

Honorary doctorate

Contributed by Lachlan
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LESLIE YOUNG

Chancellor,

It may seem surprising that the first recipient of Victoria University's new degree of Doctor of Commerce should be a man whose degrees are in mathematics. But it was by chance, a factor that so intrigues mathematicians and bedevils and enlivens so many scientific endeavours, that a brilliant young New Zealand mathematician became the distinguished economist, Professor Leslie Young.

By chance, Leslie Young was in Britain in the early 1970s and, by chance he met another New Zealander, Helen Sutch, who introduced him to her economics tutor, who in turn introduced him to Professor James Mirrlees, later to be a Nobel Laureate in Economics. He served the young mathematician a sherry and set him an essay. Too embarrassed to decline after imbibing the sherry, Leslie Young became trapped in a cycle of Economics essay writing. A year later he escaped from the essays, but not from Economics, taking up a Junior Research Fellowship in that subject at Oxford University.

Born in China, Leslie Young came to New Zealand at the age of two and only 14 years later arrived at Victoria as a Junior Scholar. He completed his BSc in just two years but, because of his youth, could not graduate. Never one to be discouraged, in his third year he completed a BSc with First Class Honours in mathematics. He was awarded five scholarships but this time forgot to send in his application to graduate with his class. Now with time on his hands as he waited to go to Oxford, by August 1969 he had completed a MSc in mathematics with distinction. Shortly after his arrival in Oxford, his Victoria supervisor wrote to say that the external examiner of his MSc thesis had recommended him for a PhD. He did not take up this offer, replying that he had already completed a different doctoral thesis that was subsequently awarded Oxford's Senior Mathematics Prize. He now turned 21.

Leslie Young rapidly attained international distinction as an academic economist. In 1992 he took up the position of Professor of Finance at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In this position he has been the Executive Director of the Asia Pacific Institute of Business since 1993, enlarging the extent and standing of its programmes on an international basis. He retains a keen interest in New Zealand and Victoria University. He has acted as an Adjunct Professor to the School of Economics & Finance, presenting seminars and initiating and aiding development of this University's programme for international students.

Professor Young attributes a good deal of his success to the tolerant and friendly New Zealand environment in which he was brought up. Now he is drawing on his interest in the interaction between culture and economics, and preparing a book on the thesis that language, culture and religion are inextricably, but explicably, intertwined, a direction that profoundly affects economic arrangements and performance, and human conflict. Without doubt, this will change the way we look at economics and human society.

Chancellor, I have the honour to present to you
 Leslie Young,

Master of Science with Honours in Victoria University,
 Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Oxford,

for the degree of Doctor of Commerce, honoris causa, in this University.

Stuart McCutcheon, Vice Chancellor, 10 December 2003