**Jean Macgregor** has been a part of the Evergreen community for 33 years. Her day job has been working in one of Evergreen’s public service centers: the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education. For the last 12 years Jean has been leading Curriculum for the Bioregion, a project specifically focused on sustainability education, helping faculty members in about 50 different disciplines and areas of study build sustainability concepts and content into their classes. She’s also been a faculty member of the MES program teaching Environmental Education and supporting student research. Below are the first few minutes of her Keynote Address at the 2017 MES Hooding Ceremony.

I’m retiring this year from Evergreen, so I feel as though, in a way, I’m graduating too.

I’ve been working at Evergreen since 1983. In my first year at Evergreen, faculty members Oscar Soule and John Perkins were proposing the MES program. They were showing me their plans, since I had just come from a liberal arts college back east where we had also been developing a new interdisciplinary environmental studies program, for undergrads.

So I got to be present at the birth of MES, as it were. Even back then I was so impressed by Oscar and John’s thinking. So many Masters’ programs are incredibly narrow and rigid – but this one, from the very beginning was conceived to be broad and interdisciplinary and flexible and rooted in collaborative learning. In the years since, I have found it immensely satisfying to see the MES program evolve, and to see what important work MES grads are doing—literally all over the world.

This year, I’m in the process of wrapping up my work both in the Washington Center and in the MES program and handing it off to others…so this is a special time of looking back on what’s been accomplished but also an opportunity to look ahead and consider what is yet to be done.

**What I’d like to speak to in these remarks is how higher education needs to stretch to fully meet the adaptive challenges of this century, and how WE, too, need to stretch as well.**

So, what is meant by adaptive challenges?

Up until recently, our steady march of the STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) has focused on technical problem-solving. But, now, in the 21st century we live in a time of something different: adaptive challenges.

The distinction between the technical problems and adaptive challenges was put forward about a decade ago by Ronald Heifetz in his classic book *Leadership without Easy Answers.*

Heifetz defines technical problems, as problems that are solvable with known information and expertise. The solution, or the goal, is often tangible—like “putting a man on the moon” or combining the power of a computer and a camera and a telephone into one.

JFK knew it could be done to put a man on the moon; he said so. And Steve Jobs knew that creating an i-Phone was entirely possible. These technical problems might be highly complex but addressing them was a matter of marshalling enough resources and expertise.

In contrast, *adaptive challenges* are problems whose solutions are elusive because the problems themselves are so large, so highly complex, and so continuously evolving. I am sure any of you could name a dozen adaptive challenges in just a few minutes. Some that come to mind for me are: the world-wide spread of disease; the rise of militant movements in all their forms and climate change and climate justice.

Working on adaptive challenges absolutely requires technical expertise.

But it also requires people to shift their consciousness or enter new ways of thinking and being in the world, and that requires **stretching,** going beyond our comfort zones, taking a hard look in the mirror, and changing how we go about living in the world.

I’m talking about how higher education needs to stretch to meet the adaptive challenges facing us, and I’m also talking about my hopes and dreams for what will continue to be alive for YOU as you move into the next chapters of your professional and personal lives.