Thank you very much for this award. It comes at the end of a difficult year and, I'm sorry to say, at the end of my tenure here at the Senate. In the five years I have served in the Senate we have established the CBA, the Board of Trustees, gone through two presidents, three provosts, one big strike, uncountable deans and a few contract negotiations. We have reviewed legislation and I have learned immensely in this process. I can only thank for the opportunity of serving the university in this fashion, learning about its policies, its processes, its inner workings—and getting to work with colleagues from other campus units in a respectful, collaborative, productive and even pleasant way.

I want to thank everybody in the university for the work we do together to keep the university running; my colleagues in the Senate, among faculty, staff and students, for asserting their important voices and teaching me so much; my closer colleagues for their support at challenging moments. I also want to thank the administration and the Honors College leadership for the many opportunities offered to pursue further transparency and trust.

Our academic mission is to “discover, preserve, and disseminate knowledge.” This mission, to which we are all devoted, can only be successfully fulfilled if we honor the contribution of every constituency and strive for their success. As our University Mission states, “We value the passions, aspirations, individuality, and success of the students, faculty, and staff who work and learn here.” All the pieces are important for this large and complex institution to function properly and succeed in reaching its main goals of educating and preparing thoughtful and creative citizens for the future. A positive relationship between the administration and the faculty is essential to build a climate that makes this possible.

At the University we cherish debate, for tacit consensus does not a new idea bring. As professors we emphasize the importance of meaningful dialogue. As in our classrooms we promote the discussion of different views, in our day-to-day interactions we can just as well consider different, sometimes even conflicting, positions, that might have an impact on the performance of our institution, for which we are mutually responsible.

In order to promote trust, we need to be able to communicate. And that’s a basic requirement for transparency. Courage to talk, to face your constituents, your personnel, your colleagues, is a must. And so is courage to listen. Simply listen to the other. The break of communication is at the basis of any lack of trust. Lack of trust brings down morale of faculty and staff, and such a climate negatively affects our
students and the fulfillment of our academic mission. Someone who is “conflict-averse”
cannot be an educator and certainly not an administrator. Administrative leadership
cannot abdicate their responsibilities of managing personnel and farm them out to HR;
they cannot hide in perennial absence justified by fundraising trips. Frank and open
conversations are crucial in order to create a strong institution, marked by respect and
collaborative work.

Shared governance is a respected academic tradition, and it is the basis of our system.
Shared governance, of course, goes with equity, fairness, transparency and
accountability. It is important that we understand that decisions that impact the whole
campus, when made or implemented unilaterally, have damaging effects. Decisions,
when made without sufficient planning or forethought, may leave people in awkward
and precarious positions. Decisions made here have real and direct impact on people’s
lives—their personal and professional lives: in their livelihood, and even their health.

Administrators can be collaborative and will find staff and faculty most willing to
participate in strengthening our institution and working toward our common goals. It has
been done, to a certain extent. It can be done. And I hope it will be done. Our success,
and that of our students and the region that we serve, can be attained if we set clear
goals, develop strategies and effective processes, as well as standards of
accountability. By supporting one another, nurturing a collegial atmosphere of respect
and trust, including in our process of governance the administrative and institutional
knowledge amassed by all the parties, and fostering our faculty excellence and
achievements, we will together build an environment where everyone feels valued,
meaningful and fulfilled. Hopefully it will be a system where everyone feels they have a
stake in the decisions made for and about them, where everyone has equal
opportunities and a fair chance at advancement.

I am honored to be celebrated for something so close to my heart and to my
understanding of faculty and administrators’ best practices. At this historical and political
moment when the value of a university education is called into question, and when
ethics, transparency and trust appear to be eroding at all levels of institutional
governments in this country and elsewhere, let us be models of a collaborative
institution. Let us show others how it can be done. Together, let us model behavior and
practices that will make us proud—and certainly stronger.

Thank you.