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.”

Each of you has overcome significant challenges as you have worked toward this day of achievement. Over the next few moments I’d like you to think about those challenges as I share with you the college experience of some of your fellow graduates. I’ll begin with the members of this graduating Pharmacy class, the first all Pharm D. group in Ferris’ history. You were the pioneers for our new curriculum and helped prove that a distributed pharmacy program can prepare extraordinary graduates.

Within your class there is a person whose family has an extraordinary history and relationship with pharmacy at Ferris. The story begins with his great grandfather, Harper, a Ferris pharmacy grad, who started their family pharmacy in Charlotte, Michigan in 1948. It continues with his grandparents, George and Esther, both Ferris pharmacy grads. The story continues with his father Jeff and Uncle Ken, also Ferris pharmacy grads. And now the fourth generation of Ferris pharmacist is prepared to receive his degree today, Joe Wildern. Joe, I’d like you and your incredible family to stand so we can recognize you.
In Allied Health I have visited with a remarkable woman, a mother and grandmother of six children. At age 44 degenerative arthritis led to a knee replacement and a needed change in careers. She began work on a coding and billing certificate, but quickly transitioned into Medical Records Technology, in which she will earn an associates degree today. She has become an active recruiter for our program, encouraging colleagues and friends to enroll. Today she has an exciting career at St. Mary’s Hospital where she works with diabetes reporting and abstracting, and this associate degree is just a midpoint on her plan to a bachelor’s degree. Later this spring she will receive the Yvonne Harbert Award from the Michigan Health Information Management Association as the outstanding graduate in the state. It is a pleasure to present to you Joan Koets.

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 the wonderful tradition of Wilderns and the inspiration story of Joan Koets. Like each of you, their stories represent hard work, sacrifice, and determination.

Congratulations and best wishes