

Good morning. My name is Amanda Kirk and I represent students graduating today in the IDLS program. Explaining what IDLS is can be a difficult and long-winded task. Further explaining why it is that I desire to teach middle school students can be an even greater task. The interdisciplinary design of the IDLS program has given me the opportunity to take classes that lie outside of disciplines that I am perhaps best suited for. In particular, I was required to take Macroeconomics which tested my ability to learn material that was as foreign to me as Calculus is to a seventh grader. Yet Macroeconomics taught me valuable information about the world market and how it operates. All of which is relevant to the lives of each of us. The information I learned enabled me to better understand the terminology of the recession that began shortly after the semester ended. The requirements of my program have thus educated me on many different areas of study that I may never have taken on my own.

Perhaps the most significant thing I have learned from the IDLS program is that I can succeed at any challenge that is presented to me through hard work and perseverance. I came to JMU three years ago not knowing if I could succeed. As a single mother of two small children, I began my journey feeling out of place and insecure. That first year was particularly interesting because it felt as though I was living two lives: one as a full-time student, the other as a full-time mom and both demanded my full attention. Our resources were stretched thin and there never seemed to be enough hours in the day to get everything done. Despite the obstacles I have had to overcome, I stand before you today to speak on behalf of my fellow students and friends. I can honestly say that I now feel secure in where I've come from, who I am now, and where I am going. I have persevered. We have persevered. And because we have persevered, we can use our perseverance as an example for our future children, students, friends, and coworkers. A former JMU professor once told me, "Students need to be taught perseverance." Indeed, perseverance is something that we can teach to one another through the inspiration of our own unique stories and accomplishments.

And now I would like to present the students graduating today from the IDLS program.