

Determined to Make A Difference
Commencement Remarks - December 15, 2007
Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business, and FSU-GR

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, 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.

In 1996 this mother's life was forever changed when her husband was struck by a truck and suffered a serious closed head injury. Changes soon forced her to be the sole provider for three children, aged 7, 9, and 11. As she worked to do so, she realized that her future would be limited without higher education. Determined to do so, she quit her job, moved to Big Rapids, and enrolled in her first class at Ferris State University in January 2000. Within a few weeks she was hired part-time at FSU. These were incredibly challenging financial times for her with three children, classes, and only part-time income. In May 2001 she was hired full-time at the University and has taken two courses each semester.

After years as the secretary for Professional Golf Management, she now is the Administrative Assistant for the Music Industry Management. As she graduates today, her oldest son is also receiving his bachelor's degree in aviation from Western Michigan University. Graduating together with her today are more than 30 Ferris students that she has personally helped through her work at FSU. Perhaps she says it best, "Finally, after seven years, I graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Applied Speech Communication, Summa Cum Laude, achieved by and through the love and support of my family, my friends - old and new - and my fellow classmates and students.

I am honored to present Lori Armstrong to you and would ask she stand. I would also ask that her family also stand.

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 Lori Armstrong and her determination to succeed and to make a difference for her family and for others.

Congratulations and best wishes.

David L. Eisler, President