

Spring 2008 Student Awards Convocation

Mark E. Workman, Provost

Academic years have a lovely rhythm to them. They begin in the fall with a surge of energy; they conclude in the spring with a sigh of relief. A wonderful transition occurs over the course of the intervening nine months. Without being depleted of it themselves, faculty manage to transfer their knowledge to their students, and not just knowledge but also the skills necessary to learn independently and to express oneself with precision and clarity. And students, while not starting out without certain essential abilities, by the end of the year discover or confirm in themselves a remarkable capacity to take greater possession of and to critically reflect upon the infinity of what there is to comprehend about the world around them.

Given the magnitude of these occurrences, it is appropriate that we mark the critical junctures in this process with communal celebrations. At graduation ceremonies this afternoon and this evening we will recognize those of you who have brought the current stage of your education to completion and who will be leaving the university with our sincere wishes for lives of meaning and gratification. This morning's celebration serves a different function. It is symmetrical to our fall convocation and thus provides the other ritual bookend to our academic year. At these ceremonies we do not recognize completion.

Instead, we recognize achievement, both of an academic and a civic nature. In light of the rhythm that I mentioned at the outset, it is appropriate that in the fall we focus upon faculty. In the spring our attention shifts to students. By calling attention to the special accomplishments of our students and faculty we serve two purposes. First, we honor those of you who have distinguished yourselves as exemplary. Second, and just as importantly, we reaffirm the values that we as an academic community hold most dear.

Academic and civic achievement, at the highest levels, resides at the very center of what this university stands for. In our new institutional vision statement we claim the aspiration of becoming a university of national quality. Through your outstanding performance you have helped to identify the metrics by which that claim will be measured and you have helped advance us toward that ambitious goal. Your excellence defines and affirms the university's excellence. For that I am both proud of you and grateful to you.

It is my pleasure to turn the floor over to President John Delaney, who will provide some examples of the admirable efforts that lie behind the awards that we are here to bestow this morning.