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Faculty Reflections

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SPEECH TO ILLINOIS WESLEYAN CLASS OF 2020

On behalf of my fellow faculty members, hello and congratulations on graduating from Illinois Wesleyan. It's an honor to speak with you. Thank you for giving us this day to celebrate.

There are few perfect moments in life: a baby's first breath, weddings, birthdays, up to a point, the first day of spring break, and graduations. You have now completed one of life's most memorable achievements...a college degree, and if I may add, from an outstanding university.

When you have time to reflect, think how happy and proud you have made everyone. Recall all the wonderful teachers who helped you arrive at this moment in your lives... those who pushed you, encouraged you, spent extra time with you, and opened the world up to you. Think back on everyone involved in coaching, the library, maintenance, admissions, the career center, dining services, advancement, administration, administrative staff, the trustees, and all the wonderful women in the registrar's office who helped make this moment possible.

And, of course there are your families, who were there every step of the way. Finally, remember a classmate who helped you on a tough assignment or encouraged you just when you needed encouragement, shared lunches and dinners, or called you at 9:37 in the morning to ask why you hadn't shown up for your FIS 307 class.

I hope you all feel incredibly proud. You have earned it. On behalf of my colleagues, thanks for all your efforts during your time as a Titan. To all of your families, friends, and relatives...thank you for all the support you gave and sacrifices you made for these wonderful young men and women. We hear about you, a lot. You have raised incredible children. And the graduates of 2020 are magnificent. Each of you possesses a special brand of magic that you will carry with you the rest of your days and share with your world.

I had the privilege of teaching many of you, some more than once. Years ago, someone asked me what I enjoyed most about teaching. Pretty much everything, to be honest, but right at the top is watching you grow from your first day on campus until your last. It's just fun. I can't describe how exciting it is to hear your plans for the future beyond Wesleyan: careers, grad school, families of your own someday perhaps, where you hope to live, all of it.

It's a crazy world out there. But there's something else that's special about you; you give us hope that the future will be okay. When people ask, and they do, what Wesleyan Students are like, my immediate response is, "Wonderful! They work hard, strive for excellence, respect others, and care about things that are important." The world will be better because you are in it.

I'd like to share a few of the many moments that have stood for me during your time here.

Each semester, I had the pleasure of meeting nursing students who needed a signature to take a business course. The profession is in good hands. You were all bright, friendly, dedicated, and caring, and so well guided by Professor Folse.

Our acting majors are fantastic. The Trial of Judas Iscariot, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Curtains are just a few that stand out in my memory.

It was also a joy to cheer on our athletic teams. It was so cool to watch you compete in volleyball, basketball, baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse (which I will figure out some day), track, and let's not forget the big win over six-time national champion Whitewater in football. You did that. And, as good as you were in your sport, it was your fine work as students that was even more impressive. Thanks to athletic director Mike Wagner and all of the coaches for creating and maintaining a culture in which student athletes can thrive.

For the past four years I have had the honor of working alongside Professor Fred Hoyt. Fred is retiring after over thirty years at Illinois Wesleyan. Every day, he worked to make his classes more relevant and vibrant. And every day, he was a role model for me about how important it is to stay engaged each day we are given. Thank you, Fred, for all you gave to Wesleyan and its students.

Last year, my wife and I attended the Spanish and Latino Student Association (SALSA) cultural night for an evening of fine food, music, and dance. It was a blast.

Each year, the Kappa, Kappa, Gamma sorority invite faculty to a dinner at their house, providing great evenings of food and conversation.

Finally, during the past year I had the opportunity to be part of Interfaith, and attend Wednesday afternoon sessions with a group of students of all different faiths and perspectives, discussing faith, secularism, and culture. It was an amazing learning opportunity. The snacks were pretty good, too.

In closing, I offer the following advice I received from two very instrumental people in my life. First, when I was just beginning law school, I received a C on a paper I turned in to my Legal Writing teacher, Brannon Heath. I went to her in a bit of a panic to ask what I could do to improve my performance. She calmed me down and said, "Success in law school isn't about how smart you are, it's about how hard you're willing to work. Professor Heath's words changed my life.

Second, several years ago I asked my dad what advice he would give to young people about life. He paused and told me that a fulfilling life is built one day at a time. Focus on doing your best each and every moment. Live each day well, and some day you will happily reflect on a life well lived.

Once again, congratulations and the best to you always.