Thank you, Dean Levi, for the kind introduction. I’d like to start off by admitting that I am a bit nervous to be here today speaking to you all. Not from a nervousness caused by a fear of public speaking, but rather one that is caused by a genuine feeling of awe of all those present here today. Here today are some of the greatest legal minds in the nation. And some of the most esteemed, involved, and generous members of the Duke Law Community.

Confronted with this sudden onslaught of nerves, I turned to my friend Tommy Thekkekkandam for advice. After all, he gave the speech just last year. He immediately sympathized with my feelings and explained that he had felt the exact same way. He gave me the notes of his speech so I could see what kind of topics he had touched on (I wanted to make sure we didn’t give the same speech two years in a row). Sitting down, ready to read his speech, I was relieved that a normal person like myself had managed to do this in the past.

When I read the “about myself” portion of his speech, my heart sank a bit. He began by telling everyone about how he had gone to Ghana and how he had started an NGO. His experiences there motivated him to pursue a joint JD/MBA program at Duke, where he was awarded a Mordecai Scholarship. Suffice it to say that that my nerves and feelings of awe were not in the least bit relieved by this exercise.

I thought I would also start with a bit about myself. I grew up mainly abroad, as my parents were both in the Foreign Service. I lived in Colombia, France, The Soviet Union and Russia (we were there when it changed), and Egypt. Growing up in such different environments helped give me a somewhat unique perspective on life, and I think it helped make me a better student and teacher. After graduating with a degree in Math and Government from Bowdoin College in Maine (I guess I missed my time in the harsh Russian tundra), I taught high school math. I planned to teach for one year and then go to law school, but it ended up being four years before I arrived here. I really loved teaching, but I couldn’t wait to get to law school, and Duke was a natural choice as this is where my dad had gone to law school.

Although I taught mainly at a privileged, all-girl prep school, I had the opportunity to teach a completely different group of students in the summers. I spent six summers teaching at the Cathedral Scholars Program, a program for DC public school children that brings the students to the Cathedral Close and provides them with small classes taught by teachers from the best local private schools. During my time with the Cathedral Scholars Program, I taught students who were every bit as capable as my high-achieving honors students, but I was shocked at how they were capable in completely different ways. My summer students were brilliant and could think through almost any problem. But they were not as strong at “the game of being a student”- their study habits were not well refined. By the end of the summer, after receiving more individual attention and some remedial study skills, the students truly blossomed.

My experience teaching helped instill in me a strong commitment to diversity (of all kinds) in education. Having seen how those students who couldn’t afford an expensive private school education thrived in such a setting, and knowing how much every student would benefit
from their involvement in the classroom, I now have a deep appreciation for the contribution that all of the donors in this room have made.

Our law school is filled with exceptional students, many of whom are here because of the generosity of our donors. Looking at the sheer number of students who receive scholarships at this law school reminds me of how different, and how much less complete, my law school experience would have been without your generosity. These scholarships help students decide to go to law school, less afraid of being crippled by debt, and more willing to pursue careers in public service and government after law school. For this, I would like to sincerely thank you all, on behalf of all the students in this room, as well as the rest of the student body, who benefit from the presence and contributions of those students who receive scholarships.

I would especially like to thank Mrs. Rochelle Siegel and her late husband, Professor Allen G. Siegel. This year I was honored to learn that I had been named the Allen G. Siegel Scholar. I was humbled when I learned of Professor Siegel’s successful legal career, but I was even more impressed by his lifelong dedication to philanthropy. Mr. Siegel spent most of his life giving back to others, and Duke Law was one of the greatest beneficiaries of his generosity. Not only did he establish this scholarship, which was originally in his father’s name, but he also started a lecture series to honor his brother, the Rabbi Seymour Siegel. And, most importantly, he gave his time as a lecturing fellow at the Law School.

Professor Siegel’s dedication to this school and the dedication of all of the scholarship donors are truly impressive, and I am sure it will continue to be a strong tradition at this school. I know I am dedicated to giving back to the students at Duke Law after I leave. Who knows, maybe some day there will even be a Wiener Scholarship. I suspect they would change the name, however.

Regardless, I know that my classmates and I will forever be grateful for your generosity. We will surely pay it forward, by continuing the tradition of dedication to Duke Law, not only by giving financially, but by giving time, and by helping Duke Law students and alums whenever we can. Thirty-six years ago, my father graduated from Duke Law, so I’ve always considered myself to be part of a Duke Law family. But this family has grown since I started at the school nearly two-and-a-half years ago, and I intend to stay close to this family, and to help it grow and prosper, just as our donors have done for years. Thank you again for everything you have given to make Duke Law the place it is today.