MENOMONIE — UW-Stout Chancellor Charles W. Sorensen challenged nearly 800 new graduates Saturday to use their degrees to pursue their dreams — even if it means risking failure along the way.

“Set very focused goals, set the bar high and be willing to accept challenges, including failure,” Sorensen told 779 graduates during two ceremonies at Johnson Fieldhouse. “Then dedicate yourself to achieving what you set out to do.”

“Use your education as a starting point, a point for further growth, including advanced degrees,” he continued. “Never underestimate your potential, never underestimate yourself. Success and achievement are seldom simply luck.

“During my career, I have been incredibly impressed with the students and the graduates of UW-Stout who took the risk and succeeded. Let potential failure motivate you to reject the usual and strive for the unusual, strive for success beyond what you expect.”
Sorensen conferred the degrees, and deans of the colleges presented the diplomas. UW-Stout interim Provost Mary Hopkins-Best presided over the ceremonies.

Sorensen singled out three students as taking risks either to go to UW-Stout or during their education career:

- Lin Fang, a student from China, risked leaving her home country and family to come to the U.S. to study business, with an emphasis in mathematics and marketing and sales. She achieved a 3.8 grade point average, Sorensen said.

- Nicole Trinh, a school psychologist whose family came from Vietnam, decided to return to UW-Stout for a second advanced degree. “She took every chance, set high goals and would not settle for the ordinary,” he said.

- Linnea Heintz, a married mother of three who lives in Hawkins in Rusk County, received a bachelor’s degree in psychology. She had a two-hour drive one-way to campus, accumulating 1,000 miles a week of commuting. That didn’t stop her from obtaining her degree in just 2½ years.

After breaking her neck in a fall and undergoing rehabilitation, Heintz decided to enroll at UW-Stout at age 42. Her experience went so well she has decided to enter graduate school and pursue a doctorate. She wants to research the connection between stress and its effects on the immune system.

“I’m overwhelmed,” Heintz said Saturday. “My children and family have sacrificed so much for me.”

Her three children, ages 19, 17 and 15, and husband attended the ceremony.

Heintz said she will miss the family and friends she made at UW-Stout but added, “The life I’ve created here for the last 2½ years is done, but they’re friends I’ll have for life.”