As graduates, you represent the hopes and dreams of our institution. Each of us at Ferris State University, faculty, staff, administration and yes, fellow students, see in your personal and intellectual growth the fruit of our collective efforts.

As members of the Ferris community, we never know when our efforts will shape a life, inspire a person, or help them find the path to a better future. While there are many, many wonderful examples among our graduates which have resulted from that guidance, allow me to share just two such stories with you.

As a very young child this graduate played school, giving assignments and organizing projects. It was a surprise when she had significant challenges in learning to read in early elementary school. Despite special instruction she continued to struggle. In the 4th grade she moved to a charter school, where she received special help for her dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity and disorder.

A very special 5th grade teacher, Karen Chapmin, would keep her in from recess for extra studies, and she began work with a special tutor, Karen Rannesbarger. As a student who was naturally gifted at mathematics, the turning point in her learning studies was when she struggled with long division. In decoding this she learned how to solve many of the puzzles that language and words created for her brain.

When she returned to the Zeeland schools for high school after this charter school experience, she saw that she could excel as a student. Upon graduation she attended Northern Michigan University for two years, but wanted to transfer into an engineering program.

Looking for a University where she would be more than a number, would be a name and face, she chose Ferris because faculty member Chuck Drake was willing to speak with her on the telephone for nearly two hours. Here at Ferris she has worked as a resident assistant and a facilitator, and she has put her understanding of overcoming learning obstacles to good work as a mathematics tutor.

This past summer as an intern at the General Motors Milford Proving Grounds, she was asked to present to the management there. They were so impressed that upon graduation she will begin her employment at the Milford Proving Grounds in the Vehicle Safety and Crashworthiness Lab.

Today she graduates with her degree in Mechanical Engineering Technology, a wonderful example of how kind, committed teachers can help determined students succeed even in the context of
special challenges. It is a pleasure to introduce to youDevonne Descloux and I would ask that she stand. I would also ask that her family stand and be recognized.

This second graduate grew up as an adopted child in a family of eight. She began her studies at Jackson Community College, but transferred to Ferris State University for the Printing Technology program, a specialized degree not offered there. She was able to attend Ferris because of the Tuition Incentive Program, or TIP, which helps students from low-income families attend college. It is a wonderful extension of our founder Woodbridge Ferris’ vision of this school as a place of opportunity. Through this students break the bonds of poverty as graduate bound for successful careers and productive lives.

A year ago, then Governor Granholm recommended that support for the TIP program be reduced or eliminated for university students. In seeking to oppose these cuts I looked for a special Ferris student who could testify with me before the legislature. This young lady proved to be the perfect advocate, testifying before the House, the Senate and then a joint legislative Education committee.

In Lansing it is possible to dismiss the testimony of a president seeking support for his university, but this is not easily done with a committed, passionate young person talking about how this support opened up a future for her. With each group I watched the electric effect she had on the legislators, as they looked up from their papers or other distractions and gave her their full attention. Against very difficult odds, not only was support for the program saved, but it was increased, a direct result of her efforts before the committees. Next year more than nine hundred students at Ferris will benefit from the TIP support she helped save.

At Ferris this young lady is an active member of the Student Alumni Gold Club, gives campus tours as a Student Ambassador, and has financed her education by working multiple jobs, including work on the University web pages. This summer she begins her internship in Detroit, having turned down several opportunities in New York to work here in Michigan.

Today she graduates with her associate degree in Printing and Digital Graphic Imaging Technology, a midpoint on her way to a bachelor’s degree in New Media. It is an honor to introduce to you a remarkable woman and someone I admire, Melissa diVietri. I would ask that she stand and be recognized. I would also ask that her family stand and be recognized.

Graduates, as you approach the stage today I would encourage you to reflect back on the education you have received, and the many, many people who have reached out to help you. On behalf of our university I wish you great success, meaning and fulfillment. 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 this wonderful example of Devonne Descloux and Melissa diVietri and their determination to excel and help others.

Congratulations and best wishes class of 2011.

David L. Eisler
President