

## Determined to Make a Difference

Today's commencement is a historic day for Ferris State University, our College of Allied Health Sciences, and for our nursing program. Graduating today is the charter class of our advanced 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. For students who have already earned a bachelor degree this compresses the nursing education into three semesters. This group began last January and less than a year later has earned advanced entry into this profession. Let me begin by sharing the stories of two members of this extraordinary group of students

This first woman graduated from Western Michigan University in 2005 with a degree in secondary English education. Decreased support for education in Michigan meant that there were few employment opportunities as a teacher and while she did receive some interviews, all that was possible for her was substitute teaching. This was replaced by a legal secretary position at a local firm, but downsizing eliminated this position soon after she accepted it. She had always wanted to be a nurse, but had shied away from this career because of fears about math and science. Finally she enrolled at Mid-Michigan College to enter their associate degree nursing program, but learned there would be a two-year wait before she could be admitted to that program. In July 2007 she learned of the accelerated nursing program at Ferris but was also told that she was the 41<sup>st</sup> applicant in a program that would accept 20 students. Although she has no background in the hospital field, she finished her prerequisites and was admitted to this inaugural class last January. Today she graduates with her nursing degree, prepared for her new position at Gratiot Hospital, where she'll work with her husband, Mark, a Ferris pharmacy graduate. She credits Mark and her mother Cindy Bauman, a long-time Ferris employee, for helping her through the difficult times of what she describes as the best year of her life.

I would ask that Abigail Young stand and be recognized. I would ask her family also stand.

This second woman moved to Big Rapids with her husband when he accepted a position in the FSU Library. Although she has a master's degree and has completed everything except her dissertation in German, there was not a position available for her here. As result she worked part-time in the library, which provided time for her to be with their children. She began to look for other careers where she would be helping others, touching lives, and teach others. She wanted to do this at Ferris, but did not want an additional 3-4 years of college education to achieve this. In a conversation with faculty member Arlene Morton she learned of the accelerated nursing program and placed her name of the waiting list. Once admitted, as one of the older students in the class, she wondered how she would be accepted in this group of students and at times whether she should be doing something else. She describes this special group of students as people who were always willing to support each other, to help pick each other up, to keep each person prepared and informed, in many respects the ultimate support group. It was for her a life-changing experience.

She credits her husband David and children for helping her throughout this year and encouraging her to persevere to meet this goal. Today she graduates with her nursing degree and a goal of becoming a home healthcare or hospice nurse.

I would ask that Vicky Scott stand and be recognized. I would ask that her family also stand.

If time permitted I would tell you the stories of each of the 17 other students in this inaugural nursing class, as each one is compelling and special. For me their stories are a wonderful example of what Ferris is and must become to help our state during these challenging times. Because of the willingness of our faculty to rethink this curriculum and to compress nursing requirements into a very aggressive 3-semester program these students graduate today into a field that desperately needs nurses, especially those with life experiences. Ferris is Michigan's partner in helping our people re-educate themselves for the jobs that exist in today's economy.

Each of these special people had already earned a bachelor's degree - in fields of business, finance, construction management, social sciences, ethics, health care systems administration, biology, education, biomedical sciences, and kinesiology. Two have master's degrees. This was a double-paced program, which required them to be organized, focused and very goal oriented.

I would ask that the advanced nursing graduates stand and be recognized. I would also ask that their families stand. We thank them for their support during this most challenging of programs. Finally I would ask our nursing faculty and administration to stand so we can thank them for making a difference in these lives.

As the inaugural graduates from this program, you are an inspiration to each of us. Graduates of the class of 2008, 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 examples of these nursing graduates and their determination to make a difference for others.

Congratulations and best wishes.