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Faculty and Staff Breakfast Remarks

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Faculty and Staff Breakfast

August 24, 2007

Thank you very much for attending this breakfast today. I know it is a busy time and appreciate the effort you have made to be here. I look forward to this occasion for symbolic and substantive reasons. This is one of the few occasions when we come together as a community, and I feel such opportunities are important. Your presence sends a message that you care about the university and that you care about others who work here.

This breakfast also provides me with an opportunity to share some of my thoughts about what we have accomplished over the past year and what our priorities will be for the year ahead.

As we approach the start of the fall semester, I must admit that I enjoy the pace picking up and the excitement growing around campus. I appreciate all of the effort devoted to readying the campus for the arrival of students this week. I see that preparation in many ways, including reports from special faculty committees that convened during the summer; staff members converging on Gulick and Pfeiffer with short timelines to clean, paint, and polish following installation of new sprinkler systems; last-minute efforts to help procrastinating students get registered or solve financial aid problems; special attention to international students with visa issues; preparation for student orientation; and the list goes on and on. I am reminded every day that it is both the big things and the small things that we do that make this a great university.

I would like to turn my attention now to some reflections on the state of the University in key areas. As you might expect, I will have to be selective, and I look forward to responding to questions at the end of my remarks on topics that I do not cover or that need further explanation.

Enrollment

I received a report yesterday that all 572 new students had arrived and were proceeding through registration. I give great credit to our admissions staff for reaching this target and for their efforts to build a class that is comparable to previous classes in terms of quality, that does not exceed limits in high demand areas, and that advances our long-term objectives with respect to diversity.

I am especially pleased that we have 24 international students from 16 countries in the entering class, the highest number that anyone can recall and that builds on two previous classes of approximately 20 students each. One of the college guidebooks recently quoted one of our students as saying that the number of international students on campus was “clearly noticeable.” I am hopeful that the policy change made this past year to allow international students to pay their tuition in monthly installments like domestic students will make it easier for these students to pay their bills and remain at IWU.

We also sustained the trend begun two years ago of increasing the domestic diversity of the study body. The 71 African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American students

enrolled this fall brings the total ALANA enrollment to approximately 300 over the past four years, roughly 15% of our total enrollment.

We won't have precise, overall enrollment numbers until the upper division students return in a few days, but we expect to be somewhere in the range of 2,100 to 2,110. I can't help but mention that we had a student call yesterday to ask why she had not received a bill for the fall semester. Well, the answer was that she had not registered. Now, I know we enroll bright students here but sometimes the practical matters seem to escape them.

At the same time I would like to single out those seniors who returned to campus early to help with move-in and first-year orientation.

We also have a relatively new tradition at IWU that is very impressive. A group of seniors serve as orientation leaders for small groups of new students, guiding them through the registration process and serving as mentors during these early days on campus.

Student Growth and Development

In many respects everything I will mention today is tied to student growth and development. The purpose behind curricular changes, scholarship programs, facility improvements, and endowment growth is, at its core, enhancing the educational experience of students.

At the same time, there are some special initiatives by the staff in student affairs that are important to note:

1. Implementation of the Alternative Spring Break Project
2. The focus on wellness throughout student affairs programs
3. Initial work on a co-curricular sequence on leadership development.
4. Student involvement in the Adopt a School Program at Bent Elementary School
5. Student leadership in securing a campus commitment to the Talloires Declaration related to environmental sustainability.

I am particularly excited about a new Sophomore Experience Program being implemented this fall by the Provost and Vice President for Student Affairs. The objective of the program is to arrange for faculty and staff to spend some time in a retreat setting with students who have not declared a major. I know that several of you in this room have agreed to participate, and I want to thank you for devoting time to this effort.

Human Resources

I am excited about the fact that we have 23 new faculty members (full-time and part-time) and 18 new staff members attending their first faculty and staff breakfast today. The latest list of your new colleagues is on the table, but I would like to ask all of them to stand at this time.

