Thank you so much for the kind words, Mary. I certainly have big shoes to fill. I originally got involved in student government as a first year thanks to Mary in fact. As a first-year I lived on the Sustainability Floor of Morrison Residence Hall, a natural recruiting stop for the Environmental Affairs Committee of Student Government. Mary came and spoke at one of our first meetings encouraging us wide-eyed first years to apply to be on her committee. She seemed nice, and fun to work with so I jumped on board and haven’t looked back! Mary, you’ve been an incredible mentor to me throughout my career here at Carolina, I’m certainly going to miss your enthusiasm and positive energy on campus but I know you’re going to be taking that energy out into the world and making a difference everywhere you go.

Next I just want to say how incredibly grateful and humbled I am to have this opportunity before me. I absolutely could not have done it without the support, energy, dedication of all the incredible people in my life. Most importantly I need to thank my mom and dad who have *always* pushed me to excel but more importantly to do the right thing. They have both led by example everyday of my life teaching me valuable lessons in hard-work, compassion, and integrity and I certainly would not be who I am today without them. I also want to thank my wonderful friends and peers who have not only acted as an incredible support network throughout the challenges of college, but have also pushed me to be my best. Everyone always says their favorite thing about Carolina is the people, it’s cliché, but it’s just so true! I am inspired by my peers here at UNC every day, their accomplishments are incredible and are matched by a deep compassion and love for the world and people around them – a combination unlikely to be found at any other university.

Talking about the wonderful people here at Carolina is a perfect segue into my vision of what the Carolina Way means to me. This is something I’ve thought a lot about over the past few years, but I could never really articulate it until I read the many eulogies printed in remembrance of former Student Body President Eve Carson a few weeks back. One of them described Eve’s vision for Carolina as a place of “Excellence with a heart.” Carolina strives not only to be a top tier academic institution, but also to be a university committed to public service. Carolina is not only a university dedicated to having the best professors and highest academic standards, but also to being the university of the people, and for the people.

This charge, to be a place of excellence with a heart is not an easy mission to uphold, however it is one that we must take seriously now more than ever. In the face of rising tuition and budget cuts we must find a way to remain accessible while still maintaining our academic excellence. (Other examples???) As Student Body President I want to empower each and every individual on campus to embody this spirit of excellence with a heart. Student government doesn’t have to just be about accomplishing platform goals, and setting university policy, it can also be an organization that inspires students to be their best in every way.