

Determined to Succeed

For every student who crosses our stage today there is a story, a story that includes parents, family and friends that supported them, teachers on all levels that have educated, challenged, and prepared them and personal commitment, effort, and sacrifice that have helped transform them.

In the success, triumphs, and achievements of these graduates we see our hopes and dreams for the future, a future that is bright and promising and filled with opportunities that are yet to be discovered.

Over the past few weeks I have taken time to visit with our graduates, learning about their experiences and hearing their stories. As I have listened, I have developed an even deeper appreciation of the students we have at Ferris State University and the power of the educational experience we provide here.

These are more than outstanding students crossing our stage today. These are extraordinary people, individuals that I would be proud to have as son or daughter, brother or sister, father or mother. I want you to know how impressed I am with these graduates. Perhaps the easiest way to illustrate this is to share this story with you.

This young woman began her studies at Ferris in the fall of 1999 after graduating from Creston High School in Grand Rapids. Struggling academically, she did not return for the fall of 2000. However she did not see a lot of potential in her neighborhood, did not want to be a drop out at a dead end job, and was determined to get out of this situation. As a self supporting student she returned to school, supporting herself by working at the campus Westview Dining facility and then for Ferris catering, where many of us on campus and on this stage grew to know her from her positive attitude and engaging personality.

In 2006 her dream of a college degree seemed to have collapsed around her, as she was forced to drop out of school, having exhausted her financial aid with significant work still remaining to graduate. This was a time of great disappointment and seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Still she continued her work at Ferris catering, commuting from Grand Rapids to do so. As she remained in the University community she came to view this as her extended family, as she describes it, “People encouraged me to finish what I had started and I didn’t want to disappoint them. During this period Stan Vallier, Dan and Carma Burcham, Rick Duffett, and many others reached out to her. These people together with her sisters encouraged her to continue. She then met faculty member Chris Vonder Haar and learned that she could complete the Bachelors of Independent Studies within two semesters.

December 20, 2008 - 10am Commencement
President David L. Eisler

Today she graduates with this degree and is source of a pride to so many people who know and appreciate her success. I would ask that Zequeelah "Muffy" Bryant stand and be recognized. I would encourage her family to also rise and be recognized. For the moment Muffy Bryant will put her career plans aside as she helps care for her father who suffered a debilitating stroke several weeks ago. For those of us who know you this is no surprise.

You are an inspiration to each of us. Many of us take for granted what you have had to work so very, very hard to accomplish.

Graduates, on behalf of our University I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. As each of you sets out on the next step on your life and career you will face times of challenge, heartbreak, and disappointment. In those times when you might consider giving up, I'd encourage you to remember the example of Muffy Bryant and her indefatigable determination to succeed.

Congratulations and best wishes.