

Dr. Decker, thank you for the warm welcome and Dean Muir thank you for the opportunity to be a part of your 2013 Commencement Ceremony at UW-Waukesha.

Good evening graduates. Congratulations! I also congratulate your parents and all those that supported you along the way. This includes the excellent faculty, staff and administrators of this college.

As Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, I am proud to share in the mission of supporting students on their journey in higher education in southeastern Wisconsin with my colleagues at UW-Waukesha.

I am also honored to address you this afternoon. In particular, I relish being one of the *first* to call you ‘graduates’ of the University of Wisconsin – Waukesha. Indeed, that is an important accomplishment.

What does it mean to be first? In most instances we use it to compare ourselves or our accomplishments to others. We want to be “first in line”. Or we are in “first place”. I don’t believe just one of you is first. I believe *all of you need to be first*.

Don’t misunderstand me. I am a very driven person. I am the daughter whose father was a welder and mother was a small business owner. I am, in fact, the *first* in my family to obtain a college degree. I am very proud of *that* “first”. I also work very hard as a leader to create opportunities for others to be first; to innovate in order to sustain the distinctive nature of our University.

However, my “first” --in having obtained a degree -- does not diminish all my father and mother sacrificed for me. After all, they went before me to create the conditions for me to succeed. Providing for me was *first* for them. Graduates, take time today to thank your parents, family members, and friends for putting your educational goals *first!*

Today I want to make you aware of the opportunity each of you has in front of you. Not only is there opportunity for each of you to be first in something. It is imperative that you do so. In our young, but exciting 21st century, each of you has an opportunity to create a “first”.

What is increasingly clear to me and many others in education is that each student within the University of Wisconsin System needs to make an important contribution to our state if Wisconsin is to remain a vital source of innovation and productivity in an increasingly global society.

You have taken a great first step in choosing to pursue and complete an associate’s degree at the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha. As Martin Luther King Jr. was quoted as saying, “Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase”. That is the nature of a journey – pursuing with confidence, but not absolute certainty, in your destination.

The talented faculty and staff of UW-Waukesha and your journey have merged for a very short, intense time, and now you will move forward. I am certain that you have been changed. You have sought out and earned new understanding, new skills and may have new motivations. All which will shape your future path.

Are you ready to take the next step? The path forward is a course that is utterly unknown to the rest of us. The path forward will be shaped by the knowledge, skills and experiences you received at UW-Waukesha.

I know UW-Waukesha shares many of the same qualities as UW-Parkside. Your experiences while pursuing a degree were shaped by a great respect for academic rigor combined with practical and relevant experiences. This is central to developing in each of you the talents to succeed in a complex and ever-changing 21st century economy and culture.

In fact, our two campuses –UW Parkside and UW-Waukesha – are so well aligned that we have entered into partnerships to create exciting ways for you to complete a bachelor’s degree. A first for both campuses! Together, our faculties have created the Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences degree, or the B.A.A.S. degree. I am certain Dean Muir shares my same enthusiasm for the unique program.

I am certain most, if not all of you, will be pursuing further education at some point in your career. Advances in technology, competition in the marketplace and your own aspirations will demand further education. The Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences degree is a great example of what we in higher education are doing to ensure we can meet the needs of life-long learning and create new pathways to a degree.

Higher education is becoming more in tune to the innovation that each of you will need to apply to sustain a career. We understand you have a unique journey ahead of you and intend to provide high quality education in a manner that addresses the needs of individuals.

Other examples of new pathways are on-line course work, MOOCS (Massively Open Online Coursework) and competency-based learning. These too provide you with new options to enhance your skills through education while managing the busy lives of work and family.

Here we have already discovered a first for you. You are the first generation of college learners that is being offered so many new ways to gain knowledge. And this is my point. You should be invigorated by the resources and connectivity of the world in which you are building your career.

The ability of each and every one of you to seek and acquire knowledge; to connect and build relationships; to market and promote your ideas and value in the marketplace as well as to make a difference in the lives of others is unprecedented in human history.

We at the University of Wisconsin- Parkside as well as the faculty and staff of the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha are one important source of inspiration. Our mission and purpose as educators is to empower you to own and to use your knowledge and skills to advance your lives and enhance our communities.

It is within each of you to be a “first”. It is up to you to make things happen. We often pinpoint times and people in history that have marshaled the courage and inspiration to help our society make great leaps forward. I think of the great civil rights pioneer, Ruby Bridges, who said, “Go where there is no path and begin a trail. When you start a new trail equipped with courage, strength, and conviction the only thing that can stop you is you!”

Graduates of the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha ... take that *first* step ... find a new path ... cut a new trail. Use the knowledge and skills you have developed while obtaining your degree ... become vital contributors to our communities, and make a meaningful difference to others. The simple fact is, you will always be *first* in your own life’s journey; where you end up is yet to be discovered. Congratulations to the Class of 2013!