

Ferris State University
December 2006 Commencement
10:00 a.m. Ceremony

by David L. Eisler, President

As graduates you represent the collective hopes and dreams of our institution. Each of us at Ferris State University ~ faculty, staff, administration, and yes fellow students ~ looks to you as the result of our collective efforts. In some ways for me this occasion feels similar to the emotion one sometimes experiences as a parent when someone is leaving home to set out on their own. These are major crossroads that help define life. As a parent, friend, colleague, and yes, as teacher, you look at someone that you've tried to help guide, grow, and evolve and wonder if you've done enough, if there is some last piece of information or advice that you might give that might make a difference. Is there something that you've forgotten to say or do that will help?

My experience in those situations is that one looks into the eyes of that student and discovers that they've changed and that a relationship that has been defined as teacher and student has become one of friend or colleague. As an expression of our University's hopes for you I want to share one final piece of advice, something I've entitled "Dare to Dream."

There was a time when we had not walked on the moon, when man could not fly, and people believed the world was flat. Each of these realities came to change as people dared to dream, to go beyond what was possible and to accomplish what many considered impossible.

I want to encourage you to go beyond the possible, to dream and do great things. Perhaps you are saying to yourself, “How is this possible for me?” Throughout your many years of school you’ve received countless grades and report cards. I’d ask you to consider these four teacher reports –

“...as a seven year school boy this young man is hopeless. His brain is addled and it is useless for him to attend school.” Who was that hopeless 7 year-old boy? – Thomas Edison, inventor of the phonograph, the light bulb, motion pictures, and the holder of 1,093 patents.

“...although he has had only four months of school, he is very good with studies, but is a daydreamer and asks foolish questions.” Who was doing well with studies after 4 months of school, but daydreamed and asked foolish questions? - None other than the 16th President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln

“...is a unique member of the class. He is ten years old and is only just beginning to read and write. He shows signs of improving, but you must not set your sights too high on him.” Who was 10 years old and only just beginning to show signs of improvement? - The 28th President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson and also President of Princeton University.

“...is a very poor student. He is mentally slow, unsociable, and is always daydreaming. He is spoiling it for the rest of the class. It would be best if he were removed from the school at once.” And who should have been removed from class because he was mentally slow, unsociable, and a very poor student? – Albert Einstein, the father of relativity and winner of the 1921 Nobel Prize.

It would stand to reason that each of you has received far better classroom reports than this. How will you ever know what is possible for you if you don't dream great dreams and then aspire to fulfill them. If each of these individuals went on to such great success, what is possible for you?

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 four examples. Like each of you, their stories represent what is possible when "we dare to dream."