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Remarks and Messages

Richard F. Wilson

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## Annual Report to Faculty and Staff

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*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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Annual Report on the University to the Faculty and Staff  
by President Richard F. Wilson

August 23, 2006

I look forward to this breakfast each fall, both because it is the start of another academic year and because all faculty and staff are involved. There are many ways that we signal to ourselves and others that the experience at Illinois Wesleyan is special and this breakfast is one of them.

This is also a good opportunity for me thank everyone who has been working hard to prepare for the start of another school year. As I have walked around campus over the last two weeks, it is clear that the pace has quickened and everyone has been working diligently to get everything ready for the start of classes, from those responsible for the buildings and grounds, residential life, orientation, and information technology, to those who are involved in providing First Year Advising, the Summer Reading Program, the Gateway Colloquia, and intercollegiate athletics.

Before proceeding further with my comments, I would like to invite all new members of the faculty and staff to stand and be recognized at this time.

For the past two years, the breakfast has immediately preceded the Fall Faculty Conference, a tradition that I reluctantly had to change because my father is undergoing surgery on Friday. We will return to the traditional schedule next year.

I plan to use the balance of my time this morning commenting on some of our major accomplishments over the past year, as well as some of the issues and challenges facing us in the immediate future. I will save time at the end for questions or comments.

### Strategic Plan

It will surprise none of you for me to say that one of the highlights of the past year was the completion of the strategic plan. As I told you at the outset, this document is something that I take very seriously and it will be used to frame decisions as we move forward. You will see elements of the plan reflected in many of the remarks that follow.

### Students

Yesterday, we welcomed 563 first-year students to campus along with 29 transfer students. Both of these numbers are on target.

- The quality of the entering class, as measured by average ACT score and class rank is identical to last year
- The number of applications for admission totaled 3,300, an increase of 400 over the previous year and the second highest total in the history of the University

- Last year we increased the number of ALANA students by 50%, from approximately 60 to 90. We have sustained that effort for a second year and enrolled 88 ALANA students this fall.
- We also increased the number of international students last year, almost doubling that number from 10 to 19. We have sustained that increase this year and welcomed 18 international students to campus.

I am grateful for the work of the staff in the admissions office, financial aid office, and international office, as well as all of you who helped with some element of our admissions program over the past year, for these accomplishments.

#### Personnel

I don't think I will have to tell anyone in this room that much time and effort has been devoted to searches over the past twelve months. On a personal level, I am delighted to begin the fall semester with all senior administrative positions filled for the first time since I was appointed President. Since this time last year, three executive officers have begun their work. I would like them to stand and be recognized:

- Beth Cunningham, Provost and Dean of the Faculty
- Matt Kurz, Vice President for Public Relations
- Marty Smith, Vice President for Advancement

I would ask that members of the search committees for these three positions to please stand and be recognized.

Immediately following this breakfast, we will be holding a reception for Beth and Matt who have joined us in the last month. I invite all of you to attend and welcome them to campus.

Several other key appointments have been made recently:

- Carl Teichman, Director of Government and Community Affairs
- Susan Bassi, Executive Assistant to the President
- Steve Seibring, Director of Major Gifts,
- Ann Harding, Director of the Alumni Association
- Stacy Shimizu, Acting Director of the Office of International Programs

#### Faculty

We will welcome eight new tenure line and 17 visiting faculty this fall and will be conducting 14 searches in the coming year to fill tenure track lines. Seven of the 14 are tied to the conversion of full-time visiting positions to tenure track lines. These conversions were debated extensively last spring, and I acknowledge the range of opinions on the wisdom of those conversions. I supported the conversions because it was clear to me that our undergraduate program would benefit in multiple ways by appointing tenure line faculty to these positions rather than continuing to meet demonstrated needs with visiting faculty.

One very exciting initiative in the coming year will be the appointment of at least two and perhaps three faculty members to fill vacant or new endowed chairs and professorships. Guidelines for selecting recipients were developed and discussed last spring. These appointments will:

- recognize faculty who have distinguished themselves through teaching, research, and service;
- pay tribute to the donors who have funded the endowed positions; and
- provide a salary supplement and modest stipend for scholarly work to the recipients.

