

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:

DR HUGH BRADY, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University, President, University College Dublin, on 14 June, 2006, in University College Dublin on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*, on **EILEEN MARIE COLLINS**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

Eileen Marie Collins was four-and-a-half years old when Yuri Gagarin made history as the first man in space.

When she was growing up in the 1960s in Elmira, New York, there were no female astronauts and no female military pilots. The closest she would have come to a female role model was Lieutenant Uhura! It wasn't until 1978 that NASA finally selected women for its space shuttle programme, and before 1992, female pilots were excluded from flying in combat. Eileen said once that eventually, having women in these roles wouldn't be news anymore – it would be accepted and expected. It was a prophetic statement whose fulfillment she was to do more than anyone to bring about.

Eileen Collins not only took on these aforementioned roles, at a time when it wasn't accepted or expected, but did so in groundbreaking and record-breaking fashion. Just four years after becoming an astronaut, she became the first-ever female shuttle pilot. In 1999 she led the first shuttle mission to be commanded by a woman. She has clocked up 872 hours in space, on a total of four space flights, two of which she commanded.

NASA Administrator Michael Griffin said of her earlier this year: "She is possessed of a quiet determination to attain the very highest levels of accomplishment."

And these she has attained in a number of different disciplines. She pursued the highest levels of educational accomplishment after finishing high school in 1974. In 1976 she attained her associate degree in Science from Corning Community College. A BA in Maths and Economics from Syracuse followed in 1978, an MSc in Operations Research from Stanford University in 1986 and an MA in Space Systems Management from Webster in 1989.

Her education was complemented by her interest in flying. The young Eileen had spent summers watching the gliders fly over Harris Hill in Elmira, a town dubbed the 'soaring capital of America' because of its history steeped in aviation. She funded her own flying lessons with a part-time restaurant job and finally got her flying licence. She then joined the US Air Force and in 1979 graduated from its Undergraduate Pilot Training at Vance, Oklahoma, where she remained as an instructor until 1982. She continued to teach flying at the Air Force base in Travis, California, where she was also a C-141 aircraft commander. In 1985 she began studying at the Air Force Institute of Technology before becoming Professor of Mathematics at the US Air Force Academy in

Colorado. In 1989 she headed to the Air Force Test Pilot School and from there applied for NASA's astronaut programme.

Eileen has always been possessed of an intelligent and uncompromising curiosity. When she was growing up, attention was focused on the unknown world, with the former Soviet Union and America competing for firsts in space. Applying for the astronaut programme in 1989, she hoped for a position as a pilot or mission specialist. Because of her flying experience, she was chosen to train as a shuttle pilot in 1990, and there began her career of firsts - firsts achieved through skill, perseverance and hard work.

In 1995 she became the first woman to pilot a space shuttle, on the STS-63 Discovery mission. It was the first flight of the new joint Russian-American space programme, and the Discovery crew was the first to rendezvous with the International Space Station Mir. In 1997 she piloted the STS-84 Atlantis to dock with Mir. Two years later Eileen became the first woman to command a shuttle flight when she led STS-93 Columbia to deploy the highly powerful Chandra X-Ray telescope, the heaviest and most powerful x-ray telescope ever launched into space. In 2005 she undertook her most recent space flight as commander of the STS-114 Discovery, the first shuttle flight since the Columbia tragedy two years earlier.

After four successful and eventful missions in space with NASA, not to mention her service with the US Air Force, Eileen has retired from both organisations to pursue her own interests and to spend time with her family.

We're here today to commend someone who has shown extraordinary talent and dedication in everything she has done. She has not only set a precedent for women to follow; she has set one for all of us. She saw what she wanted, worked hard to get it and today, her achievements are accepted, expected and duly respected.

As I said in my inaugural Foundation Day address two years ago, excellence should be the benchmark for everything we at UCD do as a university. It is with this in mind that we honour you today, Colonel Eileen Marie Collins, for always upholding excellence in everything you do.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis hanc meam filiam, quam scio, tam moribus quam doctrina, habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Scientia, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.