Congratulations to IGR, for 25 years of promoting deep learning and social justice that are the cornerstones of the program. … and to all the IGR staff and instructors for the personal and professional investment it takes to sustain their important work.

I am here from CRLT, a strong organizational ally and colleague of IGR, also committed to deep learning and social justice.

Engaged learning is the foundation of what we do. It is the core of learning. And our work is also based on research, so we know what makes a difference in teaching and learning.

Kelly asked me to say a few words about engaged learning and about resources. I have three key points to share today, all based in research.

My first point is from the research on learning: Engaged learning is learning that lasts. We know that learning is deepest when material being learned can attach to prior knowledge – that doesn’t mean reinforce prior knowledge, but connect with it … and when it relates to student experience. And that is a challenge for university instructors. They are experts, often far from the novice learning status of students, and often very far from the experiential background of their students, the varied backgrounds of their students. We help faculty translate the science of learning to their own pedagogical strategies, to connect, to pursue excellence and effectiveness. This is NOT about entertaining. This is about instructors learning, about studying what students are learning, checking in, and making the processes of teaching and learning more explicit and more reflective.

Second point is from research on inclusive excellence: Engaged learning promotes social justice. We have instructors challenged now by diversity that grows complicated. Issues of social inequalities based on inequalities in our history are mixed with variation in the international background of the globalizing university, in our work, and in our students. This remains a challenge for instructors who engage students in deep discussion about power relations, in political,
institutional, interactional contexts, and discourses about identity and power. This is also a challenge for instructors who are not teaching that material. All of those factors are in their classrooms.

One good thing about this complicated time is that this is also a time when we have great new tools for determining if our teaching is effective across social differences. We can look at student learning and see what is working across different demographics, across race, across class, across other differences. We help instructors learn about difference, and we help them with strategies that result in academic success for students who are underrepresented in their fields, for all students. And we help them track the results.

There are differences between teaching for inclusion and teaching that excludes. Every classroom has the potential to be one that is inclusive, and every classroom has the potential to exclude, to marginalize; we help Instructors make that difference.

My third point, from the research on organizational development: Engaged learning helps create allies. And this is something that is not only for students. This is for all of us. The skill building we teach is something we practice is something we give to one another. There are so many places across campus where people are learning to navigate differences. We all can benefit from one another, learning from one another. We benefit from being allies in our work, from collaborating where we can, and from creating institutional and social impact that is greater because we are all here.

The work each of us does benefits because there is a collectivity of resources on campus. A number of us provide instructional support... including IGR, CRLT, UROP, Science Learning Center, WiSE, and others. We provide grants for innovation and experiential learning – in addition to the aforementioned, Arts at Michigan and Arts of Citizenship. We provide assist with individuals work on how to hold to their identities while navigating the institution, through Growing Allies, MESA, OAMI and the Spectrum Center, for example. We also examine the institution itself, the diversity we have both in terms of numbers and in terms of climate and the directions we are going. We have the Office of Institutional Equity, the Diversity Council, and NCID. And we all have numerous websites, CRLT has a great one, take a look, and resources abound.

I should mention here that, for CRLT, working with IGR has been one of our longest collaborations. Together, and with the support of the Rackham Graduate School, we teach a six-week program for graduate students on multicultural facilitation for the classroom. And with the support of the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Lester Monts, we have been co-teaching an institute for faculty to develop their dialogue skills, and the skills of their students. These great programs are just an example of what happens when different talents and perspectives come together for the greater good.

Being allies means more than working together. It means this: gatherings like this where we sit together, with some people we’ve known and some who are new to us. We create the opportunity to form allies whenever we get together, whenever we are brought together. We create new skills
by listening to one another. Learning to navigate difference, it is ongoing. We help others do it; we learn ourselves. And this is the way we create allies, by connecting with one another.

And so I congratulate IGR not only on the 25 years, but on creating tables like these, over and over. And appreciate IGR’s creating the opportunities for us to talk across our differences, and to learn from one another.

We thank IGR for bringing this group together today. And we thank you for celebration of the values and skills that IGR upholds and promotes.