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Alumna, President of Whitman College to Speak at Commencement

April 3, 2017

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Illinois Wesleyan University alumna Kathleen M. Murray, the current president of Whitman College in Washington state, will speak at the University's [Commencement](#) on Sunday, May 7. During the ceremony, Murray will receive an honorary doctor of humane letters degree, along with alumnus Sam Porritt, a member of the Class of 1984.

The ceremony will begin at 1 p.m. at the Kemp Commencement Plaza in front of State Farm Hall. In case of inclement weather, Commencement will be held in the Shirk Center. The event will be live streamed and available for viewing on demand at www.iwu.edu/live after the event.

Murray is the first woman to head Whitman since its founding in 1882 and is the 14th Whitman president overall. She began her presidency in July 2015 and is overseeing the development of a five-year strategic plan and the building of a new residence hall at the liberal arts college, located in Walla Walla.

Murray came to Whitman from Macalester College, where she served as provost and dean from 2008 to 2015. Prior to that, Murray was provost at Birmingham-Southern College for three years. She spent 19 years at Lawrence University in Wisconsin, first as a member of the piano faculty and department chair, then as dean of the Conservatory of Music, and finally as dean of the faculty.

She received a bachelor's degree in music from Illinois Wesleyan in 1979, a master of music in piano performance from Bowling Green State University, and a doctorate in piano performance and pedagogy from Northwestern University in 1989.

A frequent performer, Murray is also a clinician and adjudicator both nationally and internationally, as well as the author of numerous articles on music and music education. She is recorded on the CRI label.



Kathleen M. Murray '79, president of Whitman College, will give the keynote address.



Sam Porritt '84, founder of the Falling Forward Foundation, will receive an honorary degree.

Porritt is the founder of the Falling Forward Foundation, a nonprofit organization established in 2013 to fund the continued rehabilitation of patients recovering from catastrophic medical issues such as strokes, brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, or trauma that impairs or causes loss of a limb.

While on vacation in Italy in August 2011, Porritt suffered a spinal cord injury resulting from an accident. Initially, he was paralyzed from the waist down. His recovery from such a catastrophic injury would be a long one, including more than two years in rehabilitation. Fortunately, Porritt learned that his medical insurance placed no limit on rehabilitation – a benefit contained in less than one percent of policies.

During his more than two years in rehab, Porritt saw the impact of therapy caps first hand. He met hundreds of patients whose recoveries were cut short when their insurance benefits stopped, and they were unable to pay out of their own pockets. Porritt launched Falling Forward to give other patients the same opportunity he had – to continue medical rehabilitation and to recover to their full potential.

Prior to his accident, Porritt spent much of his professional career as a consumer marketing executive and consultant. He earned an MBA from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and today lives in Lawrence, Kan.