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Alumni Association Welcome

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I crossed this platform and collected my degree from Illinois Wesleyan University 32 years ago, in 1986. Today, it's your turn. Welcome to the club, fellow alumni.

I'm speaking to you as the President of the Illinois Wesleyan University Alumni Association. I'm here to congratulate and welcome you.

So, first and foremost: CONGRATULATIONS! Congratulations, graduates! And -- moms and dads, and families and friends of our graduates -- congratulations to you, too! You did it!

Speaking of moms and dads, we're graduating 25 "legacy" graduates today - newly-minted alumni of Illinois Wesleyan who have at least one parent or another close relative who attended Illinois Wesleyan before them. Nothing makes me prouder than to see Illinois Wesleyan passed on as a family tradition. Congratulations to you all!

There's another important milestone to mark. Illinois Wesleyan University is graduating 44 international graduates today. This is the largest class of international students in Illinois Wesleyan's history.

To prepare for this occasion, the Alumni Association Board of Directors voted last month at its Spring Meeting to endorse the creation of the International Alumni Network, which is being publicly launched today under the leadership of Teddy Petrova from the Class of 2010!

This year, for the first time in the history of Illinois Wesleyan University, today's Commencement program is being translated in real time into both the Spanish and Mandarin languages for the benefit of our many international guests.

So, I'll give the Spanish translator a short break: *Bienvenidos, graduaodos!*

Now, you're all sitting there thinking I'm going to say something in Mandarin. No, I'm going to read something phonetically that Google Translate tells me means, "Welcome, graduates!" in Mandarin.

Huānying, bìyè shēng.

(I hope I didn't just accidentally provoke an international incident.)

Even if poorly pronounced, the sentiment is heartfelt. So to all of our international graduates today, of each and every tongue, and to every graduate from wherever you are: “Welcome and congratulations!”

So, you are all now “officially” members of the Illinois Wesleyan University Alumni Association.

When you descend the steps from this platform, after having collected your diploma, you will be greeted by two of the vice-presidents of the Alumni Association: Dirk Behrends ’87 and Molly Rollings ’99. They will hand you your official “IWU Alumni” pin.

I hope you will wear it proudly, for it is a symbol of your hard work in reaching this point, and it is your “golden ticket” of admission to a network of more than 22,000 Illinois Wesleyan alumni in ___ states and ___ foreign countries.

One last thing. About 2,500 years ago, a man named Phillip sent his son to study in a foreign country. He sent his son to Athens, in ancient Greece, to study with Aristotle. The son’s name was Alexander. Today, you and I know him as Alexander the Great.

After he finished his studies with Aristotle, Alexander decided to see what the rest of the world was like. And everywhere he went, Alexander the Great had scholars with him who would collect specimens of new plants, and animals, and so forth. Each day, he sent runners back to Athens, to take the artifacts to Aristotle. Aristotle was good to the young Alexander, and Alexander the Great never forgot his old teacher.

In fact, the way I see it, Alexander the Great invented the very first alumni association in the history of Western Civilization.

Now, you don’t have to go out and conquer the known world tomorrow. But whatever you do, and wherever your life takes you from here, never forget your teachers and this place. Illinois Wesleyan has been good to you, so please always be good to Illinois Wesleyan. Keep in touch, and don’t be strangers.

Thank you for inviting me to be part of your celebration today. Well done, graduates — well done!