Yesterday and today we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Department of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science. I would like to take a minute to reflect on what we mean by department in an academic setting.

The academic department is the core academic unit to which outstanding faculty, students and staff are recruited and in which they thrive. They are the “villages” where faculty and staff pool their intellectual strengths to create new knowledge. They are where senior faculty nurture young colleagues to become nationally and internationally recognized scholars. And they are where faculty “raise” students by constantly reviewing and revising the curriculum and mentoring students as they progress through a major. They are the single most important academic unit in the university and they are where quality originate.

Over the last decade my departmental colleagues instituted many reforms that resulted in a streamlined curriculum that attracted enough undergraduate applications to increase our enrollments by fivefold while decreasing the time to degree by one year. We accomplished the latter by ensuring that no artificial impediments - such as unavailable courses – prevented students from progressing.

In the wake of the onerous increases in tuition this has resulted in substantial savings for our students and their families. A graduating class of 100 students saves the parents of those students about $1.3 million as a direct result of the reduced time to degree.

Such innovation is just one small way that our faculty have, form the beginning, stepped up and led. Take these examples:

* Original Curriculum – CHE faculty must teach fluid mechanics and thermodynamics; CHE faculty now teach computer methods
* No cookie cutter approach to graduate education: led the reform of Ph.D. requirements in the College
* Started graduate student recruitment weekend
* Started four year offers for Ph.D. students
* First departmentally based honors program
* First to form bi-lateral agreement with another department to share teaching with chemistry
* First to have endowed chair explicitly for young faculty
* First to develop a freshman design-based course to explicitly recruit and retain top UGs.
* First to have mentorship program started by and run by UGs.
* First to start a lecture series in honor of a faculty member in Engr.
* First departmentally-based tutoring program
* First tutoring program for upper division students
* First to make summer an integral part of our offerings
* First to institute Faculty Milestone Lecture
* First to have a 50th celebration!

As I said at the beginning, my comments – my beliefs about the university are department centric because that is where excellence in a university starts. A few years ago I found I was not alone in this thinking. Former UC President Clark Kerr wrote, “A campus is a collection of departments, and each department has an external and internal life”. He believed that the success of the university is underwritten by the success of individual departments. And today, we have seen outstanding examples of his external and internal lives. Our internal life - faculty, staff and current students - all participated in putting together this great event. And we thank you, our alumni and friends – a core part of our external life – to take the time to join us in this wonderful celebration. Thank you and have a wonderful evening.