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Remarks of Class President

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Illinois Wesleyan University

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Commencement 2011

Remarks of Class President

Sean A. Gower '11

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you for joining us today in honoring the graduating Class of 2011. President Wilson, members of the faculty, staff, friends, family, and distinguished guests, it is my pleasure and honor to stand before you today to reflect on our past four years here at Illinois Wesleyan.

As freshmen, we experienced the new joys, freedoms, and responsibilities of living away from home for the first time. For many of us, it was our first time managing a budget, having no curfew, deciding our own diet (and enjoying Saga a little too much). Collectively, we probably spent more time on Facebook than the average American life span, and many of us did as little work as possible to still earn decent grades in our general education classes, not altogether understanding the benefits of a liberal arts education. At the same time, many of us fulfilled our Global Diversity Flag requirement, and our eyes were opened to ongoing struggles of the rest of the world. For the first time, many of us finally comprehended our true fortune of living in the western world.

Some of us gelled perfectly with our new roommates; some others, like me, wondered why, in the world, my roommate cringed when I sang “Fergalicious” or Nickelback at 8 in the morning every day... Apparently not everyone shares my tastes in music. We enjoyed the social beehives of Ferguson-Munsell, Dolan, and Gulick. We made new friends with our floor mates, and many of us became active members of Greek life.

We entered our sophomore year as wise fools: invincible 19- and 20-year-olds with a full year of college under our belts, ready to take on whatever was thrown our way. That doesn't necessarily mean we became more disciplined to complete our school work, but rather that we learned to operate with very little sleep. And, many of us complained about why the coffee shop in the Dugout closed so early at midnight. At the same time, we were better prepared to face the challenges and opportunities of the college lifestyle, ready to take on more responsibilities and become more involved in campus activities. If no student organization piqued our interest, we were encouraged to create our own, with the confidence that somewhere on campus, others would share that interest.

Many of us took our first upper-level courses in subjects that fueled our passions, and these courses helped direct our path towards selecting a major. Many of us voted for the first time in a historic presidential election that saw the greatest turnout for young voters in several decades, reflecting our peers' growing awareness of adulthood.

As juniors we made the abrupt conversion to upperclassmen status. Some chose to study abroad, immersing themselves in new cultures far from home. Some finally selected a major, while others chose to pursue additional interests and picked up a second major or minor. Some of us took our first steps of venturing outside the Wesleyan bubble to get involved in the Bloomington-Normal community, facilitated by our Action Research Center. I'm sure that many,

myself included, regret not getting involved sooner. Many completed fall, spring and summer internships; others took advantage of invaluable opportunities to work one-on-one with their professors to conduct advanced research.

I think we can all agree that our lives as seniors were by far the most exciting and most stressful year of our time here at Illinois Wesleyan. Living off campus, many of us expanded our cooking repertoires beyond Easy Mac, Ramen, and omelets. We took 400 level courses, wrote extensive essays for senior seminars, performed recitals, starred in theater productions and performances, and finished our varsity athletic careers. Watching President Wilson dance the night away to Jennifer Lopez at the Senior Dinner last month capped an incredible year. We became even more unified as a class this week as we celebrated the end of finals with Senior Week, which included free meals at Saga, a reception at the president's house, and a memorable Thursday night visiting downtown Bloomington's finest establishments. We collectively have now completed our last collegiate performance on stage, sang or played our last recital, cheered our last home game, turned in our final paper, completed our last clinical, given our final presentation, and filled the last bubble of our last Scantron.

We now enter the next chapter of our lives, wherever it may take us.

For the first time we have no concrete path—we've always had the next year of school, the next place to live, the next clear objective. As I struggled with this concept, my father helped bring me to a stunning realization: there is no cookbook to life, or recipe for success. We determine our own paths.

We are about to embark on a journey into uncharted territory. But it's okay! We could never be completely prepared, but I'm confident that we're better prepared than most. As truly well-rounded individuals and students of the world, we've benefited greatly from the liberal arts degree we are receiving today. We've embraced the desire for lifelong learning, which is evident in our selection for our Class Gift, as we've elected to re-establish the Tree of Knowledge, a once-famous tradition here at Illinois Wesleyan that embodies the academic spirit of globalization.

Moreover, a wise man recently told the world, "Boom, crush. You mess with the warlock, you're gonna lose. Winning, duh."

I think what the eloquent Mr. Charlie Sheen meant is this: we are prepared for whatever lies ahead. With a proverbial BOOM, our college career and college lifestyle ends today. We cannot look back at any part of the last four years with regret, because we as a class are leaving a remarkable, WINNING legacy here at Wesleyan: winning in the class room, winning in our respective athletic arenas, winning in our works in the Arts and performances on stage, winning our own development into adulthood.

As I watch my younger brother search for a college that suits him, I'll look on with envy and with confidence that he will love his experience just as much as I have loved mine. At the same time, I'll ask that all of you join me in embracing the unknown future that lies ahead with excitement and great anticipation, not trepidation. We ARE prepared to determine our own paths.

So, to President Wilson, thank you for showing us your humility and your sense of humor. To our faculty members, thank you for encouraging our thirst for knowledge, for sharing your wisdom and expertise, and dedicating yourselves to our success. To our parents, thank you for giving us guidance when we seek advice, scolding us when we misstep, and giving us the love and support to allow us to make our own decisions as we blossom into successful, respectable adults.

And finally, to the Class of 2011, congratulations and good luck on your future endeavors!!