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: Educated to Serve.”

On this commencement day I am curious about you, our graduates. How many during your college years have participated in some form of volunteer service, service learning, worked in
your community, or contributed to a charity. If you have done so please raise your hand, better yet, please stand. Congratulations and thank you. You may be seated.

Just like you have recently completed final exams, what I’ve just conducted is in many ways a final exam for our University to see how well we have done in helping to prepare you for life. It is my hope that what you have experienced here has helped develop and foster habits of community involvement, volunteerism, and service, and in doing so, established a pattern for a meaningful life.

Ultimately life is about more than personal success and achievement. Look beyond yourself to see how you can make a difference for others, those in your family and community and those less fortunate. Make your community a better place to live.

Pause for just this brief second and bottle all the emotions of this moment. 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 today’s spirit of achievement and remind you that the spirit of true success is often found in helping others.

On behalf of our University I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. Congratulations and best wishes.