For every student who crosses our stage today there is a story, a story that includes parents, family and friends that supported them, teachers on all levels that have educated, challenged, and prepared them. And, of course, there are the students themselves and their personal commitment, effort and sacrifice, which has brought them here today. In the successes, 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 listened, I gained an even deeper appreciation of the students we have at Ferris State University and the power of the educational experience we provide.

For many of our graduates, there have been significant challenges along the way. Life often makes us reconsider our dreams, determine where our passions lead, and push on against adversity. I’m hopeful you can relate to the experiences of one of our graduates here today who has truly triumphed in this context.

This graduate’s parents divorced when she was an infant and she grew up in a home with very little money, one of seven children. Her grandmother was a RN for the state, and she decided to follow this career, helping others. She worked as a waitress and then an aerobics instructor at a gym to pay for her education, studying first medical assisting and working at Med Express, and then earning her RN in 2006 when she began working at St. Mary’s Intensive Care in Bay City.

Throughout she knew that her passion was with adolescents and young adults, to help them avoid alcohol and drugs. Securing a job with the state in public health, she was told that despite her experience, a bachelor’s degree was necessary. She began working on this two years ago with the Ferris program in Midland. She’s learned to keep moving forward, especially when you feel alone.

For her the faculty have been amazing, especially nursing faculty member Susan Fogarty. Through this she has learned to share her experience with poverty and believes it is really important to be an example of success to others, especially young, impressionable people. In her words, find your place and then go with this. In her future she wants to teach, as the nursing faculty have taught her. She sees how the faculty connect with students and she wants to do the same.
This extraordinary young woman looks back at the influence of her grandmothers, Peg who was the RN that was her inspiration and taught her success, her grandma Nellie, a homemaker, who taught faith in God and her Aunt Jane, who always believed in her, and saw her potential.

She is a powerful example of a person who has dealt with poverty firsthand, pursued education to better herself and to create a great future, and a person who having achieved some of her dreams, now sets more. Beyond that she is an example of how Ferris reaches out to provide the opportunity of education to people wherever they are. Today is literally the first time this young lady has set foot in Big Rapids, taking all of her BSN courses in Midland.

I am honored to present to you Lisa Blackmer and would ask that she stand and be recognized. I would ask that her father, her fiancé Wes, her family members and friends stand and be recognized.

Lisa, you are inspiration to each of us. Many of us take for granted what you have had to work so very, very hard to accomplish.

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 extraordinary example of Lisa Blackmer and her indefatigable determination to succeed.

Congratulations and best wishes, Class of 2010.