I am truly honored by this award, especially when I think about the colleagues I’ve seen up here on this stage recently. Rick Mayes, April Hill, Scott Johnson, people truly dedicated to the intellectual and ethical development of our students. I am proud to be standing in that lineage.

And I have also learned something about this award in the past month. One side effect of the award may be to make good advisors into great advisors. That has certainly been its effect on me. When Libby notified me of this award at the end of March, I was gearing up for my advising sessions for fall semester. I can tell you, in the pre-award glow, I truly brought my A game to each and every one of those advising sessions. So on an occasion that seems to call for list-making, I offer you the four things I have learned in a month of being an excellent advisor:

1. **Advising is about discovery**…and this is inseparable from #2:
2. **The discoveries aren’t mine.**

This pairing may seem obvious, but it’s actually been quite profound for me to live into. I often have great ideas about what students could or should try. But in an excellent advising session I don’t disperse these nuggets but rather coach students towards their own discoveries about their trajectory. This doesn’t mean my students all discover why they’re in college and where they might want it to lead while sitting in my office (though I admit it’s happened once or twice and it’s pretty damn exciting). More often, I try to steer students away from the often terrifying (to them) idea of the grand discovery and towards the little discoveries they might otherwise easily overlook. This often means focusing our discussion on the present and the immediate past. Which leads to insight #3:

3. **An advising conversation is a reflective conversation.** An excellent advising conversation offers students —and me— a chance to pause in the rush to get things done and figure it all out. If we are to make discoveries together in advising then we have to be talking about something more significant than what GradTracker says or what classes they’ve lined up for next semester (though of course we have to do some of that, too). So I never start there, with those pressing logistics, which are almost always what they think we should be doing. The list makers out there hate this, but I make them put away their highlighted and coded schedules with the circles and arrows on the back of each one and instead I ask them questions like this:

   “What has surprised you this semester?” (My colleague Terry Dolson just gave me a much better way to ask this, which I plan to try next time around: “What have you seen differently because of your classes this semester?”)

   “Have any of your classes started connecting to one another or overlapping? Have any of your classes connected to anything you do or think about outside of class?”

   “Tell me about a time this semester when something you learned really caught your attention.”

Of course, what I am trying to do is elicit their experience of learning more than anything else, so that together we can appreciate what is starting to pull at them. These are the “little discoveries” I treasure in advising conversations—and in my month of being excellent I am proud to say that (with a lot of work!) I was able to get to at least one such discovery in each one of my advising sessions.

One student discovered that she did not like math alone—she liked *applying* math. Another identified for the first time that her interest in biology and her love of kids were equally compelling to her—and maybe even related.
Small as they may seem, these were exhilarating moments as they happened and I celebrated joyfully as the students held them up, fresh and glistening, to consider as their own for the first time. Which brings me to #4:

4. Advising is an affirmative act. It is about listening to each student and being present enough myself to actually appreciate something authentic about each one. This does not come naturally to me. To be honest, in my first few years here I was content to have great advising conversations with some students and adequate advising conversations with others. You know the ones I mean—the students who have terse, monotone answers, who either have it all completely figured out and don’t need my help or who seem absolutely uninspired by everything that college has presented so far. To my surprise, over the past year, these latter students have become some of my favorites to advise, because they challenge me to use my highest, most excellent advising powers (#1-3 on the list) to bring them into a reflective moment with me. It doesn’t always work—but it increasingly does, and the key seems to be looking past my own bias to reach towards appreciating and understanding the person in front of me. This is a kind of attention they can’t resist—who among us can? Being seen/heard for who we are right now, without judgment, opens us right up for reflection, and discovery.

These are the practices that make me love advising. The chance to do these things, to be in this way, especially with undeclared students, is a special joy. And they are things I am honored to do in the company of excellent advising colleagues like you.