“Success and Opportunity”
College of Business
May 7, 2011 - 12:30 p.m.

For every student who crosses our stage today there is a story, a story that includes parents, family and friends who supported them, teachers on all levels who 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 the power of the educational experience we provide here.

These are more than outstanding students crossing our stage today. These are extraordinary people, individuals that I would be proud to have as a son or daughter, brother or sister, father or mother. I want you to know how impressed I am with these graduates. Perhaps the easiest way to illustrate this is to share two of their stories with you.

This graduate grew up in Buchanan and is the first member of his family to graduate from college. He visited Ferris to try out for the football team, toured campus, and was impressed by the small classes, deciding this was where he wanted to be.

Beginning as an undecided student, he became a Marketing major and was selected for a Ferris Foundation Scholarship. He remembers speaking of this as a sophomore at the Foundation Gala in the Amway Grand in front of more than 500 people.

He joined the Sigma Pi Fraternity, which was a big life-changer for him, opening his eyes to leadership opportunities. He has been the president of the American Marketing Association, helping our chapter achieve recognition as one of the top 20 out of more than 300 nationwide. Last semester he was selected as the Homecoming King.

As a person always involved with sports he looked for opportunities to work in this field. His advisor and AMA sponsor, Professor Laura Dix, talked with him about the Sports Marketing concentration, something that melded with his desire to work with basketball.

At Ferris he has had three internships in the Athletic department. He began two years ago with in-game activities in basketball, using social media to help increase student attendance at our games by 80 percent. Next, as a sales intern, he sold sports sponsorships. This past year he has again
worked with basketball, expanding his efforts and helping teach another intern his approaches. In addition to Laura Dix, among others he thanks faculty member Nate Tymes for his assistance.

Earlier this semester he attended a job fair with the Detroit Pistons, looking to use his degree in his area of greatest interest. There were hundreds of applicants there and very few job prospects. He was fortunate to get a call back from the Indiana Pacers. Having met and visited with this young man I understand why he begins his new position with the Pacers on May 31st.

It is a pleasure to introduce to you a remarkable and talented young man, Eric Coles. I would ask that he stand and be recognized. I would also ask that his family also stand and be recognized.

For this second graduate, life turned upside at age eleven when her father lost his job and their family moved to Harrison, living in the most abject poverty. She made it her personal challenge to apply herself in school, to excel and to get good grades. This she accomplished, finishing second in her high school class, missing valedictorian by 1/10,000th of a point. Her college decision came down to Ferris State University and the University of Michigan. She chose Ferris because of the small classes and special attention one receives here.

As a student without a car, she has supported herself throughout college by working two and three jobs on campus, as a note taker for students with disabilities, at the desk in her residence hall, and as the arts and entertainment editor of our student newspaper, the Torch. She has taken full advantage of many activities at Ferris, as an honors peer mentor, co-founding the FSU military support group, Phi Alpha Delta, and Up to Dawn for the St. Jude Children’s Hospital. She offers special thanks to Dave Steenstra, Maude Bigford, and many other faculty for their help and assistance. She describes Ferris faculty as interested in her as a person and her future, and values very much the connections she has made with her professors.

In her life she has overcome significant hardship and adversity. She describes her success as taking the good and moving past the bad, looking to make the best of every situation. At Ferris her majors have included Public Relations and Political Science. Today she graduates with her degree in Business Administration and does so with a perfect 4.0 average. She also is graduating with her bachelor’s degree in just three years.

I am honored to introduce to you a remarkable young woman, Brandy Vandenbrook. I would ask that she stand and be recognized. I would ask that her family also stand and also be recognized.

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 wonderful examples of Eric Coles and Brandy Vandenbrook, their considerable determination to use education to help them to succeed and a future filled with opportunity.

Congratulations and best wishes, class of 2011.

David L. Eisler
President