

Dr. Vera Pezer (PhD)

(Honorary Doctor of Laws)

June 5, 2025:

By virtue of the authority vested in me by the legislature of the province and with the consent of the Senate of this university, I authorize the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa, and invest with you all the powers, rights, and privileges pertaining thereto. Thank you. (Applause) Oh, my goodness.

(Applause)

Well, Dr. Pezer was a mentor to me as a student, so it is an honor to have hooded her and an honor to call her up today to provide her remarks.

(Applause)

Eminent Chancellor, President Stoicheff, platform guests, friends, and graduates, congratulations to the University of Saskatchewan as it celebrates this morning's graduation of its newest graduates in pharmacy and nutrition, kinesiology, and medicine. Congratulations also to those who supported and encouraged today's graduates through their journeys over several years, family, friends, fellow students, faculty who taught you well, and many others.

And, of course, major congratulations to those graduating this morning. You have achieved your academic goals and convoked with your well-earned degrees.

Reflecting on my message to share with you has led me to three themes. The first, for you to convocate meant you needed to successfully complete coursework, fulfill requirements for your program, and achieve promotion standards demanded for your degree. This is the foundation you need to succeed in your chosen professions.

Educating students is a core mandate of the university, along with research and public service. The reputation of the University of Saskatchewan rests on producing excellent, well-educated graduates. Today, those of you graduating join more than 175,000 alumni worldwide that include Order of Canada recipients, Rhodes Scholars,

Supreme Court Justices, two Nobel Prize winners, and a former Prime Minister. You are joining a large, impressive group. The second theme is that, along with my coursework, three tools became an important addition to my education.

I wasn't aware how important they were at the time, but eventually I realized how helpful they were. They helped me with my studies, and later on, helped me a lot in my chosen career. And I'm thinking they will be helpful to you as well. One lesson I learned was that part of my coursework, but for which I did not receive grades, and that collaboration with others was sometimes involved. Some lessons were positive, others humbling and painful, but they all contributed to my learning.

I always got good grades in high school English and approached my first university class with confidence. I still remember today the shock and embarrassment I experienced when I received a D-minus on my first essay.

And with a note from the professor saying I was lucky, I did not receive a zero because there was evidence of plagiarism in my paper.

I attended a small rural high school and was one of four graduating grade 12 students. Our teacher had never explained plagiarism to us, so I did not know what it was until my first English essay.

Today I have to confess, I remember very little of that first English class, but I never forgot my lesson on plagiarism.

Another lesson I learned for which I did not receive grades was how to research material and that consulting with others could be helpful.

I was never good at statistics and was relieved when I scraped by as an undergraduate student, but I needed at least 70% on my comprehensive exam for my PhD.

Saturday mornings a fellow graduate student coached me on statistics, and I helped him with personality theory.

We both survived.

He helped me understand the difference between oblique and orthogonal rotation in case it was on the exam.

This helped me at the time, but I soon forgot the difference because I did not need to use it.

What I realized was that I could source information I needed or if I forgot it and that consulting with others could be helpful.

The third nongraded tool I acquired was how to manage my time. I learned how to prioritize projects according to what was important and what was less so, what projects involved more than work and what could be done quickly and if a task was urgent or not. University

studies taught me how to manage my time. So in summary, these three tools were important to me in my studies and my life.

Learn from mistakes to help me succeed in the future.

Go to sources including other people. If I didn't know something or if I forgot it and then focus on managing my time. These, as I said to you, these were important to my studies, and they served me well throughout my life.

The third theme is that the University of Saskatchewan offers many experiences outside the classroom. They enrich your university life and create many lasting memories. When I attended university, a curling program existed that involved competing against other universities.

I joined because curling was a popular winter activity where I grew up.

Curling on campus connected me with other students. It offered a social life, and it helped me to fit in so I felt less homesick. The University curling program became one of my most formative lasting memories.

Another example, each year I attend the University of Saskatchewan Students Union Awards Luncheon organized, promoted and led by students. It's a happy positive event to see faculty receiving teaching awards and students recognized for a wide range of volunteer activities. I'm always impressed by the celebratory success of the event and our students are evidence that our future is in good hands.

I also learned the value of non-academic activities from others.

Early in my first term as Chancellor, I hosted an alumni tour to Russia. It consisted of three days in St. Petersburg, a cruise of several days on the Neva and Volga rivers that led to three days in Moscow.

There were 18 University of Saskatchewan alumni on board as well as people from other Canadian and American universities.

We learned a great deal about the history and culture of Russia and our Saskatchewan group bonded quickly because of our shared connection to the University.

We all noticed two very stoic, humorless men in dark suits who were a constant presence and did not interact with us and we decided that it was their job to keep an eye on us. More important, we learned that happy hour prior to the supper meal in the lounge offered \$5 scotch and \$1 vodka so we all quickly became temporary vodka drinkers.

On this tour, I decided to have each University of Saskatchewan student share their memories with me of their life as a student and then I would include this in a shared diary of our trip.

What I discovered was that the group valued their degrees that led to successful careers in journalism, business, law, nursing and other professions.

I also discovered that lasting memories also had little to do with their academic work. Some remembered Saturday morning intramural hockey games at the old Rutherford ring, socials, college mischief and friendships.

In the 1950s and 60s, a non-credit physical education class was a compulsory part of each program.

One nursing alumni on our trip remembered her swimming class in the old Hanger building in winter and how her hair was frozen stiff by the time she reached her class in the medical building. A discomfort at the time had become a fond memory decades later.

Alumni, those that came before you and now you will value your academic program and connections to the university and also remember your enhanced activities outside the classroom. I hope all of this is true for you as well.

Students earn degrees and become alumna.

Your university years have given you valuable, multifaceted experiences that includes knowledge, helpful tools and personal experiences that have enabled you to convocate today and succeed in the future.

You have been well prepared to succeed in today's serious, complex, rapidly changing world.

You have spent the last several years improving your world. It's now time for you to join us in improving our world. Congratulations today and best wishes to all of you as you embark on your next chapter.

(Applause)