#### Staff

I announced at this meeting last fall that a Staff Council would be formed to serve in an advisory role to me and represent the interests of all support and physical plant staff. The Council was elected in September and has held regular meetings throughout the year. The Council has devoted considerable time to its mission statement and to electing representatives to various committees. I might add that the Staff Council has led the way in terms of electronic elections. The Convenor of the Staff Council for the coming year is Ken Detloff; the Co-convenor is Patrick McLane.

I would also like to mention three other developments that affect the physical plant and support staff:

- You may recall that we joined the Tuition Exchange Program of the Council of Independent Colleges Consortium last year. I am pleased to report that we have children of four employees attending other institutions as part of this exchange, and all four are children of physical plant and support staff.
- I am also pleased to report that in a few days, John Bryant and Cathy Spitz will announce the details of a program to move all hourly staff to a payroll system that is bi-weekly rather than monthly. This has been an important issue for many staff members, and I delighted that we can make this change.
- Finally, one of the consistent topics emerging in conversations with all staff on campus--and that certainly was highlighted in the strategic plan--is the importance of incorporating some kind of performance based system into our salary program for support staff, physical plant staff, and administrative staff. Those conversations will be initiated this fall under the leadership of the

Cathy Spitz and her staff in the Office of Human Resources and include advice and assistance from the Staff Council and other appropriate groups on campus.

## The Curriculum

A significant element of the strategic plan was concerned with curricular planning. There was widespread support for the general idea that we have to develop a process that will allow us to assess our curriculum, make investments where additional resources are justified, and make decisions concerning program expansion very carefully. The challenge for us is that there are elements of this task that fall legitimately within the purview of standing committees, e.g., the Curriculum Council and CUPP; elements that one might argue are the province of the Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committee; and other elements that might require a new committee or task force. I am personally very interested in moving this piece of our strategic plan forward and look forward to working with our new Provost and the faculty on this very important matter. The Fall Faculty Conference will “kick off” the faculty discussion.

One aspect of the curriculum that I hope we can work together to resolve quickly is the future of May Term and the Gateway Colloquium. The discussion of these programs began last year. Much effort was devoted to this task and draft reports were prepared in the spring. Both topics will return to the agenda this fall, and I will do everything I can to facilitate resolution on these two important parts of our curriculum.

I am really excited about the plan that has been developed this year for the Summer Reading Program for First Year Students and the connection between that experience and the President’s Convocation. Barbara Ehrenreich’s book, *Nickel and Dimed*, was selected as the reading for all entering students. Later this week, many faculty and staff are participating as discussion group leaders, thus making this experience one that is shared by many people across campus. That experience will be further enhanced when Barbara Ehrenreich comes to campus in a few weeks to deliver the keynote address at the President’s Convocation.

Last year, Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, appointed a Special Commission on the Future of Higher Education. The Commission issued its report recently, and I expect many of that group’s recommendations to be implemented in one form or another over the next year or so. One of the key recommendations relates to the need for institutions to provide better information on outcomes of the collegiate experience. Illinois Wesleyan is ahead of the curve on this issue, having devoted considerable time and effort in recent years to assessment efforts, including the current consortial program funded by the Teagle Foundation. One of the instruments we are using was specifically mentioned by the Spellings Commission as an exemplar. It is imperative for us to continue efforts to assess student progress and develop ways to communicate results, both to improve the quality of our programs and to provide parents and students with useful information.

## Rankings

As most of you know, the season of college rankings is upon us. Last week “U.S. News” came out with its list of best colleges and, while we continued to rank among the top national liberal

arts institutions, we did slip a few places, from #55 in 2005 to #61 this year. A number of measures are used to develop these rankings, and we are in the process of reviewing all of them, giving particular attention to those measures most relevant to the assessment of quality at an institution like Illinois Wesleyan. Our preliminary analysis of a few items reveals several areas of comparative strength:

- our student selectivity scores are strong, with an average ACT score for our entering class that places us among the top 40 liberal arts institutions nationally;
- our 93 percent retention rate places us in the top 40 nationally; and
- our 82 percent graduation rate is higher than 17 of the 20 institutions ranked immediately above us.

