

**Distinguished Teacher of the Year Award
Keynote Address
2019**

President Kelly, Provost Danilowicz, members of the FAU community,

I am deeply moved and honored to be the recipient of the Distinguished Teacher of the Year Award. Like no other, this award crystalizes the essence of the academic profession—the training of our nation’s future leaders.

Teacher of the Year is a bit of a misnomer because it recognizes individual accomplishments that are impossible without the interconnections with those who have made, and continue to make, us what we are today. How could we be successful teachers in the classroom if not for the work of the administrative staff that tends to the university infrastructure? How can we disentangle our skills behind the podium from our colleagues from whom we learn so much?

And, finally, how can we be Distinguished Teachers without the students whose dedication and commitment breathe life into the university and define its spirit?

The path that brought me to where I stand today did not start when I was hired at Florida Atlantic University twenty-five years ago. It began with the High School teachers who saw something in me that reflected potential. Thank you, Mrs. Guthridge, for making me write and rewrite my essays on Shakespeare and for introducing me to the greatest American writer, Edgar Allen Poe. Thank you, Mr. Watson, for tempting me to learn more about the underlying structural causes of World War I.

My journey continued through undergraduate studies at North Carolina-Charlotte, Masters studies at Rutgers University and Doctoral studies at the University of South Carolina. Upon arriving at FAU, I was fortunate

to be surrounded by talented and dedicated colleagues who contributed to my professional development.

It is at times like this that we take a moment to reflect on those important figures who played pivotal roles in the shaping of our intellectual development. I thank Harry Chernotsky for teaching me how to teach. Harvey Starr for thinking in deep theoretical terms about the world around us and Charles Kegley for infusing in me an entrepreneurial spirit in the profession.

While studying for my Bachelor of Arts degree, in a university very much like Florida Atlantic, one of my professors encouraged me to apply for a summer International Law training program hosted each year by the United Nations. I was very interested, given that my career interests were in law and diplomacy. As I read the application materials, however, my optimism waned. Out of a worldwide applicant pool, the United Nations would select only twenty-four candidates with a limit of one per nationality. I wondered how I could compete with applicants from Ivy League schools and flagship universities. My advisor, however, encouraged me to look beyond the obstacles and focus instead on the opportunities. I dutifully applied, was selected and spent the summer of 1986 in Geneva, Switzerland. The European headquarters of the United Nations in a very busy place in the summer, with scores of commissions, organizations and agencies holding meetings on the hallowed ground where the League of Nations operated. I mingled with diplomats, ambassadors and the occasional head of state. Twice I had lunch with Egypt's ambassador to the International Law Commission, Boutros Ghali, who five years later was elected Secretary General of the United Nations. The person I remember most from that experience was ambassador Abdul Koroma from Sierra Leone. A brilliant legal mind and respected jurist, ambassador Koroma stopped me in the hallways one morning with words of encouragement for my further studies in international law. It turns out that he, decades earlier, was selected for the same training program that I was then part of. Abdul Koroma was twice elected to nine year terms as a judge on the International Court of

Justice. Our paths crossed for the first time in more than three decades last semester at an international law symposium. I thanked Chief Justice Kormoa for his kind words thirty-three years earlier, he was kind enough to autograph the book that I wrote about the Law Commission that he had served on.

I took away two impressions from the summer of 1986 that have greatly impacted my approach as an educator. First, you do not need to attend an Ivy League school or a flagship research university to achieve all that you aspire to in life. The doors of opportunity remain full open for the 95% of us who attend traditional state universities. Second, I gained a full appreciation for the incredibly important role that university professors play as mentors to their students. To be a great mentor requires an investment of time and energy by getting to know your students, their interests, strengths and weaknesses. Finally, a faculty mentor must actively seek out special opportunities for their students that will set them apart, expose them to unique experiences and establish the foundation upon which their careers are built. I hope that I have done for my students what my undergraduate professors did for me.

There are far too many people here at FAU who merit recognition to mention in one speech. One, however, stands apart from the rest and must be given her due credit. Long before the now common system of faculty mentoring was instituted, Political Science professor Dorothy McBride took the time to serve as my mentor and role model. The quintessential social scientist, Dr. McBride was and remains a professor's professor.

I would like to thank the university for giving me the latitude to establish and develop the Leon Charney Diplomacy Program. Over the course of the past twenty-three years, more than 800 undergraduate students have participated in the Program. They have represented FAU at academic competitions in San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Indianapolis, New York, Washington, D.C. and The Netherlands. Their accomplishments

are a point of pride for FAU and have put the university on the map in the world of diplomacy studies.

As noted by President Kelly in his introductory remarks, FAU brought home its first national title last semester, a testament to the dedication and unbridled ambition of the students in the Program. Their accomplishments, more than mine, have brought me to this podium today.

These Diplomacy Program students have excelled in their careers after graduating from Florida Atlantic. Three are university professors who have established their own diplomacy studies programs, four have been employed by the United Nations, six have started careers in the U.S. State Department, one served for more than a decade at NATO headquarters in Brussels and countless Diplomacy Program graduates have attended the nation's premier law schools, medical schools, graduate and business schools. In 2018, Diplomacy Program graduate Tiffany Taylor earned the title of Miss Florida and placed 3rd runner up to the title of Miss America. Jeffrey Coltman-Courmier, this year's recipient of the prestigious Stan and Renee Wimberly Scholar Award for the university's top undergraduate student, is a Diplomacy Program veteran. Congratulations to all the Program's students, both for their accomplishments here at Florida Atlantic and in their professional lives. It might be appropriate, at least this year, to name this the Teacher of Distinguished Students Award.

Finally, Mr. President, I would like to dedicate this award to a gentleman and a scholar who remains one of FAU's greatest professors. Douglas Gatlin was a founding member of the university's faculty and fifty years ago today was the first recipient of the Distinguished Teacher of the Year Award. I arrived at Florida Atlantic two years before Doug Gatlin retired, giving me the opportunity to learn from one of the very best. Dr. Gatlin passed away on January 15 of this year, leaving behind a loving family and a professional legacy that remains the Gold Standard by

which we are all measured. May he rest in peace and always be remembered fondly and respectfully.

Thank you all for the high honor of receiving the Distinguished Teacher of the Year Award and God bless.