This award citation was read during Davidson College's 177th commencement ceremony on Sunday, May 18, 2014.

The professor we honor today artfully employs what students describe as a "unique sense of humor," not only to capture their interest, but also to help them mine the depths of human experience. As one alumna explains, that sense of humor "really sets this professor apart...It is sly but gentle, sarcastic but kind, dark but never pessimistic. Above all [it] is imbued with a certain kind of wisdom,...that finding humor in life, despite life's inevitable darkness and difficulty, is essential if one is to live life fully." Finding the sweet spot between learning and laughter is what this "wise, funny" teacher does best, fostering, in the words of another student, "an incredible class dynamic through enthusiastic lectures, specific discussion questions, and light-hearted, well-timed bad jokes."

Sweet spots abound in students' accounts of this professor's gifts. One tells of actual sweets -- "handcrafted, European chocolates" - delivered to a 1:30 class on a Friday afternoon along with graded papers turned in only two days before. Any professor, writes this student, "who provides [such] chocolates...is automatically a good teacher in my book." But it is the more amorphous and meaningful sweet spots that most praise. Another student shares that this professor "has mastered the fine balance of pushing [us] to new limits while still keeping the fun of learning present at all times." "Almost every class meeting," elaborates another, "integrates a solid and pleasantly diverse mix of audio, visual, and text sources with just enough lecture to give students a thorough base of knowledge and...to draw out a meaningful understanding and new ideas" through discussion.

In such caring and careful hands, the pedagogical becomes personal. Students marvel at this teacher's "uncanny skill in connecting with students" and forging "lasting bonds." "Integral to [his] classes," observes one admirer, "is the respect" demonstrated toward, and cultivated in, each student. "Humble and genuine, [he] carries [a] commitment to...students past the door of the classroom." Reflects another, "even more valuable than the lessons [he] taught me about history, culture, and literature were the lessons...about respect, integrity, and kindness." Bestowing "never-faltering confidence in and kindness towards" one's students is time-consuming work. "I speculated that this professor does not sleep," notes an awestruck beneficiary. "It did not seem possible that an individual could extend office hours past dinnertime and return each of our papers with a typed page of insightful comments."

There is something quixotic about this teacher's quest on behalf of students and subject - it is optimistic, romantic, and extravagant. But unlike Don Quixote, who tilted at windmills to no avail, this professor's efforts prove transformative. His course on Golden Age Spanish literature "changed my life," writes a student, who subsequently declared a Spanish major: "I was only a sophomore vaguely interested in Spanish, [but] through the medium of medieval, renaissance, and baroque Spanish literature, [he] taught me" confidence and a love of learning. A self-designated "nerd" was inspired by another course, the slyly (and characteristically) entitled Dying of Love in Medieval Spain: "His passion for medieval literature was infectious. With humor and grace he helped us see what seemed to be dusty and inaccessible texts as living, subversive narratives."
Because of your infectious enthusiasm for the life of the mind and the laughter in life, and for helping students discover that "academics are an intensely personal journey, and that the collegiate endeavor has meaning only insofar as it remains relevant and in service to the wider community," we are honored to present the 2014 Hunter-Hamilton Award to you, Professor Samuel Sánchez y Sánchez.