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. These are both examples of students who have been willing to venture into the unknown and take risks, finding in this exploration not failure, but success.

One of the core values of our university is Excellence, and this graduate exemplifies this value, having been on the Dean’s List at Ferris ever since arriving here from her home town of Cadillac in 2011.

She chose to attend Ferris, in part, because it was close to home. Her sister attended Ferris and the parents of her best friend worked here, so she was familiar with campus. Graduating today with a bachelor’s degree in architecture, she chose this area of study, despite it being a male-dominated field, because she says that it allows her to combine her creative and analytical sides. She used that same combination of creativity and analysis in applying for scholarships. In addition to receiving the university’s Honors Residential Life Scholarship and President’s Scholarship, this graduate researched other scholarships and applied for all which she thought she might be eligible. As a result, she was awarded five other competitive scholarships, including one from the American Institute of Architects.

Her willingness to take risks and face rejection led her to apply for, and receive, a scholarship from the William Jefferson Clinton Foundation to study at the American University in Dubai. It was a long way from her comfort zone, when her first airplane trip was to a country 7,000 miles away.

This graduate worked up to 26 hours per week and took as many as 17 credit hours. Her work experience as a student assistant in the Architecture and Facility Management department, as a project management intern in Ferris’ Physical Plant, and an assistant to the university’s resident artist all contributed to her skills with design software and hardware, project management and construction site evaluation. She also served as Secretary and Treasurer of the student group Women in Technology.

Thanks to her hard work and focus, she graduates today with just $2,000 in student loans. She has deferred her entry to the University of Wisconsin Master’s in Architecture program to spend a year getting further experience in the field, and also research what she needs to do to be successful in graduate school – just as she did for her undergraduate degree.

For their support and guidance, this graduate wants to thank her parents, Kerry and Monica Martin, her sister and roommate Nicole Martin, her Architecture professors Diane Nagelkirk, Chris Cosper and Mary Brayton, faculty member Robert Barnum, and her “architectural family” of 16 – the graduating Architecture class of 2015 without whom she says she never would have made it through the last four years.
Let me add that this graduate herself deserves much of the credit for her success – to her hard work, to her combination of creativity and analysis that helped her discover opportunities. Then, she had the initiative and perseverance to make the most of the resources available to her.

It is my great pleasure to present to you Erin Martin and would ask that she stand and be recognized. Would her family also stand?

Our second graduate moved from the Bahamas to West Palm Beach, Florida, after graduating from high school at age 16. He attended community college in West Palm Beach, earning a two-year degree in Heating, Ventilation and Air-Conditioning.

Receiving his associate degree during the worst months of the recession, he struggled to find a job, facing the frustration that he could not get a suitable job, since those positions required experience, experience he would not get until he found employment. Finally he wrote a personal letter to the CEO of a company to which he had applied, offering to work without wages in order to gain experience. This led to him working for the company for over two years. However, because of the economy in Florida he had limited chances to use his technology skills and ended up in a minimum-wage position. He knew he needed to further his education in order to have better career opportunities.

Online he discovered the HVACR program at Ferris and, although our campus was a long way from the Bahamas and in a very different climate, he applied and was accepted. To earn money for school he returned to the Bahamas and spent time working on a cruise ship and as a pipefitter.

Along with other members of the Ferris student chapter of the Indoor Environment & Energy Efficiency Association, this student travelled to Nashville, Tennessee, to attend the national conference in 2014. There, he made a contact that led to an internship with a company in Ft. Lauderdale. As a result of that very successful internship, earlier this semester the company called this graduate back and offered him a job. So after today, this graduate will return to the company he interned at as a full-time employee.

In speaking with this graduate, I was struck by his philosophical outlook on life. He talked about how designing an environmental system for a building requires thinking about that system as a process. In the same way, he sees his own life as a process. He said, “There’s never certainty, only possibility.” Despite that uncertainty, and being one of just two Bahamian students on campus, this graduate leaves today with a degree, a job and many possibilities.

He wants to thank his parents, Phillip and Gina English. His sister, Anthea, his niece, Paris and his girlfriend, Kentrelle Rolle. While extending thanks to all of his HVACR teachers, he especially wants to thank Joe Compton, Joe Pacella and Brian Holton. He also thanks his fellow students for their openness in learning and collaborating together. Finally, he would like to thank his good friend and mentor in West Palm Beach, Wayde Hinze. This graduate hopes to reach a stage in his life where he, too, can give back to youth in his native Bahamas.

It is my great pleasure to present to you Mark English and I would ask that he stand and be recognized. Would his family also stand?

Graduates, as you approach the stage today I would encourage you to reflect back on the education you have received, and the many prospects that lay ahead. 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, but also of opportunity. During those times I’d
encourage you to remember the example of Erin Martin and Mark English, how they saw what was possible and put in the hard work to make those opportunities come to pass.

Congratulations and best wishes, Class of 2015!