For every student who crosses our stage today there is a story, a story that includes people who supported and encouraged them, teachers on all levels that have educated, challenged, and prepared them, and personal commitment, effort, and sacrifice that has helped transform them. In the success, triumphs, and achievements of these graduates we see our hopes and dreams for the future, a future that is bright and promising and filled with opportunities that are yet to be discovered.

Over the past few weeks I have taken time to visit with our graduates, learning about their experiences and hearing their stories. As I have listened, I have developed an even deeper appreciation of the students we have at Ferris State University and their determination to overcome all odds to earn their degree.

For many of us here today the pathway to a college degree was direct and straightforward. For others there have been significant challenges along the way. I’m hopeful you can appreciate this story of a graduate who truly has triumphed in this context.

When this student was a freshman at Ionia High School her mother was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Although first diagnosed as benign, it became cancerous, and her mother passed away. Her mother’s advice to her during the period of her illness, “Make sure you go to college.” Her father remarried and moved to Barryton, beginning a very difficult time for her, when she frequently stayed with friends to avoid being at home. She went downhill quickly from being a straight A student. Life went from bad to worse when her father passed away tragically and she was left with no permanent place to live, staying with friends.

After some time trying to find herself this student started at Ferris literally because she needed a place to live. She found financial aid and worked continuously 40 hrs. a week as a server and babysitting. It has been a struggle to support herself in college. She was determined to prove that she could do it, that she could fix the mistakes, and make something of her life. She was always drawn to criminal justice and graduates today with her bachelor degree. Coming full circle to her summer internship in Ionia at the courthouse there.

However this student found more than an education at Ferris, she found a friend, Susan McNamara, her FSUS instructor, our freshman seminar. I want to read from the note Susan recently received –
I would like to let you know how much of an inspiration you have been to me throughout my years here at Ferris. Although we do not speak often, you have been a source of support for me since my very first day in your FSUS class. You have always had a kind word and a genuine care in my success as a student and a woman.

Throughout all of my interactions with professors here at Ferris, none have left such a positive mark on my life as you. I still read the reference letter you wrote for me whenever I am doubting myself or having a rough day.

I will be graduating in one week and I would just like to say thank-you for having such an impact on my life.

In this graduate’s words, “People can change. It just takes one person to make that difference.” I am honored to present to a remarkable person, Tiffany Yost.

Tiffany, you are an inspiration to each of us. Many of us take for granted what you have had to work so very, very hard to accomplish. The importance you have placed on education reminds each of us of its transformative power.

Graduates, on behalf of our university I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. 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 the example of Tiffany Yost and her indefatigable determination to overcome all odds.

Congratulations and best wishes, Class of 2010.

David L. Eisler
President