

Higher Education Expert Urges 2007 Summer Graduates at Jackson State University to Create Their Own Future

By Pamela Berry-Palmer

(JACKSON, Miss.) – Debra Stewart, president of the Council of Graduate Schools in Washington, D.C., urged graduates to create their own pathways during Jackson State University’s 2007 Summer Commencement exercises on Saturday, August 4, 2007.

“The future is not something that happens to you, but something you create,” said Stewart, the spokesperson for the graduate dean community whose organization is dedicated to the improvement and advancement of graduate education and research. Its 480-plus member institutions annually award more than 90 percent of all U.S. master’s degrees.



In her speech, Stewart reminded the 345 graduate their degrees would have no “expiration date.”

“Your degrees will represent much more than what you actually know factually today,” Stewart said, adding the graduates have a special “analytical perspective,” that should be used to help move their communities, state and country forward.

“By definition, you are the successful ones,” Stewart said.

Presiding over Saturday’s commencement exercises was Dr. Velvelyn Foster who, along with President Ronald Mason Jr., who conferred degrees

The Summer 2007 class of graduates included one longtime student who saw the day as meaningful family affair.

E X C L U S I V E

Dennis Williams, a nontraditional student, received his specialist degree in education and supervision from the same university where two of his children currently attend, and where another received his master's degree last summer.

Williams' oldest son, Casey, received his bachelor's degree in industrial technology and master's in technology education in August 2006. His younger son, Devin, is slated to graduate next May with a degree in biology/pre-med; his daughter, Mia, is a sophomore education major.

Williams, an assistant administrator for Christian Missionary and Industrial College High School or CM&I in Jackson, said he plans to pursue his Ph.D. next.

"With my degree, I can now work as a superintendent, principal or in higher education as an adjunct professor at a college or university," he said. "The purpose of my degree is so I can give back."

The Chicago native said he first attended JSU in the 1970s, but due to family responsibilities, he had to postpone his education for 17 years.

"I became a father at an early age. I was nowhere close to getting my degree, but I had to provide for my family," Williams said. "So we moved to Chicago where I got a job then shortly thereafter, I had another son and then a daughter."

Williams returned to JSU in 2002 and instilled his love for the university into his children.

"From the time my youngest son was born, I'd have him on campus with me showing him buildings and having him around the college atmosphere," Williams said. "I



also would take my kids to the JSU football games. I wanted to instill the HBCU (historically black college and university) experience into our children.”

Williams said growing up in low-income housing motivated him to make college a priority.

“I was the first person in my immediate family to get a degree, a master’s, and a specialist degree. I plan to be the first person with a Ph.D. I set a challenge to my children.”

After graduation, Williams said he will help recruit students into the master’s of in teaching program, which is designed for people who have non-educational majors or degrees and want to pursue a master’s to become a teacher.

Williams, who also hopes to open a Christian academy and daycare with his daughter someday, credits Jackson State with much of his success.

“If not for JSU, I’m not primarily sure I could have done all of these things at another university.”

Williams said he wants more non-traditional students to attend college because learning is for everybody. “Everybody has the potential to learn.”

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http://www.jsu.edu/~announcements/webready_html.html