

Graduation ceremony course 2016 - 2017 Sala Pau Casals, L'Auditori

Vice President,
President of Alumni,
Tutors,
Professors, administrative staff,
Family members,
Graduates,

Last Thursday was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Valencian essayist Joan Fuster, a remarkable man whose many contributions to our language included notable efforts in the complicated art of aphorisms.

And so I'd like to begin this speech with an example of his concision: **“Violence begets violence. But – don't forget – tolerance also begets violence, and desperation begets violence, and – above all – the truth begets violence.”**

Today being International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, this idea seemed very relevant. Because just as Joan Fuster pointed out, in addition to violence fueling yet more violence, violence is often the last resort for those willing to ignore their own failings, for those who'd like time to stand still, or for those who refuse to accept that the world changes.

This is why, as individuals and collectively, we must raise our voices to oppose this violence and the ideas that justify it. This is why we have international days like today and joint manifestos such as the one promoted by Catalan public bodies and undersigned by our University.

This is why, as the UOC and as its president, we've sought to integrate equality, the fight against discrimination and the promotion of active integration policies within our defining traits.

There is still a long way to go, but the justice and importance of the goal we are striving for guarantee our commitment. Today is also an important date in the lives of those of you involved in this ceremony.

Kundala have performed their heartfelt rendition of the Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah. There's a line in one of the verses from this classic by the Canadian singer-songwriter that says «Your faith was strong but you needed proof».

Today, you'll all receive proof of this faith. Don't get me wrong. Neither I nor, seemingly, Cohen himself were talking about religious faith (though when faced with certain continuous assessment tests some of you might have been tempted to call on divine help).

Instead, I'm thinking of faith based, over a good number of semesters, on the values of dedication, effort, learning, competencies, etc. The strength that culminates in this graduation ceremony. Today is the day to celebrate. This celebration is, above all, an intimate one: the happiness that comes from getting a job done, and doing a GOOD job.

Taking time to appreciate the challenges overcome is vital, as it lets us enjoy what we've done, to see it from a distance and value it, while also letting us regain strength and look to new horizons and new challenges.



«In our world, learning is constant. It is not a phase, but a need and an opportunity that accompanies us throughout life.»

In terms of cycling, reaching the peak of Tourmalet represents a success, but the tour has many more stages waiting for us.

Likewise, learning is now not limited by age, timetables or physical spaces. If you look closely, you'll see that learning now resembles more than ever the learning at the UOC: learning without any kinds of limits – because we are not a distance university but a distanceless university.

«Today the UOC is more global than ever. Our classrooms have students from 134 countries, we work with governments and companies from around the world. Nowadays, being open to the world means being present around the world, because all cultures, all languages, all people, and all local differences count.»

For example, there's the Master's Degree in Conflictology that we run together with UNITAR.

People from 70 countries around the world – aid workers, diplomats, military personnel – have been able to complete the course in the most adverse circumstances. But what's more, we've created a global network of experts in conflict resolution who can apply what they've learned every day in the field.

All contributions are welcome when they come in response to our desire for education, research and knowledge. Being unique, inextricably, means being global.

We believe that this future is now. There are few things we can be certain about when it comes to the future, but when it comes to the future of higher education we can make some good guesses.

Firstly, you: you are now Alumni and who knows whether you will or already have started studying again..., probably. You will be a key part of the educational models and curricula. Leading thinkers, such as our professor Manuel Castells, think so:



«universities need to evolve in response to the demands and expectations of their students. There is no other way.»

Focusing on the person who learns, who is being trained, who is updating their knowledge, is vital. To the extent that it will be you, the student, who defines how you want to study.

Secondly, as a result of the strengthening of this central role you will play, university programmes will have to change.

Bachelor's, master's and postgraduate programmes won't disappear, but they will have to live alongside other more flexible, adaptable and modular proposals.

Classical, confined programmes will have to give way progressively to personalized solutions, to responses that meet the service demands coming from you, the students of the future.

I'll go even further and say that being a UOC student is like having a password. The UOC gives you a password to access our learning model, to enter the University.

In the near future, you won't need to enter anything. The UOC will be by your side all

the time: on your phone and tablet, at any hour of day, whenever you need us.

But let me return to what I was saying and stress that today is a time to celebrate; to celebrate with those closest to you: family and friends; to celebrate with those who have accompanied you on your journey: your classmates and teachers.

They have also played a key role in your success, and have witnessed your growth and evolution; a role which, if we had to personify it, is surely best represented by the figure of the tutor.

They are, as you know, vital parts of a unique educational model based on constant support.

They were the ones who welcomed you on the first day... and who have been there for you right up to today.

I spoke about a lyric from a Leonard Cohen song at the start: «Your faith was strong but you needed proof». With this in mind, while you wait to receive your official certificate, we want you to have a memento, something both concrete and allegorical, from today. You've been given a work by the artist Jaime Serra, created especially for this occasion.

It includes 4,896 successful academic careers, or, in other words, all 4,896 graduates from our university this year are represented. You just need to look at the colours to see the wide range of interests and origins that all share a desire to learn, to improve, to focus on the future so they can play an active part in it.

«Because, at the end of the day, all of us, whether up here on the stage or not, share one aim: to generate and connect knowledge so as to respond to and pre-empt the needs of society, the job market, research and, above all, the future needs of each and every one of you here today and of the graduates who will come after you.»

Congratulations to you all.

Thank you very much.

Josep A. Planell