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An Inauguration Poem by Professor of English Emeritus James McGowan

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Poem for the Inauguration of Richard F. Wilson
by James McGowan, Professor of English Emeritus

Sestina: Knowledge and Wisdom

This is a happy day at IWU,
bestowing trust upon a man to lead us
in our work in offices, in classrooms,
laboratories, studios - pursuing knowledge,
as we say, and hoping to inspire
students to begin the quest for wisdom

If we can. But it is rare, this wisdom,
and is it often seen, even at IWU?
No guarantee, though we persist, and may inspire
students and ourselves toward this high goal. For us
it's best we concentrate on knowledge.
“Knowledge” and “college” rhyme. Our classrooms

are appropriate for its pursuit - classrooms
of philosophy, of science: the “wisdom
of the ages” or the sudden thrust of knowledge
at the cutting edge. At IWU
things sometimes happen that astonish us.
Teachers and students work together to inspire

breakthroughs in physics, or a poem may inspire
a piece of music. Practiced in our classrooms,
art displays, performances extend to us
a felt experience, a kind of wisdom
of imagination, proved along the nerves. You
need this too, another kind of knowledge.

There is a menace in America today: Knowledge
mis-valued by myopic moralists, who inspire
bigotry we must deplore at IWU,
smug ignorance we must challenge and oppose. Classrooms
of learned give and take expand our minds Wisdom
may be elusive anywhere, but as for us

we see where wisdom's **not**. It's up to us
to meet the new Know-Nothings in the name of knowledge,
excellence of intellect, a sign of wisdom.
Sicne is spurned, language debased; let us inspire
Attention, mental vigilance in all our classrooms.
May you be steadfast in this struggle, IWU.

We stand for knowledge as we hope for wisdom
to inspire us in classrooms, in our lives.
Scientia, Sapientia. IWU.