

Passion for Excellence
College of Arts and Sciences, Pharmacy, and College of Professional and Technical
Studies Commencement
May 8, 2009 - 7:00 pm

David L. Eisler, President

As graduates you represent the hopes and dreams of our institution. Each of us at Ferris State University, faculty, staff, administration, and yes, fellow students, see in your personal and intellectual growth the fruit of our collective efforts.

As members of the Ferris community, we never know when our efforts will shape a life, inspire a person, or help them find the path to a better future. While there are many, many wonderful examples among our graduates which have resulted from that guidance, allow me to share just one such story with you.

This young lady grew up as one of four sisters on a small family farm in Brown City, near Port Huron. School has always come easy for her. As early as the third grade she was assisting her teacher, and in the eighth grade, acting on advice she frequently heard, decided she wanted to become a teacher.

A first-generation college student, she enrolled here at Ferris as a mathematics major with the goal of fulfilling her dream. Her first semester here she was inspired by a class she took from David Pilgrim who is now the university's Chief Diversity Officer. In her own words, she said, "He had this energy about him, everything we did was interesting." Reflecting on her education she recalled how her favorite teachers had always been in the social sciences. She remembered how as a child she used to go with her uncle to the Eastern Market in Detroit to sell vegetables, and how he helped her appreciate the many cultures they encountered.

Drawing upon that experience, her favorite course here at Ferris was with Professor Tony Baker, who took students to various cities to compare different urban settings. In the process, she fell in love with Chicago. This led to an internship there with the Southwest Youth Collaborative, located in an economically depressed portion of Chicago. On her first day there a block party for rights for illegal aliens was the target of a drive-by shooting.

Through her internship she worked with 14-19 year-old youth - young people who had never been to downtown Chicago, because of gang boundaries that would have

to be crossed, young people who had never had a white friend their age, who did not understand that poverty crosses racial bounds.

The efforts of an extraordinary faculty and a life-changing internship fueled her interest in urban settings. An honors student at Ferris she applied to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Without a campus visit or interview, she has been accepted into the PhD program in sociology with a full-tuition scholarship and teaching assistantship. This outstanding young lady from a small farm in Michigan, has found her academic passion in the big city, and plans to become a university professor. I have every expectation she will not only succeed, but excel in this quest.

I am honored to present Autumn McClellan and would ask that she stand. I would also ask that her parents and family stand.

Whatever your field may be, I urge you to develop a passion for excellence. I say “excellence” rather than “perfection,” because life is rarely, if ever, perfect, although it *can* be astonishing and extraordinary.

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. So I would urge you pause for a moment and savor the positive and sustaining emotions of this day. I congratulate not only Autumn McClellan and her passion for excellence, but each of you as you begin the task of improving your own lives, and the lives of all those whom you touch.