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Admissions Open House Remarks

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Admissions Open House

Saturday, February 23, 2008

I am delighted to welcome you to Illinois Wesleyan University. I am confident that whether this is your first visit here or you have been on campus before, you will be impressed with what you see and hear during today's Open House.

We know you are here to compare the culture and distinctive characteristics of this institution with your own set of values and aspirations for college.

I have organized my comments around several dimensions of the University that I believe are important for you to know at this point in your college search.

1. Centrality of Teaching
2. The Importance of Size and Personal Attention
3. Our Commitment to Students with Multiple Talents and Interests
4. The Life-Changing Experience of Study Abroad
5. The Opportunities for Scholarly and Artistic Expression
6. The Priority Assigned to Public Service/Civic Leadership
7. Preparation for Success

Quality of Teaching and Learning

The faculty and staff at Illinois Wesleyan care deeply about students and about the quality of the teaching and learning process. This is a defining characteristic of this institution and is never far from the minds of anyone.

- Your instruction at Illinois Wesleyan will be provided by members of the faculty.
- The passion that they have for teaching and learning will be transferred to you and impact your life in significant ways:
 - o Mike Davis, Class of 1998, created the world's largest Periodic Table on the windows of the Daley Center in Chicago last year--because he cares passionately about science literacy.
 - o Grammy-award winning soprano Dawn Upshaw, a 1982 Illinois Wesleyan University graduate, was named a MacArthur Fellow this fall.

o Denny Matthews, a 1966 Illinois Wesleyan University graduate, just completed his 39th season behind the microphone as the radio announcer for the Kansas City Royals. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame during the summer.

o Alumnus Brian Udovich received the Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival this year for his upcoming film *The Wackness*.

• Until I read the movie notes, I thought *The Wackness* referred to my experiences as a college president.

Our commitment to teaching and to students is also reflected in curricular innovation:

• Summer Reading Program

For this year's Summer Reading Program, we read Tracy Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, about Dr. Paul Farmer's quest for social justice in Haiti.

o Every first-year student was involved in a small group discussion of the book during orientation

o Kidder was on campus earlier this fall to speak at the President's Convocation

• The Gateway Colloquia constitute an important part of the First-Year Experience for all entering students and are designed to enhance critical thinking, public speaking, and writing skills. We believe such skills are absolutely essential and are currently studying ways to enhance even further the way we teach writing to undergraduates.

• May Term is a distinctive part of our curriculum, providing a four-week opportunity for small group, intensive learning on campus and, through travel courses, around the world.

o Sociology professor Teodora Amoloza journeyed to Hawaii with students to explore the cultural impact of immigration on a state that has no majority group.

o Students of Scott Sheridan, associate professor of French, traveled to Italy to take in not only the art and artistry of Renaissance Italy, but also the present-day lives of residents of the country.

o Professor of English Jim Plath took students to Ireland to study Irish poetry and art, including meeting with Irish artists.

o Spanish 240, Spanish for Social Justice, was offered for the first time last spring. This course is part of an effort by the Hispanic Studies department to "strengthen lower division course offerings as well as increase involvement in the community. The 10 students in the class spent three hours each week using their Spanish language skills to serve the community in a variety of field projects.

- Portfolio Management Class: Our Portfolio Management class challenges students to research, evaluate, and invest a stock portfolio. Unlike other college portfolio classes, the stocks these IWU students manage are real. Students began managing this fund in 1993 as a result of a gift of \$100,000. The fund now tops more than \$1 million and the income is used to support student scholarships.

Size of the University

- Size does make a difference.
- We have 2,100 students on campus, our student-faculty ratio is 12-to-1, and 81 percent of our classes are composed of 19 or fewer students.
- These numbers mean that you will come to know the faculty, and they will come to know you. And when it is time for you to apply to graduate school or enter the job market, you will have a recommendation written for you by someone who really knows who you are and what you've accomplished.
- o And I have written three letters of reference thus far this year for students.

Multiple Talents and Interests

This campus actively recruits and celebrates students with multiple interests. We look with pride on students who combine business and football, chemistry and music, or nursing and Spanish.

- Our orchestras, choirs, and ensembles are open to students of all majors.
- Sikiru Tijani, an Illinois Wesleyan University junior international business and Japanese studies double major from Flossmoor, Ill., spent part of last year in Japan because of his fascination with Japanese cartoon drawings called anime. "The whole fantasy realm," as he puts it, is what initially captured his interest in the country back in eighth grade and he spent his junior year abroad on the island.
- Two students, Preston Prior (music education) and Kari Irwin (religion and philosophy) traveled to Japan this past summer with Professor Nancy Sultan as part of an annual program organized through Technos University.
- And many students combine academic and athletic interests. In fact, IWU ranks sixth in the country among all Universities in terms of the number of students selected as Academic All Americans by ESPN Magazine—combining excellence in athletics with excellence in the classroom.
- And Illinois Wesleyan sophomore Sam Katz spent 10 days over the holidays competing in the North American Bridge Championships (NABC) in San Francisco.

