

May 4, 2007 Commencement
College of Pharmacy
College of Arts & Sciences
Ferris State University – Grand Rapids
President David L. Eisler
Ferris State University

One Last Lesson: Challenged to Learn

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, look 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 at graduations, weddings, and 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. However I hope you'll forgive me if I the spirit of the academy and as an expression of our university's hopes for you if I try to deliver one piece of advice, something I've entitled "One Last Lesson: Challenged to Learn."

Each of you has overcome significant challenges as you worked toward this day of achievement. Over the next few moments I'd like you to consider them while I share with you the college experience of two of your fellow graduates who I met recently.

This young man planned to attend dental school and was well on his way to meeting that goal until one day when he suffered a tragic accident on a low trampoline. With the resulting spinal cord injury he now uses a wheelchair for mobility and was left with limited strength in his arms and hands. Building on the support of his friends and parents, he learned the same prerequisites that prepared for a dental career also applied to a career as a pharmacist.

As a pharmacist he has developed a strong interest of the clinical aspects in a hospital setting. As a member of a patient care team he finds fulfillment and meaning helping to meet patient needs through the combined efforts of medical experts. Upon graduation he begins work in an applied residency program at Munson Hospital in Traverse City. This courageous person credits his success to classmates and the faculty in

the college of pharmacy who helped him overcome potential obstacles and today graduate with his pharmacy degree. He represents the difference that support from faculty, staff, friends, and the University can make in helping a person overcome disabilities placed in their path. I am honored to present to you, Ryan Williams. I would ask that his parents and family stand and be recognized.

This next graduate was employed as a dental technician until she was totally disabled due to back injuries. She is a survivor of domestic violence that placed two bullets in her head. With three teenage children and a long commute to Big Rapids, she returned to school believing, "I can succeed." As a social work student just a little over one year from graduation, life placed one additional challenge in her path. She contracted a virus in her brain that left her unable to travel, attend classes, or do a traditional internship. At this point the social work faculty reached out to her putting their faith and trust in her. Using the Internet from her home, she became a strong advocate for violence against women, conducting her internship in this way. She has now recovered from the virus and has become a spokesperson for domestic violence, testifying in Michigan and at a Congressional breakfast in Washington, DC. Graduating summa cum laud, she next plans to attend graduate school at Michigan State and to continue her advocacy for domestic violence issues. As she reaches this milestone she credits the strong support of her children Leah, Gino, and Briana and her husband, George.

I am pleased to present you Kelly Grandchamp and would ask that she stand. I would ask that her family also stand and be recognized.

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 Ryan Williams and Kelly Grandchamp and their determination to succeed as students here at Ferris State University.

Congratulations and best wishes.