With the appointment of Michael Thompson as Assistant Provost and Director of Institutional Research and Planning; Hope Luckie as Chaplain; and Karen Schmidt as Librarian, all senior level administrative positions are filled—the first time that this has been true since I became president. You cannot imagine how happy I am to have reduced the number of people with “Acting” titles, despite the fact that a certain amount of theater is endemic to administration!

Much work is ahead of us for the coming year as we attempt to fill 15 permanent positions that are vacant. Some of these are the result of normal turnover and some the result of searches for which suitable candidates were not found last year. I view these searches as wonderful opportunities to strengthen the quality of the University and to help us move closer to achieving our goals with respect to diversity.

I would ask that the search committees for these positions make a special effort to ensure that the pool of finalists for these positions is diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. Over the past three years, we have increased the diversity of the student body, of the Board of Trustees, and of the staff. I need the help of the search committees in achieving the same goal with respect to the faculty. I know Provost Cunningham is committed to this goal and has some ideas on how to make progress that she will be discussing with the search committees. At core, we need to shift the focus of these committees from screening committees to search committees.

One of the academic highlights of the year was the appointment of the first two endowed professorships during my presidency. As most you know by now, Marina Balina was named to the Funk Professorship and Brian Hatcher was named to the McFee Professorship. They join six other faculty members who hold endowed professorships: Professors Criley, Hartweg, Bray, Campbell, Dey, and Seeborg. I would ask that all eight stand and be recognized at this time.

I should mention that interest in establishing endowed professorships is active among our alumni and friends. We have received funding or are in serious discussions with four more people who wish to establish endowed professorships. I also am hopeful that we will be able to set aside sufficient institutional funds to activate one or two existing professorships that have not been awarded for many years. My goal is to increase the number of endowed professorships over the next five years so that at least 20 percent of the faculty holds such positions.

Other human resource areas in which we have made progress over the past year include:

1. The role of the Staff Council has been defined, and that group has had a very active year.
2. A performance review system for non-exempt staff has been implemented.
3. A new Employee Assistance Program has been established.
4. A pandemic flu response plan is nearly complete.

5. A protocol and messaging system for emergency communications has been instituted

Teaching and Learning

Many of you participated in our third Summer Reading Program yesterday and based on my own experience I feel it was an unqualified success. The group I joined spent considerable time reflecting on some of the social justice issues raised by Dr. Paul Farmer's work in Haiti, Peru, and Russia, e.g., what is the right balance between health care policies that seek to accomplish the greatest good for the greatest number versus those that focus on the particular needs of specific individuals?

While we have had a slight decline in faculty participation in the program, I'm very proud of the increased participation among our staff colleagues. For me, this reinforces the message that all of us--faculty, students, and staff--are members of an intellectual community that values the exchange of ideas. It is my hope that staff and faculty will participate in this program in increasing numbers, not only because it is a good program for our incoming students, but also because it makes a very basic statement about who we are as an institution.

A few weeks ago, I received a preview of the work of the faculty committee that met over the summer to develop a proposal for enhancing the writing program on this campus. I know that this proposal will be part of the discussions later today, so I will not go into the details. However, I must tell you that I am very excited about the ideas being proposed and look forward to hearing how others react.

Another curricular matter that deserves mention is the progress we have made in addressing some concerns related to May Term. A proposal was developed that separated the issue of staffing for May Term from the curricular issues related to May Term. We have solved the staffing issues by allocating funds to hire enough faculty to meet student demand. This was a very important step and will give us the opportunity to consider the content of May Term in a deliberate way.

