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Union College Valedictory Dinner 2022.

Reflecting on university and my early career journey: Australia to The Antarctic and a few things in between.

We are all on our own unique journey. I will share my reflections on my time at Union College, what I found helpful and the questions I asked myself along the university journey that has led to me being where I am today. I now work in finance in Sydney, but when I turned up at Union in 2013 as an engineering and physics major I didn't picture this future. My journey over the last 9 years has taken me through coal mines, gas fields, Antarctic field work, NASA, global corporations and now many small businesses spread across the country. As I am sure some of you will appreciate by now your interests, and career plans can quickly change as your studies and peers open your eyes to new possibilities. This is good. It's developing a view of what is right for you. Along the way, all of us will face many changes and detours. So let me talk to you about my journey and reflections on it. Attending a public school in Canberra, I was the quintessential science person (studying math, physics, and chemistry) – this is where I thought I was heading, so envisaged a science undergraduate degree leading to academia in my future.

Speaking with friends I tend to think most of us turned up at college like this, not having thought hard about what we wanted to do in the long term, not knowing what the options were for us after graduation, and therefore what made sense to study. The lucky thing is, to a great extent there is flexibility to switch tracks in the future if you are willing to put the work into it. After my first semester here I decided to drop the engineering part of my degree, I just wasn't enjoying it. In my second year, I pivoted from majoring in Physics and Math to Geoscience and Geophysics (with a healthy amount of physics and math thrown in). If you had asked me why in the first year I probably wouldn't have given you a good answer except that I was bored. By the second year I had a better one: 1. I liked to spend my time with, and interact with people, not solely working alone. 2. I liked to get outdoors and travel (fieldwork being a core part of geoscience). 3. I wanted variety, for each day to be as near to new as possible. So that is how I ended up studying geoscience.

Moving into consulting and investing ended up being another cycle of these questions where I felt the opportunity for variety was unparalleled by other options in academia. Now, it's nice to be able to do what you want to do, but there is a grind to getting there. I took the attitude that learning didn't stop in the lecture hall and found every possible opportunity to get involved in activities outside of my core academics. Increasingly internships and work experience are becoming an incredible asset for students when looking for graduate work. In my first year, I started to look late and

missed out on most application deadlines and for those roles, I did apply for, I was probably too early in my tenure. It is about differentiating yourself and this is hard as a first-year student. I ended up spending the summer back in Canberra working as a landscaper to help save for the next year at Union College. In my second year, I did a summer research placement with the school of earth sciences. Applying to the winter and summer research programs at UQ is a great idea. They provide a fabulous experience and a good first step for corporate work or further research.

In my third year, I undertook a placement with BHP, at one of their coal mines. Failures aren't a good thing by themselves but when you can use them to learn and adjust your approach, you can improve. You're going to get knocked at the application stage, a lot. But having built some research or other experience when you do get to the interviews, it's your chance to go for it. I talked about the research I had been doing the last summer on coal seam gas. I received offers at Santos and BHP, but I ended up with BHP, as this would put me onsite in the middle of Queensland rather than head office. My last summer, I went to California for three months during my honours year to work at NASA, and out of this, I published my first research paper. Get involved throughout your time at university. Whether that is the rich extracurricular life the college can offer through sporting, cultural, social and academic pursuits, volunteering in the local community, or joining student groups at university. These things enrich your experience, expose you to new people, and are what you will remember. Leaving university, the world is full of opportunities, those that are available to you are bigger than Brisbane, bigger than Queensland and bigger than Australia. It's easier to take your first steps here but keep looking for the things to do that interest you most, wherever they are. The details are the easy part to sort out.

After graduation I had a science role lined up in Canberra, but decided I wanted to make that move into business, where I thought I would see a lot more variety in my work. Prior to starting this, the team I had worked with at NASA in the US invited me to join them on a field trip to the Antarctic over the summer as the resident geophysicist. The Antarctic was a fantastic experience. Challenging, exciting, and a lot of fun. After spending a week stuck in Cape Town waiting for the weather to clear (at which time the team and I learnt South Africa has some of the cheapest beer in the world) we hopped on a Russian cargo plane and flew down. The mission was to study an ice-covered lake and the microbial communities that lived on the bottom. To do so we spent more than a month camped on the shores of the lake, taking measurements, building weather stations and doing other field tasks. Outside of the work some of the memories I will take away from that place were skidooing - 100km between the base we landed at and the field site across ice riddled with crevasses (one of which I almost drove my Skidoo into) - but here we are alive and well today. Weathering a blizzard with the team in the cook tent over our last bottle of scotch. After returning to the base without having showered for a month, taking the best sauna of my life and rolling in the snow.

Coming back to Australia I got stuck in the business world. Firstly with McKinsey: This entailed three and a half years travelling Australia and the world working as a management consultant serving some of the largest businesses in the world (but with a particularly keen interest in the mining space). Now at the Australian Business Growth Fund, I work with a small team to find small to medium-sized businesses around the country in which to invest. We provide each of them with between \$5-15m dollars and in total, we have a little over half a billion dollars to invest over the next few years. We are a mission-oriented organisation and hope to promote growth in these businesses and create employment through them right across Australia. So that's where I am today.

All I can say to you is to make the most of your time at university, the adventures you make are what you will remember. Finally, I will leave you with three sets of observations on my time at college, my university studies and my experiences outside of these two. I am sincerely glad about these choices. At College: College is a great broadener - go be different, if you think you might be interested just turn up and sit in. In University Academics/Courses: I got my fair share of passing grades - I had a lot on my plate and sometimes I had different priorities. Don't get me wrong employers will look hard at your transcript but it is by no means the whole picture (gaining other experiences counts). Wider University Experience: This time is the start of your career - start making the most of it and get involved.

