Welcome to the third annual Chancellor’s Dinner at the University of California, Riverside, and the 25th annual Alumni of Distinction Award ceremony.

This event is a highlight for me each year . . . a time when we have the opportunity to celebrate the wealth of accomplishments of so many of our alumni . . . and the wonderful people who helped them on their way.

I would like to introduce you to a very special guest who honors us this evening with his presence. Roy Overstreet was the first African American student to graduate from UC Riverside. He was followed a year later by the first African American woman, Zelma Ballard, who had intended but was unable to join us this evening.

Yesterday we had a chance to ask Roy on how it is he chose UCR:

“I was a very poor student, we had no money at all. I had lost my mother to a long battle with cancer. I went to Valley College in San Bernardino and it was there that I met a physics professor from UCR who told me that UCR would be the best place for me. I decided he was right and for $52 a semester, I enrolled as a junior and went on to graduate.”

I met both these amazing pioneers last spring, when they joined our students at graduation. I don’t know what was more inspiring. Listening to their experiences from the late 50s and their advice to graduates now. Or watching our students, leaning forward, mouths agape, hanging on every word.

Roy graduated with a degree in physics, went on to earn a master’s degree and became the first African American oceanographer in the country.

Roy Overstreet and Zelma Ballard were trailblazers, introducing racial and ethnic diversity to strengthen what was a pretty monochromatic campus in the 1950s.

Today, we are a rich patchwork of cultures and ethnicities that strengthens the learning community for everyone.

Our African American students are academically indistinguishable, as measured by their graduation rates, from any other ethnic and racial group on campus.

This is a point of enormous pride and accomplishment, and certainly counter to the outcomes most everywhere else in America.

When asked yesterday about what it felt like being a pioneer, a trailblazer. Roy answered in his customary humility

“It felt just like any other graduate in 1958. I guess ignorance is bliss.”

Thank you Roy for opening the door so many years ago for thousands of others who have now followed your lead.
Roy is here with his wife Pauline…would you please both stand for a moment and allow us to both recognize and thank you?

Congratulations Nick and Susan Goldware. Your receipt of the UCR Medallion is richly deserved. You have been great friends of UCR, and the greater Riverside community, for years. And for Karen and I at a personal level, you have provided great support and advice ever since we arrived on this campus three years ago.

And congratulations to the three alumnus award-winners tonight. Nakul Dev Mahajan, Susan George and Vernon Crowder, your stories will inspire generation after generation of students who come after you and know that they too, can accomplish great things.

I’d like to spend a few minutes as we conclude this evening, to ask you to reflect on the importance of one of the things we pride ourselves on at UCR, and work every day to achieve.

It is our sustained, unwavering, and enduring commitment to keep our doors open to any student who has demonstrated academic and personal aptitude and drive, and who is determined to study and learn.

And once they become a matriculating student, we are committed to providing access to the ever-increasing excellent quality of UCR, its faculty, programs and staff, and to our community writ large.

Indeed, the University of California, Riverside, is increasing in both size and excellence in almost every measurable way:

- Through growth in enrollment as a campus of first choice
- Through the quality and the promise of our students
- Through the excellence of our faculty, and their recognition world wide
- Through the stellar accomplishments of our alumni
- Through the commitment and support of our community
- And, importantly, through the vision, the generosity, the pride and the passion of our donors

Increasingly, UCR is achieving the recognition that has long been its due.

I think we are telling the story better these days. We are telling it to elected officials and alumni, to parents and students. We are telling our story in the regional communities, the California Schools, and in Japan, Korea and Hong Kong, and elsewhere.

We have been featured in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the LA Times, NPR and… national television. In a few weeks, you’ll see another show on CBS – 60 minutes and our Citrus Collection

We have developed a stronger relationship with the Press Enterprise, in which the impactful stories about our students, faculty, athletic and cultural programs have gained greater prominence, resulting in strengthening the paper and providing value to the print and electronic subscribers.

