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Richard F. Wilson
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Experience IWU: Parent Orientation

June 20, 2009

The Experience IWU program for parents marks a special time of year in the life of Illinois Wesleyan. This event signifies that graduation and May Term are over, and we are turning our attention to the arrival of new and returning students in the fall. This is an exciting moment for us, and we are delighted to have you here.

Distinctiveness

Many of you attended one of the Open Houses held during the fall or winter and heard me talk about some of the distinctive characteristics of the university

• The emphasis on quality that permeates the institution

• A curriculum that embraces and balances the liberal arts and the professions and that responds to students who have more than one curricular interest.

• The commitment of the faculty to teaching, scholarship, and artistic expression with a goal of active student engagement.

• The personal attention given to students while they are here and to their success as graduates.

Principles

I suspect that these qualities are what attracted your son or daughter to enroll at this institution. What I would like to do this morning is shift the lens of the camera slightly from who we are to what you can expect as parents:

• Although students and parents focus pretty quickly on the role of college as preparation for a career, we try to balance that interest with an overarching consideration of preparation for life. Students must surely learn to think clearly and write persuasively, but they also must learn to deal with adversity and take responsibility for their own actions. Others will talk more about academic and personal development today, but I want you to know that you have a role in this process, partly tied to what you do and partly to what you don't do.

• The college years constitute an important transition in the lives of students, and we know there will be periods of uncertainty, anxiety, and discomfort. We work hard to make sure such feelings are kept in reasonable bounds, but we also know that expanding horizons is inevitably unsettling. There is an important shift in perspective that occurs during the first year in which students realize that they are going to school with a lot of bright people. We try to help them come to appreciate not only what they can contribute but also what they can learn from others.

• The environment at Illinois Wesleyan is ideal for personal and intellectual growth. Every student arrives with a different set of skills, abilities, and interests. The size of the institution and

the care and concern of the faculty and staff provide an environment that students find both challenging and fulfilling.

• A student's educational experience is a unique blend of formal and informal exchanges, some in the classroom and some elsewhere on campus or in the community. When you talk with your son or daughter after they enroll, it is inevitable that you will ask about their class experiences but I urge you to inquire about their efforts to engage the opportunities that occur outside the classroom.

• Special lectures

• Fraternities, Sororities, Theatre, Choirs, Orchestras, Student Newspaper, Athletics, and Recreation

• Volunteer Efforts in the Community

The Future

I thought I would focus the balance of my remarks this morning on a few of the changes you can expect -- ones that will impact the experience of your son or daughter.

• We are in the midst of a significant shift in perspective, one that requires a world view of almost everything. We will encourage students to explore other countries and cultures; you will hear us talk a lot about study abroad: 200-250 students will study abroad for a semester, year or May Term. They are forever changed. When you ask a student who has been abroad how the experience went, settle in for a long conversation if you are genuinely interested.

• We will bring the rest of the world to us; we are increasing international enrollments on the campus; we are bringing visiting scholars to campus (Fulbright Scholar this year); we have developed an international studies program that can be combined with many majors, e.g. international business.

• We will encourage Civic Leadership/Community Engagement

a. Demise of Civic Engagement

b. Concern for others, informed citizenry

c. Alternative Spring Break

d. Action Research Center

e. ISU/IWU Habitat for Humanity

f. Adopt a School Program: Achievement Gap

• We have several curricular changes

a. Offering Chinese for the first time

b. New Writing Initiative: Mellon Foundation

c. New Advising Initiative: A. V. Davis Foundation

d. Initiated Summer Reading Program

• *Nickeled and Dimed in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich

• Tracy Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains*

• And this year, *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson

• We will continue to emphasize Sustainability: Environmental Studies Program, Wind Turbines, LEED Certification for Buildings, Talloires Declaration.

• Faculty. Despite all of the economic travail, we made a decision to move ahead with faculty searches and will welcome 17 new faculty members this fall. At a time when many institutions have instituted hiring freezes or increased use of adjunct faculty, we have enhanced one of our core assets: the faculty.

• Facilities. We recently completed the Minor Myers Welcome Center.

Many of you walked through this facility as part of the admissions· process. What you may not have recognized is that this building also houses the Career Center. We have a new atrium under construction and are in the design phase of a new classroom building.

I mentioned a few minutes ago that this is a transition time for students. Well, it is a transition time for parents as well. My guess is that you are or will face all kinds of emotions related to your son or daughter leaving home and attending college. As you deal with these emotions, I hope it will be of some comfort to you to know that students are central to everything we do at Illinois Wesleyan.

I have learned very quickly that students who attend IWU love this place. My sense is that most students find just the right balance of independence and structure and spend four very exciting and rewarding years on campus. I am committed to enhancing that experience for the Class of 2013.