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Remarks of Class President

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Remarks of Class President Hannah Smith '14

May 4, 2014

Hello. My name is Hannah Smith and I represent one of the many voices of this graduating class.

So here we are, commencement. The day that we have wished, prayed, and cried about over the past 4 years. I'm honored to speak today as we reflect on the past few years.

Four years ago, I made the wise decision to attend Illinois Wesleyan University. With my older brothers graduating from other esteemed universities, I knew I had big shoes to fill. I liked the idea of a small school, but had no idea of all the wonderful opportunities Wesleyan could and would end up giving me.

I'm here because my parents encouraged me to attend a four-year, liberal arts university. I'm here because Wesleyan Alumni felt their education was worth paying it forward. And I'm here because my friends encouraged me to switch majors from psychology to nursing freshman year.

When thinking about what to speak about today, I decided to turn to the same support system that was there for me 4 years ago, my friends. Topic recommendations included: "life's too important to be taken seriously", "Never take a moment for granted", and "Don't underestimate the power of friendship". My freshman roommate suggested: "Remember, life is a game that can't be won, only played. So we play on for the moments yet to come". Realizing the obvious, our class is already filled with wisdom, I thought I would take a different approach to my speech.

As cliché as it may be, I decided to talk about entering the "real world". Tomorrow begins a new chapter of our lives. We're starting a chapter that doesn't involve quad squirrels, Saga Dave, or sitting on the hot spot. We'll be in a world that functions on real money instead of munch money, where you probably shouldn't leave your laptop on the library desk while you go to Fusion Brew, and where it isn't socially acceptable to wear sweat pants every day of the week. We'll

be leaving this place that we've called home for the past few years, and entering somewhere unknown.

But while I thought about this "new world" we're entering, I realized we've been a part of it for a long time now. Freshman year, we were given the opportunity to participate in a Volunteer Day. This gave us the chance to get to know the community we would be living in for the next few years. This past week, another Volunteer Day was available as part of senior week. But this time, we entered fully acclimated, ready and willing to give back. Multiple organizations on campus have been utilized by our class, to work and serve in our community. Some seniors even created their own way of community immersion. The Tool Library and the Peace Garden both started while we were students here and have grown exponentially due to the commitment of fellow graduates.

In addition to immersion in Bloomington-Normal, many of us took the opportunity to leave this area for a semester or May Term abroad. We were fortunate enough to not only be part of the Illinois Wesleyan community, but to join the global community as well. I was part of a group that became the first nursing students to study abroad for an entire semester. We were able to live with host families and do our hospital rotations in Barcelona, Spain, utilizing both our nursing and Hispanic studies skills.

With Illinois Wesleyan's strong commitment to students' cultivating a comprehensive worldview, a phenomenal 50% of our class studied abroad.

So in the spirit of gratitude, I'd like our whole class, right now, to thank all of the friends, families, and professors who have helped us through these exhausting, life-changing, amazing years.

I'd like to personally say "Thank you" to the people who made this possible.

"Thank you" faculty and staff: Your invaluable source of strength has been such a gift. You have given us the tools and confidence to go into this world and not only do well, but do good.

"Thank you" to my parents for everything you have done for me over the past 4 years. For calming me down after I was convinced I would never pass Human Anatomy. For supporting my decision to switch majors on "a whim". And for raising me to be the woman that I am today.

Lastly, “thank you” to my friends, old and new. You have enriched my life and changed me in ways I will never be able to repay you. You have helped me appreciate life and given me the strength to pursue my dreams. You’ve made me a better student, a better friend, and a better nurse.

Today, as we walk across this stage we are leaving behind a place we’ve called home. A place where some of the best memories of our lives were made and we became better people in the process. As we spread our wings and take that leap of faith into the “real world”, remember that we’ve been well prepared for what lies ahead.

Thank you and congratulations class of 2014.