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 MBA class, the first in Ferris’ history. You were the pioneers for our new curriculum and demonstrate the quality and diversity of the Ferris experience. I would ask that you stand and be recognized.

Within this MBA class is a person whose accomplishments truly demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning and excellence. He is a Vietnam veteran, a father and a husband. A recipient of the College of Business Student Excellence Award, he graduates with not one, but two masters degrees, and he has done this by maintaining a perfect 4.0 grade point average. This extraordinary student is Frank Armstrong and I’d like you and your family to stand so we can recognize you.
The College of Business has a strong interest in international education and a wonderful component of international students. The next student is a person whose visa request was denied five times. As a result instead of beginning in Fall 2000, it was January 2001 before he could begin study at Ferris. This is a young man that has not just adapted to his new home, but who has flourished here. It seems on some occasions that he is involved in everything, including International Student activities, the Gold Club, a column for the Torch, and continual promotion of Ferris State University. He graduates today with two degrees in Public Relations and Psychology. It is a pleasure to present to you Mircea Cotosman. I would ask that he rise together with his parents who are here from Romania and his American sponsors, Dave and Ann Dayton.

One final inspiration embodies the spirit of lifelong learning. He began work on a business degree in 1947, fresh from high school and as a member of the Ferris Institute football team. Among his instructors was business English teacher Karl G. Merrill who became Ferris’ 9th president. Raised as a dairy farmer, a variety of circumstances and potential career changes interrupted this education. Today 57 years after he began, we are proud to recognize John Emmons as he receives his associate degree in managerial accounting.

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 excellence, persistence and diversity. Like each of you, their stories represent hard work, sacrifice, and determination.

Congratulations and best wishes