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 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?

In those situations one looks into the eyes of the student and discovers that they've changed. A relationship that has been defined as teacher and student has become one of friend and colleague. However I hope you'll forgive me if in the spirit of the academy and as expression of our University's hopes for you, if I try to deliver one piece of advice, something I've entitled "One Last Lesson: Life's Simple Truth. And if you wondered, in the best academic tradition, yes there is a colon in that title.

I'm hopeful you've learned how to learn. In that context you understand how today is truly a beginning and not an ending. There is so much more for you to learn and we've helped you develop the skills and ability to do so.

An educated life is about learning and learning doesn't just happen in books or in classrooms. It happens in our interactions with others and in places we might never imagine. One never knows when there will be a teachable moment, but if we are observant, listen carefully, and are thoughtful, these occasions abound.

I'd like to share with you an experience this week that reminded me of something very important. It happened this Wednesday at the Reed City Rotary Club, in the backroom of the Osceola Inn, where they meet. As frequently occurs, I'd been invited to deliver the luncheon remarks for this service club.

I had not met before my host for this event, a retired farmer who greeted me with a handshake and a smile, relieved that his program had arrived. I learned his father had attended Ferris Institute, and that Woodbridge Ferris had made quite an impact on his dad. Seventy-five years later this man's daughter had also graduated from Ferris State College.
His introduction for was very complimentary and I was confidently prepared for the folksy remarks I had planned to deliver. However I was totally unprepared for what happened next. He reached in his pocket and handed me an envelope with his check for $1,000 to help students at Ferris State University. I was literally speechless and did not know what to say. This is a moment I will never forget.

Here for me was a life lesson, delivered in the most unexpected setting, but taught to me by someone who had discovered life's simple truth.

It is not what you get in life; it is what you give.

On behalf of our University, I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. Consider this simple lesson taught to me this past week. I truly believe that you will find more meaning in a life and career that is dedicated to giving rather than getting.

Congratulations and best wishes to the Class of 2003.