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From the President's Desk | Richard F. Wilson

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From the President's Desk

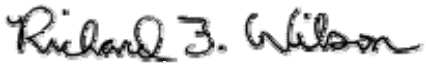
This letter appeared in the Fall 2007 issue of the Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine

As I travel around the country, visiting with alumni and friends of the University, I frequently ask how we might better prepare students for their lives and careers following graduation. I suspect that you will not be too surprised to learn that writing is at the top of the list. The faculty at Illinois Wesleyan recognized this need in affirming effective writing as a strategic priority of the University.

Writing is not only vital to our students' success while they are in college but also is essential to post-graduation endeavors. A recent report from the College Board's National Commission on Writing reveals that writing ability is critically important to employment and promotion, especially among salaried employees. This report estimates that $3.1 billion is spent annually by American businesses to improve the writing skills of their employees. Whether the task is analyzing a problem, composing a report or communicating via e-mail, the ability to write clearly, creatively and persuasively is more important than ever.

Over the summer, a committee of faculty members at Illinois Wesleyan began discussions on how we can improve student writing and strengthen the culture of writing on campus. This committee is examining keystones of our general-education curriculum associated with writing such as the Gateway Colloquium, a required course that is designed to help first-year students gain proficiency in college-level writing. The committee will also suggest ways to strengthen the support services of the University Writing Center as well as how we might enhance teaching in our writing-intensive courses offered at the upper-division level.

Because of a robust assessment program on campus, we have historical data on the writing skills of our students. We intend to continue collecting such data to help determine whether the changes we implement are making a difference and how the writing skills of Illinois Wesleyan students compare with the work of students at peer institutions.

One of the central tenets of a liberal arts education is that students learn to be critical thinkers and effective writers. I am heartened by the effort being devoted to these subjects and will keep you informed of our progress.

All the best,