Each one of you here today has a story to tell. Family and friends, teachers and mentors all have played an important role in your success. As we look back over this past academic year, it has truly 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.

There is much to be learned from your dedication, which has led to this celebration today. I wish I could share the story of every graduate here today as each is special in its own unique way. As an example, I want to highlight the story of one special graduate. His journey personifies the individual fortitude it takes to overcome adversity, as well as the supportive role others often play in this success.

This young man is a graduate of St. Louis High School. He began his studies at Delta Community College and in Fall 2018 transferred to Ferris State University. Knowing he wanted a career working outdoors, he focused his sights on our Surveying Engineering program. After class one evening in February 2020, he went to a ranch south of Grand Rapids to practice bull riding. This was one of his hobbies, along with riding dirt bikes. He was not a stranger to bull riding, and had practiced on many occasions without incident. This time, however, was very different. Upon his dismount from the bull, he fell to the ground, and before he could get up, the bull landed on his chest with both hind legs. Severely injured, he needed emergency surgery to stop internal bleeding and ended up spending two weeks in the hospital with five broken ribs, a lacerated liver and a partially collapsed lung.

Once he was back home, he worked very hard to continue his studies. This was especially difficult, as he would tire easily. As he continued to heal and with the help of his professors he was able to catch up in his coursework. Just as he returned to school, the pandemic hit a month later, and he, along with his peers, was learning remotely for the rest of the semester. Through his horrifying accident and remote learning, he never gave up. This whole experience has given him new insight on how to live each day – with a thankful heart, not taking anything for granted.

He says his professors, and the students he studied with, gave him the motivation to keep going. While he was in the hospital, cards came in the mail from the Surveying Engineering faculty and students, and tutoring was arranged to help him get back on track. This tight-knit, supportive community helped him get to where he is today.

During his time at Ferris he has completed three internships – one at a larger company in Novi, another at a smaller, employee-owned company in Grand Rapids, and the third for the Bureau of Land Management in Alaska. He chose these companies purposefully, to know what
work he would want to do in the future. With his drive and determination several job opportunities are waiting for him.

Today he would like to thank his family for their love and support, and the Surveying Engineering faculty, staff and students graduating with him today for always being there for him.

His words of advice have served him well. He said, "There are always going to be struggles to get to where you want to be. It’s hard. But you can make something good come out of the challenges you face in life."

It is an honor to introduce to you Lane Sherwood. Lane, would you please stand? Will your family also stand?

Graduates, on behalf of our University I wish you great success and fulfillment as you begin the next stage of your journey. In addition to times of success and advancement, you will inevitably face times of challenge and adversity. I would encourage you to remember Lane’s story, and how with an indefatigable determination to succeed, even life’s most challenging times can be overcome and dreams realized.

Congratulations and best wishes, Class of 2021.