Good morning,

It is an honor and a privilege to be here to accept the Student Servant-Leadership Award. I would like to thank Debra Crusoe for recommending me and encouraging me to apply for this award and for her continued support of the Black Graduate Student Association.

I would like to thank the members of the Black Graduate Student Association, especially those here today, who have given me a platform to improve as a servant-leader by serving our community on campus.

Thank you to my research advisor, Dr. Klaus Lackner, for believing in me and continuing to support me through my graduate career.

Thank you to my roommate Leah for getting up early to be here this morning and her support as a fellow PhD student, and our other roommates, Chloe and Elisabeth, for their consistent friendship and accountability.

Thank you to my mother, Stephanie, my sister Ashley, and all of the many family members and friends that continue to love and encourage me every day. And a special thank you to my dad and step-mom, Joe and Carolyn Morton, for traveling all the way from Ohio to be here today.

As I was planning what I wanted to say this morning, I have been thinking a lot about what it means to be a servant-leader and how humbled I am to be receiving this award.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”
Dr. King was a servant leader because he never encouraged others to make sacrifices for civil rights without making those sacrifices himself first. Although there were many people who hated him for his color and his cause, he was willing to sacrifice his reputation, safety, and ultimately his life, for the benefit of all people, not just those that agreed with him.

If we want to be leaders who truly create change, we have to be servants first.

My graduate research looks at designing policies that reduce carbon dioxide emissions in order to eliminate the negative effects of climate change. Many people see this research as saving the planet, but I am among those that see it as helping to save humanity.

The truth is, the planet doesn’t need us, we need the planet. As we continue to pollute our earth, we are really only hurting ourselves.

Regardless if you believe in climate change or not, we collectively need clean water and clean air so that we can sustain the human race.

In parallel, regardless if you like the color of my skin or not, we collectively need to fight against injustices so that we can sustain our humanity.

I hope that through my research and my leadership, I will be able to help others change their mindset about what matters to them and how they can contribute to the greater good.

Whether that is reducing our energy consumption or starting a conversation with someone very different from ourselves, we can humble ourselves and realize that our humanity is worth being a little uncomfortable for.

Thank you!