I imagine that all of you are here today, because you know President Van Zandt, or want to know more about him and the future of The New School. I’d like to welcome you all—the friends, family and acquaintances of David Van Zandt, as well as those of you who may simply be curious strangers.

And of course I’d like to welcome our new president.

This is a new beginning—a new opportunity. Like anyone coming to The New School for the first time, I wonder if President Van Zandt had to answer the same question that most of us did:

“What new school?”

That single unassuming question offers the beginning of a definition of who we all are—individuals that risk going places that most others have never even imagined.

But really, what is The New School? Yes, The New School is renowned for its progressive pedagogy, and we’ve had our share of academic luminaries over the years, as well as our share of press—both positive, and how can I say it... “educational”. However, many in this institution feel that the current New School reality is not The New School mythology we so often invoke, even though many of us also believe that education is a force for social change and liberation. How can we each do our part to make sure this is The New School we all want it to be, rather than the magical New School marketed to the outside world?

The New School is what it is, because of you: the people in this room.

President Van Zandt came here and did something that not many people in his position would do—he listened. He walks around and waits in line for the elevator and meets people. He does what we are all here to do—he learns.

We must continue learning together and use our collective knowledge to make this university a better place, continuously challenge the status quo and ultimately create systems of change.

The University Student Senate is a resource where you may share your ideas of how to begin, or how to continue. As students, we must do our part to make this university more transparent, supportive and just.

I was honored to be asked to speak on behalf of the students this evening. However, I could only speak on behalf of myself. Each of us in this room has a voice. President Van Zandt has made clear his intentions to listen and to collaborate. I encourage those of you in this room who do not yet know our new president to remain curious, but not strangers working in silos when we are promoting a common agenda and learning more each day, together.

President Van Zandt, we look forward to working with you.

Thank you.