



5-1-2016

Welcome & Closing Remarks

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Recommended Citation

Jensen, Eric R., "Welcome & Closing Remarks" (2016). *Commencement*. 77.
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Commencement

Commencement Welcome

President Eric Jensen

May 1, 2016

Good afternoon and Congratulations to the Class of 2016!

On behalf of the faculty and staff, I am pleased to welcome you to the 166th Commencement Ceremony at Illinois Wesleyan University.

This is truly a moment to remember:

- Thousand of your relatives and friends have gathered here to witness one of the most significant events in your life.
- We're all in our academic regalia, reliving centuries of academic tradition intended to emphasize the momentous nature of the day.
- And finally, you're moving from being a student to a proud graduate of Illinois Wesleyan.



As President, 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'm grateful to John Cossio '16 for leading us in singing "America the Beautiful" and to Professor Lev Ivanov and the members of the Illinois Wesleyan Wind Ensemble for sharing their talents with us this afternoon.

Transitions are exciting, but unsettling times. However you first arrived in Bloomington--just after high school, as a transfer student, or in some other way--you came with with a heightened sense of exhilaration, anticipation, and anxiety. Today marks another distinct transition in your life, one that again is fueled by a mixture of excitement, anticipation, and uncertainty.

I speak for all of the faculty and staff when I tell you what a privilege it is to share with you those wonderful first days,

this great (great) day, and of course your journey over the intervening days. This Commencement ceremony honors you for your accomplishments at one of the finest liberal arts colleges in the country. There is much to say about these accomplishments, but it's appropriate to pause for 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.

We also gather to celebrate the potential you represent and the differences you will make in your communities, the nation, and the world that you will make. I sincerely hope that you will remain loyal to Illinois Wesleyan as you join a family of more than 20,000 alumni doing great things.

You see before you a concrete pineapple. As you may know, the pineapple is often used to symbolize the spirit of friendship and gracious hospitality. Apparently in past years a small wooden pineapple that used to sit atop the entry portal to the President's House would mysteriously travel around campus in unpredictable ways. Perhaps because it is made of concrete and very heavy, this particular Titan Pineapple, a gift from the class of 2008 to President and Mrs. Wilson, seems less prone to ramble.

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 2016!

In a moment, we will rise and sing together the Alma Mater. I've memorized the words, and I'm sure you have, too -- 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.

One of Elizabeth's and my favorite things at the graduation ceremonies of our own children was the chance to meet faculty and staff members who had made a difference in our kids' lives. If you'd like to find specific faculty members following this ceremony, look for the departmental signs that are scattered around the fieldhouse at the reception.

Finally, I want you to know what a privilege it is for me to serve as President of Illinois Wesleyan. The Class of 2016 is the first that I've had the pleasure to award diplomas to. You're a spectacular group who will always have a prominent place in my memories.

My parting words to you are simple: Remember who you are, remember how you got there, and remember Illinois Wesleyan. Congratulations and good luck.

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