

Commencement
Presidential Address
May 6, 2006
9:00 a.m.
David L. Eisler, President

**Michigan College of Optometry and
College of Education and Human Services**

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.

As a first year student this young lady was both homesick and shy. Through the help of mentors like Karen GreenBay and Karyn Benner she began to recognize the opportunities available for her here at Ferris State University. Working with her fellow students at Ferris, she helped create the First Expressions registered student organization, a social, artistic group that encourages students to share their artistic talents to inspire others. She overcame her initial shyness to be elected by the student body last fall as Homecoming Queen.

As a high school student she had begun to write poetry and had been encouraged to share her poems with others. Last year she became determined to

realize her dream and to publish her poetry. This fall she published “Wiser Than Young,” a collection of poems reflecting her experiences. This spring she published her second book, “Waiting for Rain.” Even more impressively, with receipts from her book, she has created a scholarship at Ferris State University. She wants to help that next young man or woman have the educational opportunity she has experienced. Graduating with a bachelor degree in Television and Digital Media Production, Kaiya Hamilton truly is a student who works to help other students. I would ask Kaiya to stand. I would ask her family to stand.

The semester before graduating from Ferris State University with a bachelor degree in the human resource field, this student felt she had chosen the wrong field. Upon graduation she was employed with a regional bank. Through their mentoring partnership with a local elementary school she confirmed her true passion, to be a teacher. She moved with her husband to Chattanooga and was a substitute teacher in a poor inner city school. This was an eye opening experience for her, as she taught in rooms that did not have enough desks, let alone books for the students in her classes. Very few children had thoughts of attending college and their futures had few hopes and aspirations. Many days she would return home after a day of teaching crying in frustration. Moving back to this area she enrolled again at Ferris, this time to earn her teaching credential and the Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction.

At the start of her student teaching experience, her supervising teacher at Chippewa Hills shared an email regarding Heifer International and their program, “Read to Feed.” As a student teacher, she implemented this program with her classes, where students seek pledges from family and friends for each book they read. The money raised was then used to purchase farm animals for indigent people in Latin America or South America. As an example, when students had earned \$150 they could purchase a llama. This gift was then matched by the charity so the family received both a male and a female animal, and the first offspring is given to another indigent family. For motivation, in her classroom she built a seven-foot hunger tree, and the students placed a leaf on the tree for each book they read. Beyond encouraging reading, this project motivated school children to become actively involved in helping others far less fortunate. Graduating on Saturday, she and her husband are moving again, this time to Chicago, where she hopes to work in an inner city school that in her words, “needs me.” Her desire is to become the type of teacher who makes a difference for students, the one who students remember years later. Jill Swett’s determination and commitment to help others exemplifies Ferris’ students desire to make a difference. I would ask Jill Swett to stand. I would encourage Jill’s husband Tyler and her family to stand.

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 Kaiya Hamilton and Jill Swett. Like each of you, their stories represent the commitment to excellence required to not just succeed, but to excel and the hard work, sacrifice, and determination to make a lasting difference for others.