One Last Lesson: Inspirations for Learning

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 in 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: Inspirations for Learning.”

Today we are pleased to recognize students from Red River Community College in Winnipeg and Assiniboine Community College in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada. They have endured a 20-hour bus ride to receive their degrees, the result of an innovative partnership between our institutions. These are the first graduates from this program and we salute them on this happy occasion. I would ask that these graduates stand and be recognized.

We are also pleased to recognize the first graduates from our Bachelor of Arts programs in English, History and Communications. I would ask that they stand so we can recognize them.

Among our graduates is a couple that represent for many the challenges and opportunities of the Ferris experience. Married with a 2 ½ year old son, each knows the hardship of losing a parent. Lacy lost her mother when she was two and Jeremy his father at 5. Although both began in different areas, they are graduating today in television production, a demanding and time intensive major. Throughout their experience here they have managed school, work, and parenting duties. I expect their son Collin may someday be a television personality with the time he has spent at the studio and as a star of their production projects. It is a pleasure to present Lacy and Jeremy Slone. I would ask they stand and be recognized.
For this arts and science graduate her educational saga truly demonstrates an extraordinary commitment to lifelong learning. Her career has included positions as a police officer in Flint, an elementary school counselor, a social worker and an assistant director of social services. Determined to earn her degree, studies were delayed by career responsibilities and on her retirement by the need to provide care and support for a series of family members and relatives with terminal medical conditions. This is a woman who began her studies in 1956, and who first attended Ferris in 1965. Throughout she was determined to achieve her lifelong dream, to earn her college degree. Starting back to school in 2001, today, 83 years young, she completes her bachelor of social work degree. I am honored and humbled to present to you Audrey Ditmas, class of 2004, and would ask that she stand and be recognized. I would also express my thanks to the faculty who helped this occur.

On behalf of our university I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. As each of you sets out on the next step of 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 these wonderful examples of Lacy and Jeremy Slone, and Audrey Ditmas. Like each of you, their stories represent hard work, sacrifice, and determination.

Congratulations and best wishes