We have engaged in providing the expertise of our faculty to discussions across southern California, and indeed the world, in areas of the economy, Middle East, agribusiness, education, energy, plant disease, invasive species, transportation, air quality, arts and culture, politics, healthcare, the environment…and the list goes on.

Recently, UCR was named to the 2010 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for demonstrating exemplary community service and achieving meaningful outcomes in their communities. What’s more, Washington Monthly ranked UCR 5th in the nation based for its benefits to society through
research, the social mobility our degree provides to our students, and the service our students and university provide to the community. This is a terrific accomplishment:

- When you realize that 59 percent of the incoming class this year are the first in their family to go to college.
- When you realize that UC Riverside has more Pell grant students (those from low-income families) than any other UC campus, and more than all the Ivy League schools combined.
- When you realize that, despite national trends to the contrary, we graduate all our students at the same high rate.

It is the individual stories that make a difference – that touch our hearts, that inspire faculty and staff and other students, that inspire our friends and expanding donor community to invest in UCR in ways they can.

As you heard this evening from the three exceptional alumni who achieved success, and are giving back through their work and through their example. As you hear about their accomplishments, keep in mind that thousands more such stories are developing every day… 21,000 students… 21,000 stories… 21,000 positive impacts on our society. Each one of them remarkable, and touching in its own way.

Two of tonight’s honorees – Vernon Crowder and Elizabeth George – graduated in the 1970s. When the campus was barely 20 years old. When UCR was still developing its promise. When Elizabeth and Vernon were just beginning to realize theirs.

There were difficult moments for UCR in those formative years, and yet our community, our students, our faculty and our staff continued to believe in this campus. It is their work, and the work of those who came after them-but before us- that has made us what we are today. Today we build on their shoulders.

Today is our time, our time to accomplish, to give back, and to leave our fingerprints on this wonderful campus, and to leave a legacy of leadership. This is, I believe, an obligation - a responsibility - of everyone in this room this evening, and I am grateful to you, and for you, as we can’t do it alone.

Alumni from the earlier eras might have a hard time recognizing the campus today. We have more than 3,000 academic personnel, including 654 professorial rank faculty, nearly 4,500 staff including student workers. We now have 6.8 million gross square feet of building space. And four times as many students as when Elizabeth and Vernon were here. And today we have more than 1,200 international students from over 60 countries, and we are focused on increasing these numbers because of the opportunity it will give our students to live and learn, and to compete and prosper, in a more globally enriched and more demanding environment. Already we have 1,500 alumni living abroad and we enjoy 72 international research collaboration agreements with universities all over the world.

I have come to realize that one joy of being your Chancellor is I get to tell stories.

Two weeks ago I gave an invited keynote address in Pittsburgh to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. As I was preparing for the address, I learned of many UCR students who are already becoming leaders in this field. Undergraduates have won major national awards and research grants for developing solar-powered clothes driers, solar-powered water desalination systems, and systems for converting waste into ethanol.

One undergraduate, Fortino Morales, inspired his professor to apply for a USDA award. As a result, assistant professor of Botany and Plant Sciences Louis Santiago, became the first UCR faculty member to earn the Kika de la Garza Fellowship, addressing challenges in developing a well-prepared Latino workforce. Morales launched a sustainable food seminar. He helped develop the UCR community
garden – which provides fresh produce to needy members of our community and teaches all interested students the ways and power of sustainable gardening – and became involved in sustainability organizations within the community and throughout the state. His research seminar earned a $25,000 Social Innovation grant and continues to be taught today. He developed the campus green action program to install solar panels on the Highlander Union Building and on Parking Lot 30, create internships at the new Office of Sustainability, and fund student-initiated sustainability projects.

When he graduated this past June, he took his leadership skills, his knowledge, and his contacts back to his home town of San Diego, where he continues to work on community sustainability issues at home, in Riverside and in Mexico. And he maintains his ties with his alma mater, making the resources he developed during his five years on campus available to the students who are following in his footsteps. Fortino Morales is yet another alumnus who is out in the community making a difference.

This fall I learned of another student whose courage, dedication and generosity deeply impressed me and relates to sustainable communities in a different way.

