Thank you so much for those incredibly kind words and this wonderful honor. My sister, who is in med school, and I have a bit of the traditional sibling rivalry so it has been great fun to remind her that I have actually won the race for “Doctor,” and I didn’t even have to deal with any organic chemistry or cadavers.

Today is an exciting day. It is wonderful to see so many friends and family here in support. Thank you for all you have done to support and encourage these graduates in their journey to this day.

Even though I just turned 30, when a changing first-digit in your age officially enters the horrifying stage, I feel self-conscious in addressing graduates, because I wasn’t there that long ago. And that is a line that I’ll probably try to stick to until I’m in my 50’s at least. But I sort of have no choice, because the truth is that I need you, that we need you. We need you to start things.

Over the past few years I’ve had the privilege of working with great folks in building projects like ArtPrize and Start Garden that at their essence are frameworks encouraging people to start things. And the best bit about it is constantly being surprised by the creativity and unique visions of the diverse individuals that partner with us. It’s from these unique visions, thousands of them, that amazing things happen over time.

You can see this dynamic very clearly in the history of the State of Michigan. In the earliest days of the 20th century, south-east Michigan was a hotbed of mobility innovation with 1000’s of individuals mucking around with various parts of what eventually became the automobile. And the best part, and the reason you knew it was going somewhere, is that most respectable people seem to have considered these tinkerers goofballs.

A captain of Michigan industry at the time is claimed to have said, “The horse is here to stay, but the automobile is a novelty - a fad” in an effort to convince Henry Ford’s lawyer to avoid investing in Ford’s new automobile company. Obviously we know that he was wrong, and over time the chaos of thousands of experiments evolved into the dominant Big Three that we know today.

This is why we need you to start things. I realize it is somewhat counter-cultural. The success that came out of that chaos over a hundred years ago built incredible prosperity, but also a culture where our mindset shifted subtly from “what can I do” or “what can I start” to “where can I work.”

But I think it’s time we start to embrace the chaos again, even though it’s ambiguous and uncomfortable sometimes when you’re trying something new.
I just started a new project and continue to swing wildly back and forth in my internal dialogue from "this is awesome" to "this is terrifying." And failure is an inevitable part of this process as you try and experiment because there truly are no sure-fire things. As long as we set up attempts and experiments so we can survive everything blowing up, every experience becomes an opportunity to learn.

The things we try will look wildly different. They could be special projects and prototypes for an employer because you see an opportunity to serve customers better, or a new model of a school, or starting a whole business or joining a team that is starting a business. You all have amazing resources to turn to. Everything you have learned over your years here at Ferris, the relationships you have built with faculty and your fellow students, and the relationships you have with friends and family that are so evident today as they come here to show their support.

So that is the simple thought I have for you as you celebrate today and the entrance into another stage of life and learning. All of you have amazing abilities and ideas. What can each of us start, and how can we help each other along the way, because it is through the small starts and individual visions that big, world-changing things evolve.

Again, congratulations to all of you on this accomplishment, and thank you so much to the Ferris State University Board of Trustees for this great honor. I'm going to keep starting things and I am excited to see the amazing things that will get started and supported by this group. Thank you.