Faculty Presentation Speech: Over the many years of teaching I have come across few students who embody so many of the outstanding traits of a scholar and a theater practitioner that Ms. Mingus so effortlessly displays. Kayla Mingus obviously loves to learn. Her assignments, presentations, and performances in both my Introduction to Theater class and Introduction to Acting class demonstrate a depth of thought and an originality of approach, in which it is clear time and energy has been invested. Her presentation of Sam Shepard’s landmark play True West introduced her peers to the Shepard’s scathing vision of American masculinity through an illuminating power-point and entertaining lecture that exhibited a thorough knowledge of the piece. Her work on Almost Maine’s befuddled and quirky Clare in acting class, where she volunteered to be the first to work through the exhaustive and exhausting process of finding beats and physicalizing actions, was courageous and once again revealed a talent for critical thinking. “Excellent” is a word she reads often on her returned work.

But Kayla also possesses something that raises her above the “good student” role: awareness of others. Kayla cares about her peers. Her skills as a scholar are matched in Kayla’s make-up by her responsive and open attitude toward her fellow students. And this is what stands her in good stead as both a theater student and a theater practitioner. Building a community through theater class is a tenuous exercise. You need people willing to be “the first,” more so than in other academic classes, because theater is about sharing and exploring what it means to be human: the ups and downs of existing side by side in a world that is ever-changing. Kayla consistently offered to be the guinea-pig,
regardless of looking foolish or possibly failing—motivated I found after a while—not by a “get it over with” or a “look at me” attitude but by a sense of “for the good of all.” This may seem dramatic and in fact it is, because this is what it takes to be a successful practitioner of the theater, indeed this is what it takes to be a successful human being.

Kayla was there for anyone in her cohort who was struggling: she offered notes, time, and encouragement, and was consistently at-the-ready to help the class in any way. She allowed me to share her work as an anonymous example to peers, she gave me feedback on the D2L Assignments and Announcements, at my request—aiding me in understanding how to effectively communicate when we went to on-line learning, and she did all this with good humor and good sense. Having Kayla in my classes this semester has made my own experience at Kish satisfying, enjoyable and—what most instructors crave because we love to learn too—educational. Through Kayla’s candor and critical thinking, I was able to view my classes: assignments, lectures, exercises, and prompts, through the eyes of a student. A view most instructors never get—I am very grateful to have had Kayla Mingus in my classroom. Kayla “will go far” as they say, but the really great thing is, she will bring others with her. Congratulations Ms. Mingus, I envy your future professors.