But numbers never tell the whole story. Now let me turn briefly to the “Princeton Review Best 361 Colleges” rankings that were released this week. These rankings are based on student surveys, and here is where the story comes to life. Quoting from the “Princeton Review”, here are a few of the many positive things that our students have said about us:

- Most of all, students cherish a faculty that “really cares about the students... The professors are fantastic. They make students want to attend class...”
- Typical students “couldn’t be more pleased with the educational experience...”
- And, one of the best campus resources is the Ames Library, which is ranked #9 by the Review
- In terms of campus life our students feel that the campus is “abuzz with activity.” feel “...there’s always something to do... Everyone is so friendly, even people I barely know say hi ... Maybe it’s the good old Midwest ..., but I think it’s also because the students and faculty here are truly happy.”
- Finally, our students feel that they are “the number one focus” at Illinois Wesleyan

## Budget

It has been and will remain an important strategic priority to share information on our budget with the campus community. We are making great progress in getting the budget realigned. Several important elements of this effort include:

- We have balanced the budget for the coming year
- As part of a five-year plan, the Board of Trustees approved an additional endowment draw (beyond our normal 5.25 percent payout) of \$2.3M. Through cost containment and additional revenues, that draw will be less than \$2.0M for the year just completed.

- The additional draw in FY07 has been budgeted at \$1.1M. This is last year of the additional draw, and we will work hard to reduce that draw as close to zero as possible. Every \$1M that we reduce the additional draw increases our operating budget by \$50,000 annually.
- The elimination of this draw is critical to our plans to begin offering a salary program that matches inflation and responds to the competitive pressures we are feeling from salary programs being offered by our peers.
- Our health insurance premiums increased by only 4% for the coming year, demonstrably different from the 10-12% rates found in other organizations. Given that there was no increase in premiums last year, our employees have seen their health insurance premiums increase only by 2% over a two-year period.
- We are budgeting approximately \$600K per year for repair and remodeling projects. The two projects most obvious to you this year will be the elevator in Stevenson Hall and the entry to Presser. I am particularly pleased with the elevator project in Stevenson Hall because it makes the oldest building on campus accessible.
- We were able to reduce the projected rate of increase in tuition from 5.5% to 5.3%. Our plan is to continue to reduce tuition rates in order to more closely follow price increases in higher education and make a quality IWU education as affordable as possible.

#### Facilities

As most of you know, we have had a special campaign underway for the past year to secure \$5.2M to build the Minor Myers Welcome Center on the site now located by the Methodist Conference Center. This new building will house the Admissions Office and the Career Center. The Board of Trustees made a major commitment to this campaign in the spring by contributing \$750,000 to this project. These gifts and others have allowed us to make significant progress. We have secure gifts and pledges totaling over \$4.4M and should reach our goal sometime this fall.

We also have received a financial commitment from Sodexo, our food service provider, that will allow us to undertake a major renovation of the Memorial Center. The project will proceed in three stages: some remodeling of the Bertholf Commons will occur this fall, followed by a major renovation of the Turfler Room during winter break. Next summer we will begin remodeling the Main Lounge and converting the patio on the east side of the Lounge into an atrium. These changes will improve the aesthetics of the building and also make it more functional for faculty, staff, and students.

We continue to explore options for transitional student housing. We have found a building design that we like and have identified a few potential locations for these buildings. During the coming year, Vice President Cavins and the Residence Life Staff will be meeting with students to develop more concrete plans for this new housing concept on campus.

#### Concluding Comment

As the previous comments indicate, this is an exciting time to be at Illinois Wesleyan. I am honored to serve as your President at this time and am grateful for the dedication and loyalty that I see everyday in the work of faculty and staff on this campus.