Thank you, Dean Levi, for that very kind introduction. And thank you Deans Levi, Coates, and Hoye, for giving me this wonderful opportunity to say thank you on behalf of my classmates to our friends who have given us so much.

I guess without ever knowing it, this is an opportunity I’ve always wanted to have: to say thank-you for this wonderful scholarship I’ve been given—I’ve never really gotten to do that. As Dean Levi mentioned in my introduction, I have a scholarship named for Mr. James Padilla, established in 2006 as the result of a generous gift given by Mr. Padilla at the time of his passing. Mr. Padilla graduated from Duke Law in 1978 after receiving his bachelor’s in history from Northwestern; he kept close ties with the law school to the very end and served as a member of the Law Alumni Advisory Board.

I remember receiving the packet of scholarship thank-you information during my 1L year—the packet provides more information about your scholarship, your benefactor, and contact information so that you can thank him or her. And I’ll admit to a bit of sadness when I read that there were no living donors to thank for my scholarship. But today, I am so fortunate to have the opportunity to thank all of you and to tell you just what your generosity means to me and to my peers.

Prior to law school, I had a pretty neat and unusual job. I worked for a national service fraternity, Kappa Kappa Psi, that focuses on service within college music programs on over 200 college campuses across the country. I was a member of that organization in college and led the local chapter at my alma mater, UGA, and after graduation was hired to work full-time as the “National Chapter Field Representative.” My job there was to travel around the country to our local chapters and work with college students on leadership, and cooperation, and building their organizations. Also, it means that I’ve now eaten at nearly every Applebee’s in the United States of America. The most important lesson I learned in that job was one I learned to teach my students: take any group, team, family, or organization—any time people work together—if you want its members to be happy, to be enthusiastic, to do the best possible work, you have to make sure people feel not just welcome, but also wanted. Feeling wanted by those around you is a fundamental human need, like eating, sleeping, or (for me, at least) college football; and people lacking in fulfillment of that need are never the best, happiest version of themselves. I really do believe that this need to feel wanted underlies the success or failure of nearly every endeavor under the sun.

I bring up this idea because it should not go unsaid that that feeling of being wanted is exactly what you have given us: you made us feel like Duke really wanted us to be part of its family. And that made us want it, too. I still remember receiving the scholarship offer from Dean Hoye—it was the letter that changed, “they let me in,” to “they really want me to come here.” And I can tell you: that letter, in addition to Duke’s sensational admitted students weekend, made sure that I, and so many of my classmates, did come to Duke.

And I am really glad that I did. I think you know and will agree that this place is special—unique among law schools in its atmosphere of cooperation and fellowship in the midst of an endeavor that, generally, is known to be quite competitive. We know it’s different here.

On that note, I want to very quickly tell you about one of my most memorable experiences at Duke Law. As you know, the students sitting here today have made the fortunate and wise decision to attend law school during the worst economy since before even the original Law & Order show existed (we all know that’s what brought us to law school anyway, right?)—and jobs for law students have been a bit harder to come by than they once were—even at top-tier schools like Duke.

With this bad economy came the fear that the unique sense of fellowship that existed when we arrived here—this “Duke Standard”—would pass away as anxiety and fear over the economy led to self-preservation and distrust of others. But here at Duke Law, that did not come to pass. In particular, I’m thinking of the efforts of one
student. Last year, one of our peers, Bridget McNamee, thought maybe the Class of 2011 should get together and talk about the economy, about not becoming too competitive with each other, and about keeping that unique collegiality alive. So she put together a town hall meeting about exactly that.

Now, despite being a generally optimistic person, I was a bit nervous about this idea: would people really show up to talk about collegiality at 7 o’clock in the evening—during callback season—even when they were bribed with the promise of delicious North Carolina barbecue? Maybe they wouldn’t just anywhere, but as it turns out, here at Duke they would. Despite the lateness of the hour, half the 2L class showed up. People expressed their worries and concerns; we talked about expectations for ourselves and each other; and we talked about how to help each other with the job search and in keeping collegiality alive. Now, we’ll never know if it was that meeting that did it, but I do know that Duke survived that fear and anxiety, and the Duke Standard remained intact.

I think that kind of heartfelt discussion is something a family would have. And that started with the environment created by those who came before us as students and who today sit with us as alumni mentors and role models.

Yes, it has been a tough time to be a law student, and the crushing impact of debt, combined with genuine fear about the future, leaves many students worried about their careers and whether they will ever be able to pursue the dreams that brought them to law school in the first place. Because of these scholarships that we are so fortunate to have, our fears are lessened and our dreams brought closer to within our reach.

Those of us sitting here today—generous donors and thankful donees—will always know that even in a tough economy and brutal job market, when belts were tightened around the world, Duke Law alumni still gave of themselves so that their successors could have the opportunity to pursue their dreams and experience this great family. And like any family, we know that it will one day be our turn to give back and continue that tradition far into the future.

So, on behalf of my classmates, it is my honor to thank you for all that you have done to enrich our lives, to enrich our education, and to make us feel welcome and wanted at Duke Law. We will not forget your generosity when one day we sit where you sit now. Because to do anything less would not meet the Duke Standard you have set for us. Thank you.