



Remarks and Messages

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President's Convocation Remarks

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President's Convocation

September 26, 2007

Good afternoon and welcome to the 2007 President's Convocation.

As you know this convocation marks the official beginning of the 2007-08 academic year.

Several weeks ago I welcomed the class of 2011 at their new student convocation. Today I extend greetings to the entire student body and to the faculty and staff.

I also welcome our keynote speaker, Mr. Tracy Kidder, the author of our Summer Reading selection, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning author.

Mountains beyond Mountains is indeed a powerful portrait of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Harvard University trained physician and a man who has made his life's mission providing healthcare to many of the world's forgotten peoples. As Mr. Kidder's book reveals, one person can indeed change the world for the better.

I am certain that today's presentation will deepen our understanding and appreciation for the difference that Dr. Farmer has made, and the example that he sets for all of us.

Mr. Kidder, thank you for joining us today.

I also would like to take a minute to extend the University's thanks to Professor Vickie Folsie, our first-year advising coordinator who provided the summer reading program leadership, and to all of the faculty, staff, and student orientation leaders across campus who met with our students and colleagues to discuss the issues that were so vividly portrayed by Mr. Kidder.

Would Dr. Folsie and the discussion leaders please stand and be recognized.

As you all know one of the hallmarks of Illinois Wesleyan is the excellence of our faculty and their dedication to excellence in the classroom. So at the beginning of this new school year, I would also like to recognize two of our colleagues who have recently been awarded honors for their excellence in teaching:

- Dr. Marina Balina, who holds the Isaac Funk Professorship, and is professor of Russian Studies, is this year's Pantagraph Award –winner for Teaching Excellence, and
- Dr. Greg Shaw, associate professor of political science, who was named Teacher of the Year by the class of 2007

Would you both please stand and be recognized.

Finally, I would like to welcome new colleagues who have joined us this year. Today our faculty ranks include eight new tenure-track and 12 new visiting scholars.

We are delighted to have these new colleagues join us. They come from some of the finest institutions in the nation. Each is an active scholar and is dedicated to undergraduate education.

But more than filling faculty-lines and classrooms, we look to these new colleagues

- To add to the intellectual vitality of our campus,
- To stimulate the curiosity and creativity of our students,
- To continue their scholarly activities contributing to the body of knowledge, and
- To engage themselves and their students in meaningful ways with the broader community.

I would like to ask these new colleagues to please stand and be recognized.

This celebration marks the beginning of what promises to be a very stimulating and productive academic year. And one of the highlights occurred yesterday with the announcement that Dawn Upshaw, four-time Grammy award winning soprano and a 1982 graduate of Illinois Wesleyan University, was named one of 24 MacArthur Fellows for 2007 by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. These so-called genius grants constitute one of the most prestigious national awards that an artist or scholar can receive, and I thought it would be appropriate to acknowledge her achievement on this campus and on the very stage on which she performed as a student at Illinois Wesleyan. We all can take great pride in her accomplishment.

This will also be a year in which we continue to make progress on the goals of our strategic plan. A few of the key initiatives include a special curricular review; efforts to enhance advising; continuing attention to environmental sustainability, diversity, social justice, and globalization; campus-wide discussions of our institutional identity; and planning for an impending campaign.

Through these efforts and others, I look forward to working with each of you to achieve our shared vision for Illinois Wesleyan.