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Richard Wilson

Illinois Wesleyan University

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From the President's Desk

This letter appeared in the Winter 2006 issue of the Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine.

This is the first of what will be regular communications from me in the *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine*. In these brief letters I will share with you my views on issues facing our University, update you on major initiatives, or discuss accomplishments by our students, faculty, and staff.

As you know, our University prides itself on being a welcoming academic community for students with multiple talents and interests. In the finest tradition of the liberal arts, we appeal to students who are broadly curious, creative, and intellectually passionate.

Why is it that multitalented students are attracted to us and why do they seem to thrive here? In my view it is because they are not forced to make choices. We do not push them into limiting their options. They are not rushed into decisions about majors or careers. Instead, we encourage our students to pursue their intellectual passions, curiosity, and creativity in ways that are most meaningful to them. For that reason, the campus is filled with students who find ways to express their diverse interests through the curriculum and through the co-curriculum. I see examples of this every day:

- Pamela Solowski, a senior biology and Hispanic studies major from Lemont, Ill., hosted a campus drive this fall to gather supplies to be distributed during a week-long trip to Nicaragua, where Pam and a team of volunteers will set up temporary clinics and assist with feeding programs. The team expects to see around 1,000 patients on their trip.
- IWU hosted a discussion panel this fall on "The Benefits and Costs of a Living Wage in Central Illinois." Panelists included Jean Pretz, assistant professor of psychology; two local politicians; and Todd Kumler, a senior economics and math major. Todd became interested in the idea of poverty reduction while studying at the London School of Economics.
- Matthew Anderson, a senior biology and sociology major from Mt. Prospect, Ill., was recently honored for his work in the Governor's Environmental Corps.
- The student group that since 1993 has published *Tributaries*, a fine arts and literary magazine of student work, will host the third annual Tongue & Ink creative writing conference later this year.
- A new student Madrigal Group hosted its first Madrigal Dinner in November, with the goal of bringing Renaissance culture to life through music, drama, and cuisine.

Simply put, our students come to us because they have a passion for learning and growth. The important outcomes for our graduates are measured in the successes - both personal and vocational - that they enjoy in life.

I cannot help but think about the richness of these experiences in light of calls across the country for colleges and universities to become more accountable for the quality of education they provide. The most recent example comes from the Spellings Commission, which was convened by U.S. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings. Among the recommendations

recently forwarded by this group was a call for national student achievement testing that would allow comparison of results across institutions.

On the surface this seems to be a reasonable proposal, and I favor universities providing information to prospective students, parents, alumni, and friends on the impact of the undergraduate experience. Whoever considers such data, however, should bear in mind that a student's education has multiple dimensions. It would be a mistake to reduce the assessment of the collegiate experience to what can be measured on a standardized test. Such misguided efforts will overlook the concerted efforts of universities to provide opportunities that stimulate the imagination, creativity, and civic engagement necessary to solve the problems of an increasingly diverse and complicated world.