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Faculty Retirement Dinner Remarks

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• Good evening. It is good to be back with you this evening for this opportunity to note the achievements of this year's honorees and, above all, to thank them--and all of you--for service to the University and generations of students.

• Linda and I came to our first Faculty Retirement Recognition Dinner seven years ago--before we were officially part of this campus community. I remember the kind of deep appreciation I felt that night for the caliber of the people I was meeting--and the sense of regret that I might not have the opportunity to know them better.

• This year, as I look out among you, I see friends I've been privileged to work with. And I have no sense of regret--for two reasons. First, I'm celebrating with you and know how well-deserved your new life of retirement is. Second, I really don't intend to let you go. You will continue to hear from me and I expect you to remain the treasured part of our community we recognize tonight.

• There are 25 of you being honored this evening. I always like to do the math. You represent six of our seven degree-granting colleges and 18 academic departments. When you leave us, you collectively take with you nearly 700 (691) years of service and institutional memory. This year's faculty retirees have individual years of service that range from 13 to 46 years, for an average of more than 27 years.

• There's another calculation to make that is difficult to do accurately. Multiply those 700 years of service by the number of students served in each year. The number will reach into the tens of thousands. Please know your impact on them has been profound. As I travel around the world and meet our alumni, I am always struck by
the ones who ask about one of you, specifically. Their queries usually come with a quick observation about how the lessons learned in your classrooms made a lasting difference in their lives.

• W.H. Auden once said "A professor is one who talks in someone else's sleep." I've always liked that description. As we honor you tonight, I want you to think about those "someone else's" all around the world. They're former students for whom your voice is a permanent part of their dreams and the sense of direction they summon to meet a challenge. They are your legacy.

• This evening, the first order of business is to thank you for your commitment and contributions. I also want to thank your family members who have been part of your life here--your loved ones who have supported you in so many ways and helped you to be productive. Even though our focus this evening is on you, I know this milestone is theirs as much as yours. So please join me in extending the gratitude of this University to them (pause to lead applause).

• You are retiring from the faculty, but I don't believe for a minute that you're done with the intellectually rich and challenging life of an academic. You'll change your focus a bit. You're not retiring "from" something, as some people do. You're retiring "to" a life of new intellectual inquiry. Those ideas that have been dancing in the background can now take center stage--on your own schedule. As one sage said of retirement, "The money is no better, but the hours are."

• I want you all to know that no matter where you are, you will remain--always--a part of this University community. I look forward to seeing you on campus enjoying yourselves in the coming months and years. You've earned it.