I think most of you know by now that I am supporting an effort organized by the presidents of the top liberal arts colleges in the country to abstain from completing the reputational portion of the US News survey that is administered each spring. The rationale for this position has been articulated in several articles in the last few weeks, so I won't repeat it here today. However, the point that I do want to make is that institutions like Illinois Wesleyan strengthen our position when we have good information that we are willing to share with prospective students and their parents. It is not enough to provide descriptive information about the students who come to IWU; we must develop better ways to convey what happens to those students while they are here. This is where our assessment program becomes absolutely critical. We are fortunate that we have considerable experience with assessment on this campus. I see such efforts becoming even more important in the future. There is much work to be done to devise an assessment program that we can embrace, and I look forward to those conversations.

Identity

Many of you responded to the identity survey distributed during the spring. We had a fantastic response from the campus, especially noteworthy given the time of year. The essence of the study is to determine how various constituencies perceive the University and whether those perceptions are consistent with the values articulated in our mission and vision statements.

The campus-wide Identity Committee will receive a preliminary report on this study in the next few weeks and will share those results with the campus community later this fall. The identity study will be extremely useful in building consensus around core values of the University, in communicating more effectively internally and externally, and in developing the case for our upcoming capital campaign.

Financial Resources

I have been waiting for three years to stand before this group and report that we have a balanced budget for the coming year and to say that we will make no additional draw on our endowment to get that done. I am grateful for your patience and careful use of existing funds while we realigned the budget and positioned ourselves for the future. This is truly a defining moment for the University in terms of our financial health.

We achieved this objective through efficiencies obtained in existing budgets, modest tuition increases, increases in gift income, and favorable stock market performance. I am particularly pleased to report that the Development Office exceeded \$9 million in gifts during FY07, a 30% increase over last year and one of the highest gift totals in recent memory. Funding for endowed and current use scholarships, for endowed professorships, and for the Minor Myers Welcome Center were the top categories of support.

The performance of the stock market exceeded our fondest hopes for the fiscal year. We will end the year with \$185-\$190 million in our endowment, despite a correction in the market that occurred in the last few days of July. This total represents an increase of at least \$20 million over last year. I should also report that the Investment Committee of the Board of Trustees has worked hard to diversify our portfolio to cushion any short-term declines in specific asset classes.

We are in the early stages of the next campaign. Considerable time and attention was devoted to establishing fund-raising priorities during the spring semester, and the tentative list was shared with the Board of Trustees in May. Following that meeting, the list was refined and incorporated into a feasibility study that was conducted over the summer.

The consultant hired to conduct the feasibility study provided a preliminary report yesterday, and I must admit that I am encouraged by the level of alumni support for the campaign in general and for building faculty and student endowments in particular. More interviews will be conducted in the next few weeks, and a final report will be presented to the Board of Trustees in October.

Facilities

I don't think I need to spend a lot of time discussing efforts to construct or remodel facilities on this campus. Those of you who have been on campus this summer could not help but notice the work that was underway, from sidewalks and sprinkling systems to the Memorial Center and the Welcome Center. The construction crews have been amused with my frequent excursions through construction sites and have issued me the requisite protection.

The new sprinkling systems in Gulick and Pfeiffer were installed just in time to welcome students back to campus. We used the occasion to remodel bathrooms and lounges in those two buildings. I had a student stop me earlier this week to express his thanks for the great new showers in Pfeiffer. All of this is being done through timely refinancing of bonds and at no cost to our operating budget. We will do two more halls next summer.

The renovation of Main Lounge is also in the final stages. Installation of the bamboo flooring remains to be done, a task that should take no more than a week once humidity levels fall enough to safely proceed. Finally, the Welcome Center is underway and on schedule. I view this project from the catbird's seat and am impressed with the progress being made. We are on schedule to move into this building next summer.

In the coming year we will take the first steps in defining expectations for a new classroom building and a new theater/performing arts center. Once that has been done, we can begin to evaluate whether Sheean can be remodeled in a viable way or should be replaced.

Conclusion

Well, you have been very patient this morning, and we have covered a lot of territory. As you can see, much has been accomplished and much remains to be done. I am excited about the possibilities and look forward to working with all of you to continue the growth and development of this outstanding university.