

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
May 14, 2004
Ext. 2500

This week I received some requests for the student experiences that I shared in my commencement remarks. I thought you might enjoy reading about some of our most recent graduates. In developing these comments I received many wonderful examples of the extraordinary efforts of our students, unfortunately more than I could relate in our commencement activities. These are but a sampling of student success stories from the graduating class of Winter 2004.

Allied Health and Pharmacy

Each of you has overcome significant challenges as you have worked toward this day of achievement. I'll begin with the members of this graduating Pharmacy class, the first all Pharm D. group in Ferris' history. You were the pioneers for our new curriculum and helped prove that a distributed pharmacy program can prepare extraordinary graduates.

Within your class there is a person whose family has an extraordinary history and relationship with pharmacy at Ferris. The story begins with his great grandfather, Harper, a Ferris pharmacy grad, who started their family pharmacy in Charlotte, Michigan in 1948. It continues with his grandparents, George and Esther, both Ferris pharmacy grads. The story continues with his father Jeff and Uncle Ken, also Ferris pharmacy grads. And now the fourth generation of Ferris pharmacist is prepared to receive his degree today, Joe Wildern.

In Allied Health I have visited with a remarkable woman, a mother and grandmother of six children. At age 44 degenerative arthritis led to a knee replacement and a needed change in careers. She began work on a coding and billing certificate, but quickly transitioned into Medical Records Technology, in which she will earn an associates degree today. She has become an active recruiter for our program, encouraging colleagues and friends to enroll. Today she has an exciting career at St. Mary's Hospital where she works with diabetes reporting and abstracting, and this associate degree is just a midpoint on her plan to a bachelor's degree. Later this spring she will receive the Yvonne Harbert Award from the Michigan Health Information Management Association as the outstanding graduate in the state. It is a pleasure to present to you Joan Koets.

Business

Each of you has overcome significant challenges as you have worked toward this day of achievement. I'll begin with the members of this graduating MBA class, the first in Ferris' history. You were the pioneers for our new curriculum and demonstrate the quality and diversity of the Ferris experience.

Within this MBA class is a person whose accomplishments truly demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning and excellence. He is a Vietnam veteran, a father and a husband. A recipient of the College of Business Student Excellence Award, he graduates with not one, but two masters degrees, and he has done this by maintaining a perfect 4.0 grade point average. This extraordinary student is Frank Armstrong.

The College of Business has a strong interest in international education and a wonderful component of international students. The next student is a person whose visa request was denied five times. As a result instead of beginning in Fall 2000, it was January 2001 before he could begin study at Ferris. This is a young man that has not just adapted to his new home, but who has flourished here. It seems on some occasions that he is involved in everything, including International Student activities, the Student Alumni Gold Club, a column for the Torch, and continual promotion of Ferris State University. He graduates today with two degrees in Public Relations and Psychology. It is a pleasure to present to you Mircea Cotosman.

One final inspiration embodies the spirit of lifelong learning. He began work on a business degree in 1947, fresh from high school and as a member of the Ferris Institute football team. Among his instructors was Business English teacher Karl G. Merrill who became Ferris' 9th president. Raised as a dairy farmer, a variety of circumstances and potential career changes interrupted this education. Today 57 years after he began, we are proud to recognize John Emmons as he receives his associate degree in managerial accounting.

Arts and Sciences, Education and Human Services, Optometry

Today we are pleased to recognize students from Red River Community College in Winnipeg and Assiniboine Community College in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada. They have endured a 20-hour bus ride to receive their degrees, the result of an innovative partnership between our institutions. These are the first graduates from this program and we salute them on this happy occasion. We are also pleased to recognize the first graduates from our Bachelor of Arts programs in English, History and Communications.

Among our graduates is a couple that represent for many the challenges and opportunities of the Ferris experience. Married with a 2 ½ year old son, each knows the hardship of losing a parent. Lacy lost her mother when she was two and Jeremy his father at 5. Although both began in different areas, they are graduating today in television production, a demanding and time intensive major. Throughout their experience here they have managed school, work, and parenting duties. I expect their son Collin may someday be a television personality with the time he has spent at the studio and as a star of their production projects. It is a pleasure to present Lacy and Jeremy Slone.

For this Arts and Sciences graduate her educational saga truly demonstrates an extraordinary commitment to lifelong learning. Her career has included positions as a police officer in Flint, an elementary school counselor, a social worker and an assistant director of social services. Determined to earn her degree, studies were delayed by career responsibilities and on her retirement by the need to provide care and support for a series of family members and relatives with terminal medical conditions. This is a woman who began her studies in 1956, and who first attended Ferris in 1965. Throughout she was determined to achieve her lifelong dream, to earn her college degree. Starting back to school in 2001, today, 83 years young, she completes her bachelor of social work degree. I am honored and humbled to present to you Audrey Ditmas, class of 2004, and would ask that she stand and be recognized. I would also express my thanks to the faculty who helped this occur. [In a magical moment, Audrey received a standing ovation from the Commencement audience.]

Technology

Among our graduates is a person who exemplifies the opportunities a Ferris experience can provide and is a true model of excellence. Her career includes service in both the Army and Marine reserves. A surgical assistant for ten years, she began to realize the limitations of that career for her. Although she knew little about the field, she heard about the plastics program at Ferris and moved ultimately to the new rubber technology area. At Ferris she developed the first plastics and rubber career day, which attracted 230 students from 10 high schools to our campus. She presented the success of this effort at an industry meeting in Las Vegas and was filmed for a History Channel program on the modern marvels of the rubber industry. At Ferris she has continually been recognized with scholarships and honors. A 4-year graduate, she has worked three internships at Acor Automotive in Cadillac and the North American Vice President for this firm created the position she will assume on graduation especially for her. On top of this she has maintained a perfect 4.0 gpa. I would ask that Kathleen Franks stand so we can recognize her.

Closing Thoughts

The success of our students is a result of your efforts with them. Thank you so much for the difference you make for our students. Part of what makes our University special is the extraordinary stories of our students and the life-changing impact your educational efforts can make. There are many, many other stories of extraordinary effort and achievement by our students. I always enjoy hearing about our students and would encourage you to share these with me.

May Commencement was a wonderful series of events. Beginning with the alumni recognition evening, including the Granger Building dedication, and through each of the commencement ceremonies, this was an important and eventful week in the life of our University. Thank you very much for your many contributions.

Best wishes,

David L. Eisler, President