I want to begin today by thanking the Faculty Personnel Committee for naming me the recipient of the Thompson Distinguished Teaching Award, and for making it possible to stand in front of you today. I also want to thank my colleagues in the Spanish Department and in the Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies Program, for their support over the years. And most importantly, I thank my students, who inspire me to be the best teacher that I can be.

When I received the invitation to give this talk, what I was most excited about was the opportunity to address the amazing students who will be receiving awards. Today, your professors, your families and your peers celebrate your accomplishments in scholarship and athletics, your leadership and your involvement. And not only that. What we are really celebrating is what stands behind these accomplishments. We recognize your hard work, your academic integrity, your sense of obligation to your own future, and to the people who believe in you. And, whether you realize it or not, today we celebrate still more. We celebrate your contributions to scholarship, to critical thinking, to the intellectual community of Gettysburg College, and to something much larger – the liberal arts.

This is a beautiful celebration, but do not take it as a conclusion. Honors Day is the climax of one thing and the beginning of another. What I want to urge you to do today is to take the next step, and to make it intentionally and earnestly meaningful.
When I was preparing this address, I caught myself thinking not only about what you have done to get here today, but also about what you would do after, and I kept pondering another ceremony (a bit more famous), that recognizes people for their outstanding accomplishments. Thirty-three years ago, Gabriel García Márquez -- the Colombian author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and one of the most important Latin American writers -- was given another award -- an award that one of you might win one day -- the Nobel Prize for Literature. In accepting that award, he spoke about the harm that colonialism and imperialism have done to Latin America, and about the obligation that writers have to find authentic means of expression that do justice to their reality. In an address titled, “La soledad de América Latina” (“The Solitude of Latin America”), he expressed his faith in the possibility of “a new and sweeping utopia of life, […] where happiness will be possible, and where the people condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth.” At the ceremony that honored him for his words, García Márquez used words to inspire in people the vision of a world defined by justice and respect. He used his words for a meaningful act, hoping to energize others to act upon the same vision.

My hope for you today is that you take the awards that you are receiving as your own personal charge to work tirelessly to make positive changes in your multiple communities. Because, in the words of Eduardo Galeano, another great Latin American author, “Al fin y al cabo, somos lo que hacemos para cambiar lo que somos.” “After all, we are what we do in order to change who we are.” Some of you will recognize that here Galeano uses the “we” forms of Spanish verbs. He does not talk about “one” or “you,” but of “we.” “We” as human beings, “we” who, whether citizens or not, inhabit the same
country, “we” as members of the same College, which we share with many people who
do not look, talk, dress, or experience everyday occurrences the same way that we do.
Use the skills and knowledge for which you are recognized here today for the benefit of
these intersecting and overlapping communities of which you are part. This recognition
that you are receiving means that you have a voice, that you have earned a certain level of
authority in your field or among your peers. This is an asset. Do something meaningful
with it.

So how do you do it? How do you get to the next stage, how do you take those
steps that will matter more fundamentally and to more people?

I borrow this first piece of advice from the Mexican-American author and critic
Gloria Anzaldúa, who urged her readers to “live sin fronteras”, to live without borders.
To live sin fronteras. Although in her broader work Anzaldúa discusses the border
between México and the United States, these specific words refer to more symbolic
borders, those that limit our thinking, our imagination, and our capacity not only to
dream, but to surprise ourselves with what we can envision and accomplish. In the spirit
of Anzaldúa’s words, I urge you cross geographical and metaphorical borders, to
challenge the borders of your own belief systems, to stretch the borders of your curiosity,
to keep your minds open, and to live learning from others, sin fronteras.

My second piece of advice is to make all of this intentional. Keep yourselves
informed. Actively, thoughtfully, and critically. Know what is happening, ask where you
are needed, and where your abilities can make a difference. Sometimes that might mean
volunteering your skills, sometimes it might mean choosing a course of graduate study or
a career through which you will contribute to a consequential change in the lives of
Others. It may mean writing or speaking. It will almost certainly mean educating others, whether formally or informally, in classrooms, in offices and inspiring them to break through their own borders. It always means speaking out and acting resolutely against hierarchies and forms of oppression – sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism – to help break down borders. Make the accomplishments that you celebrate today a stepping stone toward larger and meaningful objectives. And I promise you that one day, you will turn back and look in wonder at how much you have grown, and at how slowly, purposefully, and resolutely, you have managed to surprise yourselves.

Thank you, and congratulations to all of you on the awards that you are receiving today.