

Chair of Council, Vice-Chancellor, eminent faculty, proud parents and grandparents and Sussex graduands of the class of 2014:

Thank you very much for giving me the great honor of receiving an Honorary Degree from the University of Sussex. Today's ceremony is for me the fulfillment of a dream. In 1976, both Sussex and the Technical University of Munich/MPE accepted me for graduate studies. I opted to attend Sussex for a Masters degree and to complete my studies in Germany, as these came with a scholarship, which greatly improved my Brighton living allowance of 8 BP per week! ...

However, it is the aggregate of my education, including the Physics degree at my hometown, at the University of Athens, that gave me the legs to stand on here in front of you and vastly contributed to my professional experience and cultural education. Together with my second and third homes, the Netherlands and the United States, they are the foundations that kept me afloat throughout my scientific career.

This brief address is a daunting challenge and a wonderful opportunity for me. After deep and astute omphaloskepsis, I decided to touch upon what I believe does a good scientist make, and how she/he can get there.

So, I spent some time pondering all the qualities that I look for in my students, postdocs and above all my collaborators. In the end I came up with the following list, which I realized is a description of what kept me going these last 35 years:

- Motivation
- Curiosity
- Perseverance
- Diligence
- Anger – the healthy kind
- Respect
- Patience

Armed with these and your own personal traits, you still need to navigate many uncharted waters to get where you want to be, or perhaps to get out of where you already are. You need to find your own place to stand on firmly, a place from which you can claim your life, your career and your success. I hope you will find these guiding principles to be of value.

I will only illustrate my first point with a story.

I have a cat that likes hiding in the weirdest places. I came home one evening and, despite my best efforts, could not find my cat after searching for over half an hour. I looked under beds, under and inside sofas, all closets and behind doors, and in the end I turned off all lights in the house and sat on the sofa trying to simply listen. It took a few minutes in the darkness to hear a complaining meow, coming, of all places, from above! The darn animal was on the top of the curtain rod! All this time, I was only looking down, not up, which made sense, given that I was missing a cat, or so I thought... So,

- Look for the unexpected – do not bias yourself too much
- Find your own way – do not let others define you
- Follow your gut, or your nose (depending on the language) – take risks
- Make and admit mistakes – else it comes back to haunt you
- Make choices – not all battles are worth it Challenge authority (politely) – check facts  
Finish things – 97% done is not done Practice scientific altruism – help others
- Realize that past performance is no guarantee of future results (and this goes both ways; think about it!) – do not be inflexible
- Do not underestimate the value of Communicating,
- Collaborating, and Networking – especially in today’s world
- Have fun with your work – the most difficult and most important goal to achieve

This last point is what I believe essential for a successful career. In my life I have changed course several times following my instinct in this pursue of happiness. I quit a tenured job from the University of Athens, to join the NASA/MSFC gamma ray group in Huntsville. I never regretted this decision, as hard as it was leaving my homeland behind. 23 years later, I look back at that young and fearless gal, with a strong driving force: feel good when you get up in the morning to go to work. More than good – these first years with NASA were a fairy tale. Our experiment onboard the Compton Gamma-Ray Observatory unveiled multiple discoveries and new phenomena. We collaborated with colleagues from all over the world, and traveled everywhere to present our results. Science had no (and should not have) borders.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the University for the honor bestowed on me by this honorary degree, and offer my best wishes for the future success of all graduates, alumni, staff and current students of the University.