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Illinois Wesleyan President Cites Progress on Diversifying the University

August 26, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. -- Illinois Wesleyan University President Richard F. Wilson pointed to the increased diversity among the Class of 2009 as an encouraging sign in the University's efforts to diversify the campus during his “State of the University” remarks delivered at an annual faculty and staff meeting on Friday (August 26).

Wilson noted that the number of African American, Hispanic, Asian American and Native American students increased almost 50 percent, from 61 last year to 90 this year. He attributed the increase to the University’s dedication to the goal of diversity, and to the hard work of admissions and financial aid personnel.

“The challenge now is to sustain the recruitment efforts in the future and to provide the support and encouragement necessary for these students to be successful at at the University,” Wilson said.

Another important characteristic of the entering class, he said, is 19 new international students. As the University strives to maintain both minority and international student numbers, “if we can do this for four years, can you imagine how this will change the face of Illinois Wesleyan?” he asked.

Wilson noted that he and his wife, Pat, had entertained the international students at a reception at his house and were impressed by their enthusiasm.

“I asked the students what they had observed in their short time here that had impressed them or surprised them,” Wilson said. “One young woman raised her hand and said, ‘The lights stay on here.’ I thought that was quite an insight into the perspective that students bring to this campus. If we can continue to increase our numbers of international students over the coming years, it will change the nature of the experience for students and for faculty at the University.”

Wilson also noted progress on strategic planning at the University, moving from goal-setting into work groups that will develop strategies for achieving the goals related to diversity, identity, human resources, student growth and development, teaching and learning, and financial resources.

In coming weeks, a new staff council will be formed by election to serve as an advisory group and to elect representatives for strategic planning and other campus committees.

A highlight of the past year was the announcement of a gift from the Funk Foundation to re-establish the endowed Isaac Funk Professorship. Wilson’s goal is to secure 40 similar endowments, which would support roughly 20 percent of the faculty. Criteria will be developed this fall for awarding professorships and chairs.

At the start of Wilson's remarks, he acknowledged the impact felt on campus at the recent death of Doug Schmied, a senior accounting and computer science major and co-captain of the football team. He remarked that the impact can be even more dramatic for students, who may be experiencing such a loss for the first time.

"One of the advantages of our size is that we can monitor how students are handling the situation and can call the counseling center for help if we notice students in serious distress," he said. "I ask that you watch for this need."