Thank you, Dean Ross. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Sarah Gustafson, and I feel so honored to represent generations of Davidson College students whose lives Dr. Epes has touched. I am simply blown away by Dr. Epes’s generosity in giving back to his school and to its students: generosity in his thought, in his feeling, and in his time. I would like to share a few stories that show how his generosity has shaped the Davidson experience for me and for others here and beyond campus.

I first met Dr. Epes as a prospective student in the spring of my senior year of high school. Setting a pattern for virtually every future meeting between us, the conversation turned to books. One question of his stays planted in my memory with particular tenacity. Dr. Epes learned that I had read “Billy Budd” by Herman Melville and “The Stranger” by Albert Camus, albeit I had read them a year earlier and in two different classes. He asked me, with an inquisitive and almost devilish cock of the head, to compare how Melville and Camus portray the limits on rendering objective justice in a subjective world.

Well, I would love to imagine that I gave a worthy, well-expressed answer. What I can say with absolute certainty, though, is that I felt intellectually unsatisfied with my answer. The result? When I arrived home, I pulled out my books and sat down to explore connections I may have missed before. And then as I’m sitting on the floor of my room with my books, I realized- Dr. Epes was making me do research, and I hadn’t even enrolled yet! He had invested his time and his thought in asking me the right question. I say the right question because it inspired me to look deeper. The question needed to be answered, and he made me want to answer it.
It would be easy for Dr. Epes to rest on his laurels, but just as he motivated me to reconsider what I thought I knew, he holds himself to a standard of constant intellectual dialogue. I turn to a comment he wrote on one of my papers in Humanities 150: “I wonder whether the Tower of Babel and the Garden of Eden can be seen as framing structures for Genesis 1 through 11. But I’m just thinking aloud.” Dr. Epes keeps wondering and never allows himself or his students to feel too comfortable in what he or they already know. We learn with him, not under him.

Later that semester, Dr. Epes emailed our section of Humanities 150 about the final exam. He wrote: “Don’t pull all-nighters; they are counterproductive. Rest instead. Organize your thoughts, but don’t let frustration over a small thing create an obsession that gets in the way of doing well on the rest. And, of course, write clearly.” Dr. Epes pushes his students towards where they can go and what they can do, but he never lets them forget what it is they most need to get there. Whether that need is clear writing, appropriate courses, more research, or a break, Dr. Epes generously offers his word of care. I know I represent many students when I thank him for prompting me to discover my voice and decide what matters most to me, inside and outside the classroom.

Not too long ago, I sat on the phone with my mom struggling with how to organize this tribute. After listening quietly for several minutes, Mom asked if she could share what Dr. Epes means to her. She said to me, “Sarah, it is one of the saddest of my life that you never met your grandfather. But I will always be glad that you picked Davidson, not in small part because it brought you the mentorship of Dr. Epes.”
She is only one member of the extended Davidson community who has seen Dr. Epes’s kindness spread across the lives of others.

In an article announcing his new position as registrar, Dr. Epes says “I refuse in any way to say I'm no longer a teacher.” Thank you, Dr. Epes, from the bottom of my heart, for being not just a scholar, a professor, or a registrar; thank you for teaching. As the lessons we learn from and with you continue to reverberate throughout our lives, we will never stop being your students.

And although it is almost cliché to cite Socrates or Plato at this particular moment, because I read Plato in Dr. Epes’ class, I still feel particularly empowered to do so. Plato writes that “Wisdom begins in wonder.” When I hear that adage, Dr. Epes, I think of you.