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Welcome and Closing Remarks

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President Wilson - Welcome & Closing Remarks

May 3, 2015

Welcome

Good afternoon and Congratulations to the Class of 2015!

On behalf of the faculty and staff, I am pleased to welcome you to the 165th Commencement Ceremony at Illinois Wesleyan University.

This is truly a moment to remember:

- Over 5000 of your relatives and friends have gathered on the quadrangle to witness one of the most significant events in your life.
- You can ease up on the Weather Channel's refresh button. No rain is forecast for this afternoon.
- And finally, you will soon move from being a student to a proud graduate of Illinois Wesleyan.

As President of this University, I frequently have the opportunity to listen to wonderful performances by faculty and students from our School of Music. Today, that talent is on display for all of us. I would like to thank **Natalie J. Howard '15** for leading us in singing "America the Beautiful". I especially want to thank **Professor Lev Ivanov** and members of the Illinois Wesleyan Wind Ensemble for providing the music and sharing their talents with us this afternoon.

Four years ago, the Class of 2015 arrived in Bloomington with a heightened sense of exhilaration, anticipation, and anxiety. I suspect that those of you who joined this class as transfer students will recall those same emotions during your first few weeks in college. The irony is that for all of you, today is another transition in your life, one again fueled by a mixture of excitement, anticipation, and anxiety.

While this day and this ceremony properly focus on you as graduates, we must not lose sight of the fact that you didn't make this journey alone. Therefore, it's only appropriate that we take a moment to thank those who helped you along the way.

- Please stand and face the **faculty and staff** who are seated behind you and give this group of dedicated people a round of applause.
- While you are standing, please turn now in the direction of your **parents and friends** and extend a round of applause to those whose support and assistance have been so important to your college experience.

This Commencement ceremony honors you for what you have accomplished at one of the finest liberal arts colleges in the country. We are pleased to have shared this journey with you.

We also gather to celebrate the potential you represent and the contributions you will make in the future. I sincerely hope that you will remain loyal to Illinois Wesleyan as you join more than 20,000 alumni who can be found doing great things across our nation and around the world.

At the Senior Class Dinner, I played a few songs from my iTunes playlist that were popular during your time at IWU. Paraphrasing the lyrics from two of those songs, I hope, as alumni, you will have many occasions to “clap along because you know what happiness is” and that over the arc of your careers you will do more than “call us maybe.”

Finally, there are two special aspects of today’s ceremony that I would like to bring to your attention. First, in recognition of the fact that Brandon Landau was a member of this class, we have draped a graduation gown on a chair in the front row. Each of you will walk by his chair on your way to receive your diploma, thus paying tribute to his life and honoring his memory.

Second, seven years ago, the Class of 2008 presented my wife and me with a concrete pineapple to replace the small wooden one that used to sit atop the entry portal to the President’s House. In fact, the family of Doug Burrichter, who is graduating today, was instrumental in making this happen. We were pleased to receive this gift and decided we would start a new tradition.

As you may know, the pineapple is often used to symbolize the spirit of friendship and gracious hospitality.

After you receive your diploma and are leaving the stage, give the Titan pineapple a friendly tap as a way of acknowledging the friendships you have formed on this

campus and, in addition, the University's pledge that you are always welcome here. This is one of Wesleyan's enduring gifts.

It is now my honor to present the Chair of our Board of Trustees, George Vinyard, Class of 1971.

Closing Remarks

Let's hear it for the graduating Class of 2015!

In a moment, we will rise and sing together the *Alma Mater*. Our expectations are high that you will know the words--but just to be safe we have printed them in your program.

Following the alma mater, we will adjourn and enjoy the graduation tradition of strawberries and scones.

I would also like to remind you that an easy way to see specific faculty members following this ceremony is to locate the departmental signs that are scattered around the quad. There is a map of departmental locations in the back of your program.

Finally, I want you to know that it has been a great personal privilege to serve as President of Illinois Wesleyan during the time you have been a student on this campus.

Given my retirement this year, the Class of 2015 will always have a special place in my heart. I shall leave with wonderful memories of your spirit, creativity and passion and with deep appreciation for the many kind messages and thoughtful gestures you have extended to my wife and me over the last few months.

I am especially grateful for the personal tribute that you have included on the new bench, purchased with gifts from members of this class, that now graces the recently completed quadrangle north of State Farm Hall. I am honored to be connected to the Class of 2015 in this way.

My fondest hope is that your life and career will be filled with as many exciting moments and rewarding opportunities as I have had as President of this wonderful University.

I shall close this Commencement ceremony in the same way I have closed all IWU commencements in recent years.

I lift my cap to the Class of 2015 and offer the following admonition:

- Search for what is true
- Stand for what is just
- Strive to make a difference

Congratulations and good luck.