

Commencement  
Presidential Address  
May 5, 2006  
7:00 p.m.  
David L. Eisler, President

**College of Pharmacy  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Ferris State University-Grand Rapids**

Graduation Recognition

It is a true honor to stand before you – the class of 2006. Today is a wonderful opportunity for you to reflect on your accomplishments here at Ferris State University. At such you need to know that your success is built upon the collective efforts of so many people who care about you and who take great pride in your growth and development.

I want to pause for a moment so we can express our thanks to them. I begin with our faculty, who have served as your teachers, advisors, guides, and mentors. We are truly fortunate to have a faculty who are dedicated to teaching and who care deeply about students. I would ask that are our faculty rise so we can express our thanks to them.

Next I want to recognize our staff, who each contribute in their way for you our students. In doing so I would note the beautiful decorations here today and their many contributions to today's ceremony.

We are fortunate today to have a beautiful commencement program which provides information on our University, its program, and today's ceremony. I extend special thanks to the students in our University Printing program for this wonderful keepsake.

Now to the special guests with us today. First I want to recognize your parents who are here with you. They have planned and sacrificed to help you reach this pinnacle of achievement. Parents please stand.

I would be willing to guess that there are also proud grandparents here today. Would you please stand.

For some graduates there are spouses or significant others who have stood by them in both good and tough times and have supported you working toward this day. Would you please stand.

Graduates, some of you also have children, who have had to share their Mom or Dad with books, studying, and homework assignments. I'd ask the children of our graduates to stand.

Finally we have many friends and other relatives of our graduates here today. Please stand so we can thank you for being here with us today.

Graduates in a few moments you'll be crossing this stage. A few helpful reminders - As you celebrate this achievement take time to thank those who have worked, helped, and supported you. Their sacrifice and love have helped create this moment for you.

Second, a practical, but useful reminder. We're going to take your picture as you receive your degree, don't forget to pause as I shake your hand and smile.

### Student Stories

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 has 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 may yet be undiscovered.

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 two of their stories.

This young man came to the University to become an optometrist. He is a person who exemplifies involvement, and soon became a member of the Student Alumni Gold Club, eventually serving as vice president. He also joined the pep band, playing 171 performances and becoming its assistant director. When he became a docent for the Card Wildlife Museum, it was clear to him that his true passion was in outdoor, wildlife, and environmental education. Building on this experience he worked with students to help create the Outdoor Club, which brought national wildlife celebrity Jack Hanna to our campus, not once, but twice.

The second time this event was staged in Wink Arena because the crowd was too large for Williams Auditorium.

He earned national recognition when he was selected as a Morris K. Udall scholar, one of 80 in the nation and the first for our University. He is currently involved with planning for the Udall Scholar National Conference. He conceived and headed a gala in April for the Card Wildlife Museum. Working with other students he staged an evening that earned over \$16,000. These funds will be used for transportation costs so school children can visit the Card Wildlife Museum. Graduating with his bachelor degree in Applied Biology Bret Muter is a student who does more than excel academically, he also works very effectively with his peers. It is a pleasure to recognize Brett Muter and I would ask that he stand. I would ask that his parents also stand.

As a mother with two children, this woman was determined to get an education at Ferris State University. She applied on-line, sold her home before she was accepted to the University, and with the assistance of her family moved to Big Rapids two days before Christmas. She arrived with no money, except for a \$50 check that she could not cash until the following Monday.

Reflecting on her experiences at Ferris, she talks about how the community here has embraced her and what a wonderful experience this education has been for her children. She has become an active member of efforts from the Office of Minority Affairs, especially TOWERS, an acronym for Teaching Others What Establishes Real Success. With TOWERS she speaks to school age youth, conveying through her testimony how to overcome adversity, to choose friends wisely and to discover personal gifts to take action "right now." She continues to stay in touch with the students she speaks with, encouraging and mentoring their success.

An active member of the Social Work Association, she began her undergraduate degree Winter Semester 2003 and graduates today with her Bachelor of Social Work degree. This fall she will begin her master's work at the University of Michigan. Her hope is to create a nonprofit organization for intervention with teen pregnancy and child care. Vanita Sanders understands and exemplifies the difference a person can make for others. It is a pleasure to present to you Vanita Sanders. I would encourage her children Lashay and Darius to stand together with her family.

On behalf of our University I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. As each of you sets out on the next step of 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 these wonderful examples of Bret Muter and Vanita Sanders. Like each of you, their stories

represent not only the hard work, sacrifice, and determination, but also the commitment to excellence required to not just succeed, but to excel.