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## President Wilson's Farewell Remarks to Faculty and Staff

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# President Wilson's Farewell Remarks to Faculty and Staff

October 20, 2015 Campus Reception

I have commented on my impending retirement on several different occasions over the past three months, but none is more important to me than the one today with faculty and staff. Not only have you made the last decade both exciting and enjoyable for Pat and me, you also have become our friends.

I often talk about the spirit that exists on this campus and the many ways that faculty and staff reach out to one another to celebrate achievement and provide consolation during adversity. This is one of the defining characteristics of the University, and Pat and I have certainly been the beneficiaries.

With my last day as president fast approaching, I find myself thinking more and more about the memorable experiences I have had at IWU. I don't think you will be too surprised that current and former students figure prominently in my mind. I would like to share a few special moments with you that I believe reflect the transformative impact of faculty and staff on students at IWU:



Pat and Dick Wilson were presented with a commemorative book about their tenure at Illinois Wesleyan.

- At Homecoming a few years ago, we honored **Bob Page '79**, who was an accounting major at IWU and is now CEO of the University of Kansas Hospital. What I found compelling about his acceptance comments was that he singled out an English professor as someone who had made a profound difference in his life.
- **Jocelyn Martinez '11** mentioned at a luncheon a few years ago that she chose to enroll in our Nursing and Spanish Program because of the opportunity to work in a medical field and because of her personal interest in “speaking loudly for those who have no voice”.
- **Babawande Afolabi '10** came to Illinois Wesleyan from Nigeria and upon arrival discovered that one of his major sources of support had evaporated. Classes had not yet started and he was in danger of being forced to return to Nigeria. He made frantic appeals to the Financial Aid Office and to anyone else who would listen. Fortunately for him and for us, staff members figured out a way for him to cover his costs and remain at IWU. As many of you know, Babawande went on to become an outstanding student at IWU and the first international student to serve as President of Student Senate. He subsequently was accepted into the MBA Program at Stanford University.
- **Josi Banales '14** was a psychology major at IWU and went on to do research at the University of Michigan. In a presentation she made while on campus, she reported how difficult her adjustment had been and then identified a member of the housekeeping staff who had been invaluable as a friend and mentor during her first few years on campus.
- **Margaret McCarter '15** was a physics major at IWU who was named a Goldwater Scholar and received a prestigious NSF Fellowship to pursue a PhD in Physics at UC Berkeley. The interesting part of this story is that Margaret told me that she had no idea what research was when she enrolled at IWU.
- **Steve Ondra '80** transferred to IWU from West Point following a training accident that left him severely injured. Too ill to leave his room for a chemistry final, he was in danger of losing credit for an entire class. A faculty member went to his room

and sat with him while he took the final. Steve has gone on to be a renowned neurosurgeon and presidential advisor on national health care policy.

- And finally, **Vanessa Rodriguez-Macias '14** was asked to make remarks to her Latino/Latina classmates who were graduating in 2014. She indicated to everyone that it was a minor miracle that she would stand in front of large group and make a speech. The phrase from her speech that I will never forget was “the person I was, would be very proud of the person I have become”.

I know that each of you could add other students to this list of people whose lives have been transformed at IWU as a result of the efforts of the faculty and staff. If you will allow me to broaden the impact pool to include college presidents, count me among those whose life has been forever changed. I am grateful to all of you for making my experience at IWU more fulfilling than I could have ever imagined. Your dedication has inspired me; your encouragement and support have sustained me. It has been a distinct honor and privilege to serve as your president for the past eleven years. Thank you very, very much.