

Ideas for Distinguished Faculty Award

To say I am humbled is a gross overstatement.

When I first heard this amazing news, I truly wondered why I was receiving this honor. I am not an extraordinary research scientist who has made some life-altering discovery. I have not brought in millions to the university through large research grants. I come from a small, humble department that doesn't do a lot of high-tech, glamorous and financially lucrative procedures. Sure, I love teaching, and hope I've been able to help some of the thousands of students I've worked with over the years become the doctors they want to be, but at this institution I'm surrounded by some of the most inspiring and awesome medical educators on the planet. And yes, I'd started an interesting and innovative program bringing together medicine, the arts, and humanities, but others have initiated more impressive programs. Could I have been mistaken for someone else?

Once I got over the worst waves of imposter syndrome, I thought more deeply about the meaning of this award. I realized that, in an important way, perhaps the most important way, my receiving this acknowledgment was not a mistake, but a validation, not a validation of me, particularly, but of certain kinds of faculty member of whom there are countless numbers at this institution. In this sense, perhaps I am standing here for all the researchers and their teams who have not, as yet, made a big splash breakthrough, but who toil diligently day after day, week after week, year after year on their benches, in their labs. Maybe I'm standing here for all those who every day take their places on the front lines of clinical medicine, dedicating themselves to improving the wellbeing of patients who will never be donors to UCI, who are vulnerable, marginalized, and often overlooked in our society. And it's possible that I'm standing here as a placeholder for all my brilliant colleagues who strive with such heart and love to ensure UCI graduates physicians who are not only knowledgeable and competent, but empathic, reflective, and kind. And finally, I might be standing here on behalf of all my fellow faculty members who strive every day to fulfill their own visions of how to make the way we care for our suffering patients and for ourselves a little kinder, more compassionate, more humane.

By honoring me with this award, the university and School of Medicine honors all of us who do our best to fulfill our piece of the puzzle; who do not despair but rather, in the words of one of my role models, RBG, persist on the path toward building a more just, equitable, humanistic institution and society; and who just try to stay connected with those around us in the hope that this does some good.

It is with these thoughts that I happily and humbly accept this award.