- My guess is that some of you have so many interests that you are not ready to declare a major. Let me assure you that you will not be alone at Illinois Wesleyan. Each year, between 100 and 150 students enroll without declaring a major. I worry more about those who rush to declare a major than I do about those who are still weighing options. The nature of the curriculum at Illinois Wesleyan gives you an opportunity to explore options before that choice is made.

Study Abroad

Study abroad is an important strategic priority of the University. Illinois Wesleyan operates its own programs in London and Madrid (20 students each) and participates in numerous programs operated by others. Approximately 150 students study abroad each year.

- Earlier this fall, I invited all of the students who studied abroad last fall to my home for a discussion about their experiences. They filled the room with laughter and excitement about how their lives had been changed, from overcoming language barriers and anxieties about ethnic food to becoming more independent and more sensitive to cultural differences.
- Five Illinois Wesleyan students and one faculty member were awarded the ASIANetwork Freeman Student-Faculty Fellows grant, and traveled to China for several weeks during the summer for a research project. It is the fourth time the University has received the ASIANetwork grant.
- Illinois Wesleyan University student Angela Rumsey was selected to receive a Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship. The \$4,000 scholarship helped finance Rumsey's fall semester study abroad experience in Uganda.

We live in a world in which connections across national boundaries extend to all areas of our lives. Those who have knowledge of other cultures have an advantage in seeking out career options and in leading more informed and interesting lives.

Scholarly and Artistic Expression

Illinois Wesleyan values scholarly and artistic expression and you will find a very active undergraduate research program on campus. The distinctive aspect of scholarship at Illinois Wesleyan is that faculty members select research topics or pursue artistic projects because of the opportunities for undergraduate students to participate in meaningful ways.

- The John Wesley Powell undergraduate research conference is held each spring. I have been impressed with the quality of the student work and with the range of disciplines involved, from education to economics and from chemistry to the arts.
- Illinois Wesleyan University offered 35 students from 19 academic institutions the opportunity to present undergraduate work in literature during the third annual MUSE Undergraduate Literature Conference held a few weeks ago.

- Students of Kevin Strandberg have a rare opportunity to work with one of the few kiln-glass experts in the country.
- Biology Professor Will Jaeckle, along with two Illinois Wesleyan students, spent part of last summer in the Bahamas on the first leg of a four-year project funded by the National Science Foundation. Jaeckle's group is studying the invertebrate larvae from deep-sea species to learn how these developmental stages get the necessary sustenance to complete their developmental cycle.
- Rachel Slough, a 2007 graduate of Illinois Wesleyan University, received a Fulbright grant to travel to Chile to teach English.
- Jamie Rogers, a senior chemistry major from Elmwood, Ill., has been chosen as one of 11 national finalists for the Frank and Sara McKnight Prize in Undergraduate Chemistry.

Public Engagement

This campus embraces public engagement: service to the campus, community, and world.

- Over 200 first-year students at Illinois Wesleyan participated in a volunteer day during orientation
- Our Habitat for Humanity Chapter was recently designated as the 2nd most active chapter in the country (12 houses).
- Nine Illinois Wesleyan University students were accepted into Teach for America this year, the national corps of outstanding recent college graduates who commit to teaching low-income students in urban and rural public schools for the next two years.

Preparation for Success

Much national attention has been focused recently on whether colleges and universities are paying enough attention to the measuring the impact of the undergraduate experience, i.e., are we making a difference. I can assure you that we have made this question a priority and have identified several direct and indirect ways to document not only the changes that students experience in their four years at IWU but also the success that they have following graduation. Let me cite a few examples.

- We have had a strong assessment program for many years and carefully review student progress between the first year and the fourth year on such important dimensions as critical thinking and effective writing.
- 95-100% of our nursing graduates pass the licensure exam; the national average is in the mid-80's.

- 80-86% of our pre-med biology graduates are admitted to allopathic medical school on the first try; the national average is 50% for all majors.
- Students in the accounting program at IWU had the highest pass rate on the CPA exam of any accounting program in the state for two years in a row.
- The Journal of Economics Education published an article during the fall in which economics departments were ranked on a variety of measures. One of the measures was the percentage of the graduating seniors between 1997-2003 who earned PhD's in the field. IWU was ranked first in the country.

Facilities

The facilities on this campus are outstanding. We are quite sure that once you tour our campus and visit our facilities you'll understand why we are so proud of what this campus has to offer.

Closing

I hope that I have given you a sense of the enthusiasm that I have for this University. This is truly a splendid place, something we know and that others have recognized. And I believe that once you get to know us, you will agree. Thank you all for being here.

Have a wonderful day.