“What kind of memories were stored in this brain? I wonder why this artery branches the way it does? What sport did these strong muscles play?”

Although we are all students of different fields, one thing we have in common is the amount of time that we have spent with our anatomy atlas. We have studied for hours to engrain the connections, pathways, and anatomical relationships into our head in order to best prepare for the upcoming lab. The reality however, which we come to find throughout every lab, is that the human body is not this straightforward. The human body does not always look like the atlas or the lecture slides. Anatomical variation lies within each human body and it is the uncovering of these differences that I have found to be moments of awe. It has been these moments that have allowed me to step back and revel in the intricacy and beauty of the human body, specifically of the individuals who graciously donated their bodies to our education. We are extremely lucky to have the opportunity to learn the human body through this hands-on experience. Although this experience requires extreme focus and attention to detail, appreciating the human within the body is just as critical.

Most of the students in this room will become health care professionals or scientists. Their choice to pursue these careers will be driven by the true passion for the human body and the physiology that constructs it. Our success as physicians or scientists however will not simply come from our mastery of the human body, the memorization of the atlas, but it will be heightened by our ability to communicate with compassion, to interact with social awareness and to understand the context of the situations we will face. Observing individual differences and anatomical variation within the donors has been the context that has humanized this experience for me and has reminded me why I am so fascinated by the human body. I want to pursue a career in medicine to better understand the mechanics of the human body in order to contribute to advances in health, wellness and disease treatment. But it is the ability to understand the system within each of my future patients that ultimately fuels my passion for this career. Learning anatomy through the donors has been the beginning of my pursuit towards this understanding. On behalf of the Modern Human Anatomy program, I want to take the opportunity to appreciate the stories and the context that lie within the donors and thank them for being our greatest teachers. I would like to thank them for their contribution to science because they have not only impacted our mastery of anatomy for the rest of our careers, but they have also reminded us of the spectacular machine that is our body and the beauty that is each human.