Psychology student Serkadis Krohm was selected for the 2011 Student award given annually by the Citizen’s University Committee. She came to their attention because of her service work to the campus and the community. She works with the Child Leader Project, which engages with Riverside area youth and also works in the slums of India. She met with students at Norte Vista High School, helping them launch the Arlanza Community Garden. And she is starting a summer leadership program for high school seniors. She wanted to provide the youth with the opportunity of accompanying UCR students to visit an orphanage in India this summer, and so she organized a 5K run to raise the needed funds. While in India, she gave classes to the children in the orphanage and helped them create a community garden. Her work gained the attention of Clinton Global Initiative, which invited her to attend the Public Service Conference. And on her own initiative, every year, she attends a camp for young people who have been adopted from Ethiopia – her country of birth.

Serkadis is part of the UCR Guardian Scholar program, which supports emancipated foster children who want to attend UCR. We learned more about her amazing journey . . . After being orphaned at 9 years old and separated from three of her five sisters . . . she and her younger sister were adopted by a family from Moreno Valley. The sisters were treated so horrendously in that household that Child Protective Services removed them, and she spent her teenage years moving from one foster home to another. Nonetheless, she graduated high school as both student and athlete of the year. She now excels academically as a senior psychology major, & plans to attend graduate school in social work.

This is the caliber of student that is drawn to UCR by our focus on accessibility and excellence. This is the caliber of student drawn by our demanding academic programs and uncompromising talented faculty. This is the caliber of student drawn by our deep resolve that as we challenge students intellectually, socially, and regrettably financially, we also support them to succeed. This is the caliber of student that flourishes here with our help.

There are those who look at the profile of students who are carving a new path to higher education for their families, who are often supported by financial aid . . . and they imagine these students to be educationally disadvantaged, stumbling through college courses, and hanging on by a thread. As you can see, nothing could be further from the truth. They are engaged and accomplished learners, active community members, who seek to share their new knowledge with the people of California and beyond. They are the leaders of today, and importantly of our future, with a clear appreciation of the value of education, with their feet solidly grounded in the realities of daily life.
UCR students will be the educators, physicians and health care workers, attorneys, engineers, business leaders, politicians, librarians, and social workers for your children and grandchildren. UCR grads become World Series champs...in the fabulous game 6 of this year’s World Series Marc Rzepczynski pitched a perfect inning for St Louis Cardinals, and last year Dan Runzler received a World Series ring with the Giants as a pitcher. UCR students of today and tomorrow will be the entrepreneurs and innovators that provide leadership and solutions to the growing issues at home and around the world.

You have...I have...a vested interest in their success. This is a mission we can be proud of, a mission that we honor in this room tonight through our accomplished alumni. This is the noble mission that our supporters help sustain and expand.

As I close this evening and look around at our campus today, and reflect on what has been accomplished in just over 50 years. As I consider our alumni, and their contributions to society, I feel tremendous confidence in the ability of our students and our alumni to fulfill their promise, and in so doing, to make a difference to the lives of all Californians – indeed, the world.

Thank you for being part of those accomplishments. Thank you for joining me tonight to help fulfill that promise.

You my introducing Roy Overstreet, one of UCRs pioneer class graduates. He was asked yesterday What does it feel like now to return and see all of the life around you? Roy replied:

“I guess you could say that I returned because of two pioneers. I returned as a pioneer African American student to my alma mater. But I also returned because public education is under assault and I see the way Chancellor White is leading UCR, and doing so with the important power of excellence through diversity. I was a pioneer, and so is he, in providing affordable access to the underserved communities and fighting for young people of every creed and color.”

Mr. Overstreet, thank you for those kind words. But you are wrong, sir. You are a pioneer; I am a servant...a servant to each of you in this room this evening, a servant to our students, a servant to our faculty and our community. I am a grateful servant, touched – as an immigrant and first-generation student myself – by the transformative power of the University of California at age 23.

It is my deep privilege and honor, with the love and support of my wife Karen and my family, and the support of this inspiring and proud community, to serve and give back now some 39 years later...and counting.

My many thanks to all this evening...