

Determined to Succeed
College of Allied Health
May 8, 2009 3:00 pm

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, of course, there are the students themselves and their personal commitment, effort and sacrifice, which has brought them here today.

In the successes, 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 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 listened, I gained an even deeper appreciation of the students we have at Ferris State University and the power of the educational experience we provide.

For many of our graduates, there have been significant challenges along the way. Life often makes us reconsider our dreams, determine where our passions lead, and push on against adversity. I'm hopeful you can relate to the experiences of two graduates here today who truly have triumphed in this context.

This first came to Ferris to pursue not just one, but two of her dreams and passions: to become a dental hygienist and play intercollegiate soccer. By her sophomore year she was well on her way to accomplishing both. Then reality stepped in, as she did not handle well the scheduling challenges between soccer and dental hygiene and was told after her first semester in the program that she would need to return or perhaps choose another major.

Determined to pursue her career goals, she walked away from something she had done almost her entire life, soccer. She returned to the Dental Hygiene program the following fall, determined to succeed. However, life was not finished placing obstacles in her path. First she was involved in a very serious automobile accident in which her car ended up beneath a semi truck. Fortunately neither she or her friend were seriously injured. Then she developed life-altering dietary challenges, lost significant weight and had to make major lifestyle changes.

In the pursuit of her education, this student found the meaning of service, the opportunities to put that service to use. Along with her classmates she travelled to Guyana in South America to help those in need. She also worked in Jackson prison as part of her internship.

I was struck by this young woman's spirit. To use her words, "People will tell you that you might not be good enough, but if you want to make it happen, you can." She credits her faith and belief together with the support of her family, friends and classmates. She graduates today with an Associate's Degree in Dental Hygiene and a desire to continue helping people in need.

It is a pleasure to present to you a remarkable young woman, Michelle Young. I would ask that she stand and be recognized. I would ask that her family also stand.

This next associate degree graduate followed a very different path to his degree, growing up in the eastern part of Ethiopia as a member of the Oromo tribe. Leaving Ethiopia, he went first to Kenya. With help from the United Nations, he reached the United States ten years ago. After settling first in St. Louis where he knew no one, he moved to Grand Rapids where he had a friend. These were very difficult years as he struggled to adjust to his new home and worked many different jobs to make ends meet.

Although he had earned a forestry degree in Kenya, all record of this education had been lost. Here in Michigan, it became his dream to attend pharmacy school at Ferris, enrolling first at Grand Rapids Community College. As he prepared for Ferris he welcomed his first child into the world. Today, his family includes three young children and in addition to pursuing his education, he has needed to work to support his family. Instead of abandoning his dreams he adjusted them by switching to a degree program that would lead more immediately to a career.

He enrolled at Ferris the fall of 2007 and has commuted between Grand Rapids and here since then. His many different jobs have included working at a gas station, in real estate, and as part owner of a coffee shop. Today he graduates with his associate degree in nuclear medicine, having just completed an internship at Spectrum Hospital just this week. Although his educational path has been a hard struggle, it does not end here today, as he plans to continue on at Ferris to complete a bachelor's degree, with the ultimate goal of earning a master's degree.

I am honored to present to you a remarkable graduate, Omar Yafsin. I would ask he stand and be recognized. I would also ask that his proud family stand.

Michelle and Omar, you are inspirations to each of us. Many of us take for granted what you have had to work so very, very hard to accomplish.

Graduates, 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 Michelle Young and Omar Yasfin and their indefatigable determination to succeed.

Congratulations and best wishes