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 I 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: A Passion for Excellence.”

Whatever your field may be, I urge to develop a passion for excellence. I truly want you to be the best, not in terms of competing against others, but rather from measurement against yourself and your potentials. I select the word excellence rather than perfection, because life is rarely, if ever, perfect and part of success is getting things done. You have been given a wonderful brain and we have done our best to help you use it. Become an effective thinker. Practice something I call “breakthrough thinking,” that’s where you combine intellect, creativity, and analysis to develop new approaches to persistent problems.

In your life you will seek success, but must learn to embrace failure. Indeed, it will be one of life’s lessons that you can learn much from failure. Along your path there will be opportunities for shortcuts. While this may seem to work for others, I believe there are few silver bullets in life, magical cures for challenges. A passion for excellence will help you develop the character to sustain your life’s loftiest ambitions, and attributes like hard work, commitment, deliberation and self sacrifice are all a part of striving to be the best.
On behalf of our University I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. Pause for just this brief second and bottle all the emotions of this moment. As each of you sets out on the next step on 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 today’s spirit of achievement and to draw upon that passion for excellence.

Congratulations and best wishes.