For every student who crosses our stage today there is a story, a story of personal commitment, effort and sacrifice, which 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.

As we look back over this past academic year, it has been one of the most challenging any of us have ever experienced. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone, and it has impacted many facets of our everyday lives. From social distancing and remote learning to managing the uncertainties that accompany COVID-19, our students have persevered and triumphed. You, our graduates, have learned important lessons on the power of adaptability and resilience. Please know how very proud we are of you and what you have accomplished.

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. One of the core values of our university is Excellence, and this graduate exemplifies this value.

This young woman began gymnastics at the age of two and continued through elementary school. When gymnastics became something she dreaded, her parents suggested she try some other sports. In 5th grade she tried out for the basketball team but did not make the team. Continuing to practice she made the team the following year and also began playing softball. In 7th grade she was encouraged by her basketball coach to try out for volleyball. The next year her team won the volleyball state championship. She continued with volleyball and basketball at Lincoln-Way North High School and joined a club volleyball team, continuing to hone her skills on the court.

Her sophomore year she began emailing colleges during their recruitment period, including Ferris State University, and in her junior year she made the decision to focus on volleyball. At a tournament her senior year of high school, she caught the attention of Krista Cooper, at that time the Ferris assistant volleyball coach. While she visited a number of schools, once she visited Ferris, she knew this was the place she could call home.

She arrived at Ferris in 2016, but had not declared a major. She took CARE 102, our career exploration class and chose to pursue Music Industry Management. While the classes were enjoyable, she was uncertain this was her future. After careful reflection, and speaking with family members and friends who were teachers, she switched to elementary education. In doing this she knew that her business courses would not count toward her new major and that it would require additional semesters to graduate.

Juggling classes and collegiate athletics was not easy, but she excelled in both. At Ferris she did not know if or how much she would play, but started all 36 matches her freshman year and was named an All American. While the pressures increased each year, she set an extraordinary standard of excellence – she was selected three years for the Dean Davenport
Bulldog of the Year as the best female athlete at our University and three-time GLIAC player of the year as the best player in our conference. She finished her career as the only four-time All American in the history of our program, and was chosen to participate in the USA Division II volleyball tour of Brazil. Hers were not just individual accomplishments but led to unprecedented championship success. Our team won both the regular season and postseason tournament all four years, went to the NCAA postseason each year, and only lost seven conference games in four years.

When her volleyball career finished in 2020 she had time to focus on her remaining year at Ferris. She completed all of her coursework and student teaching during the pandemic, including her last student teaching assignment at Ballard Elementary School. After graduation, she looks forward to substitute teaching in Maine this spring.

This graduate will tell you that while she didn’t have much time for herself or extracurricular activities, managing her classes and athletic schedule helped her develop time management skills and a strong work ethic. The supportive culture she experienced at Ferris helped her grow and thrive. She is eager to have her own classroom and share her love for the sport that has taught her so much.

For helping support her during her time at Ferris, she would like to thank her parents, Eric and Deb, her sister, Kelsey, her grandparents, Deb Warwick in the School of Education, and her coach, Tia Brandel-Wilhelm.

It is a pleasure to present to you Allyson Cappel, and I would ask that she stand and be recognized. Would her family also rise?

Graduates, on behalf of our University I wish you great success and fulfillment. As each of you sets out on the next step of your life and career, I hope you will remember Allyson’s inspirational example of the success you can achieve when you truly commit yourself to excellence.

Congratulations and best wishes, Class of 2021!