines; cross the faculties. They have entered ongoing sustainable partnerships with organizations such as Yooralla, Cisco Systems, and Australian Multicultural Education Services (AMES). They are working with the homeless and the mentally disabled and continue to expand the influence to the local community but also internationally in developing countries. They are leveraging the knowledge gained through their university studies to affect sustainable change in the community.

This generation has a social responsibility conscience. We held a volunteer fair recently and over 1000 students came through the door. They see the value in volunteering but doing it in a way that is sustainable for the community group – empowering the group to take ownership of the project. We have the opportunity to develop that sense of social responsibility in the subjects we teach and in the experiences we provide. Let me give you an example of the kind of educational synergies that we create -- John Fedderson --a BCom, BSc – as a teenager he started to ask question such as -- Why are some countries poor; and some rich? What role does education play? What role does culture play? He studied theories of economic development during his BCom but he wanted to study the problem first hand by immersing himself in a developing country – so while at Uni he went to teach English in a school in Northern Thailand while living with a Thai family. He then went to India, Zambia and South Africa. These ‘immersion’ experiences made him realize that poverty isn’t overcome through handouts, but rather, in his words “people must feel empowered to generate the type of prolonged economic growth which will lift them out of poverty.” He is now

studying development economics at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. As he says in his application ‘global economic development is not a zero-sum game and Australia’s recent economic growth clearly demonstrates this. We can indeed ‘do well by doing good’. We can indeed ‘do well by doing good’.

And of course, as Rupert Myer reminded me a couple of weeks ago, we don’t need to go overseas to do good. We only need to go as far as the indigenous community living near Shepparton to see what can be done. Or work with the Sudanese community in Melbourne helping them transition into Australian Society.

I use these examples tonight to share with you some of the ways that ‘we are making a difference’. I am proud to be part of a University that is ‘dreaming large’ The Melbourne model has encouraged us to be visionary – but now -- we in this room have the opportunity to turn these dreams into reality -- imagine if we had the resources to enable even one third of our student body --- 15,000 students – to contribute to the community in Australia or in the region. If we could harness this intelligence, youth and energy while they are at the University – imagine how it would change lives – now and in the future.

Imagine if we could expand the opportunities to study at Melbourne to the very brightest students regardless of means. I always remember a touching moment when I first became dean and was giving out access and equity scholarships at the dean’s honours event .-- This young student came up to me afterwards – and said “I couldn’t have come here if I hadn’t got this scholarship” – his parents were proudly standing quietly behind him – he was from an underrepresented school in Geelong. It

brought tears to my eyes that night and it does every time I think of him and other students for whom scholarships make such a difference. I keep track of this student because I want to follow what he does – I met him last week and asked him what would make a difference to his studies – he answered support for his train fares and books – it doesn't take much to make a difference.

Or a scholarship for a student in the Masters of Teaching who recently won the Olive Battersby award – the award will enable him to stay in the course – he has a wife who is ill and they have eight children. The cost of travel to placements was a difficulty. Or fully funded scholarships for PhD students to work on Rick's cocoa pod borer problem in Indonesia and PNG.

We have wonderful alumni and friends of the University in this room tonight and indeed in the region -- who have offered support to enable us to 'make a difference'. They are 'making a difference' to the arts, to music, to science and the humanities and social sciences. I have been astounded at the support that I have received from industry and the wider community. I have a new advisory board – the Fin Review calls them the 'dream team' – I think so too. They are currently working on a number of projects to expand the experience international students have while at the University; they are helping me launch the Campaign for Commerce; one of our alumnus from Indonesia has recently endowed a chair in Asian Economics and Business – this will provide the foundation for increasing our work in the region – will assist us in obtaining scholarships for PhD students to work with Lisa and Manisha on their Indonesian project. Jim Angus, Dean of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences is working with this same alum to expand the opportunities for the medical faculty to

provide training for nurses and doctors in Indonesia. And Tom Kvan, Dean of Architecture, has support from three alums in the region who are committed to supporting his new building – they want to support their alma mater because of the opportunities we provided to them. There are many more examples.

So in closing, I would like us to raise our glasses to the town – to all of you – with different talents, opportunities and passions – to thank you for helping us for ‘making a difference’ – may you continue to do so.