

Graduation 2008 Honorary Graduate - Oration

Oration for Honorary Graduand Derrick Swartz
Orator: Professor John Packer

Chancellor, the Senate has resolved that the degree of Doctor of the University be conferred upon Professor Derrick Swartz.

It is my honour and privilege to be able to address you this afternoon in order to introduce Professor Derrick Swartz – already twice a graduate of this University, but more importantly an impressive commander in the universal struggle for equality and social justice, notably in his native country of South Africa. Professor Swartz came to Essex in different and harsher times, fleeing the authoritarianism of apartheid which he had resolved to combat. He returned to post-apartheid South Africa where he has contributed to a remarkable transformation – certainly still in progress and far from an ineluctable road of perpetual progress.

Permit me to add that it is especially welcome and appreciated that Professor Swartz has brought with him today the sunshine which is enlightening our ceremony and celebrations. Thank you!

Derrick Swartz has been, and remains, a member of the noblest vocation: he is a teacher. From early days teaching at a secondary school, he followed his studies at Essex to become an accomplished scholar, Research Fellow and eventual Director and Professor of Inter-Governmental Relations at the University of Fort Hare. In the midst of a transitional challenge and reported crisis, he rose to Vice-Chancellor and quickly moved that University forward to solid ground and eventual excellence as an academic centre – as a productive higher educational institution contributing to the social development of his country. In recognition of this success, Professor Swartz was appointed earlier this year Vice Chancellor and Rector of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth with some 25,000 students on seven campuses.

Professor Swartz is not merely – if I may say so amid this specific community – an academic. He is also a social activist. In South Africa he sits on the Boards of a number of important Trusts. More to the point, his studies, work and related engagements are directly connected to his passion for social justice and equality of treatment and opportunity. It is evident that for Professor Swartz, as for many at Essex, education is about equipping citizens with the capacity to contribute to social progress – to reflect upon, design, populate and drive public and private institutions for good ends. Professor Swartz has lived and continues to live this – as teacher, reformer and administrator. He is not watching from the front row of history: he is engaged energetically in making it happen – despite the challenges and odds. Chancellor, Professor Swartz is a leader – in thought, words and deeds; his own deeds.

Certainly, we congratulate Professor Swartz on his commitment and success. And we wish him all strength and fortune in his continuing endeavours. This is, as he will be the first to tell us, not only for the benefit of his own society and country, but also for the region of Southern Africa, for the Continent and world beyond. We need him to succeed. As Director of the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex, it is my special pleasure to share these words, and also to express our readiness to engage with Professor Swartz and join hands in our common, universal struggle for social justice.

Chancellor, it is for his achievements that the Senate has resolved to confer on Derrick Swartz the degree of Doctor of the University.

Chancellor, I present to you, Derrick Swartz.