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Students diverse but still share common ground, Ringeisen says

By **RHYS SAUNDERS**

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Of the more than 1,000 students who graduated from the University of Illinois at Springfield, 634 walked during the commencement ceremony at the Prairie Capitol Convention Center on Saturday.

UIS Chancellor Richard Ringeisen said even though the graduates come from diverse backgrounds, they have a couple things in common. They recognize the value of education in making them better citizens and they know education extends beyond the classroom.

"As Henry Ford once said, 'Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or at 80,'" Ringeisen said. "Anyone who keeps learning stays young."

Current events, such as wars and economic hardships, were not overlooked during speeches given by university faculty and the event's commencement speaker, Matthew Holden Jr.

Ringeisen recognized that seven UIS students put their academic careers on hold this year when they were sent to active military duty. That brings the total number to 82 since Sept. 11, 2001.

"Times of war always make things different at colleges and universities," he said. "To each of them I would like to say on behalf of the whole UIS community, thank you for your sacrifices and may you return to us quickly."

Many of the day's speeches focused on the difficulties awaiting graduates in a turbulent economy.

"The nation, the world is going through a very difficult period," said University of Illinois President Joseph White. "What I've been thinking about are the tens of thousands of University of Illinois graduates who graduated between 1932 and 1939 when unemployment during part of that time was 25 percent in America, and they went on to do great things in their lives."

White advised graduates to go into the world with great confidence because "talented people with the right education welcome a challenge and overcome it."

"I think these economic conditions only mean one thing for you," he said. "They may mean that you won't go from your education to exactly the job you want in one step. They may mean that you'll go from your education to the job that will get you the job that you want."

Holden, a Wepner Distinguished Professor designee who is expected to join UIS' political science department in fall 2009, echoed those sentiments.

"Failure is not final," he said. "Out of everything, even the bad things, come useful things. When you stumble, remember that you can get up and struggle on to the next thing."

One graduate, David Stapleton, of Springfield, double majored in accounting and business administration. He said graduating Saturday felt amazing.

"I left for a while and I came back to school, so I'm glad I got this accomplished," he said.

Rhys Saunders can be reached at 788-1521.

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