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## Faculty Reflections

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## Life Lessons from my Anatomy Notes

Good afternoon! I am very honored to have the privilege to speak to you today. However, this is really a day to honor you, our graduates. Today we, your faculty, instructors, family, friends, and peers, are gathered to celebrate your many accomplishments here at Illinois Wesleyan. We have enjoyed partnering with you during these undergraduate years as you were stretched, challenged, and pushed both inside and outside the classroom. We have tried our best to prepare you well for whatever next step you have chosen. You are here before us today because you have read, written, presented, discussed, performed, and tested your way across the finish line, successfully completing all the academic requirements to graduate. Congratulations!

As we celebrate your crossing of that finish line today, I want to send you off with a few last lessons. These lessons are not of the academic type, and they are not specific to a particular major or future career path. I hope you will apply them not only to your professional life, but to your personal life as well. To find these lessons, I have dug into my anatomy notes (I'm an instructor in our Human Biology class, after all), where I have found some life lessons among the cells and structures of our bodies.

My first lesson comes from special cells in our skin known as melanocytes. These selfless little cells spend their days making the brown pigments of our skin, which they then ship off to adjacent cells to protect these neighbors from the sun's harmful rays. Melanocytes are so generous with the pigments they produce that, when viewed under a microscope, it is the neighboring cells, not the melanocytes, that appear visibly brown! Here's the life lesson I'd like you to learn from the melanocyte: Be generous to those around you. Take time to really listen when a friend needs support. Take a meal to an ill co-worker. Mentor a troubled youth in your new community. Find ways to serve. Like the melanocyte, give of yourself to better the lives of others.

My second life lesson from anatomy comes from our bones. These hard structures in our body seem static and unchanging. However, at the microscopic level, our bones are constantly being reworked. Cells known as *osteoblasts* are busy building new bone. In contrast, other cells called *osteoclasts* spend their days breaking down bone. Although both the builders and the breakers are needed to keep us healthy, there is a lesson I'd like you to learn from these cells. Every day we have a choice to be an *osteoblast* (a person who builds up others through encouragement, kindness, and friendship) or an *osteoclast* (one who tears down others with careless or even harsh words or actions). Choose to be an osteoblast, an encourager and supporter of those around you. The world needs more osteoblasts.

My final life lesson from anatomy looks at the body as a whole. In the fall semester, we begin our laboratories by looking at the skeleton, but soon realize that this amazing assemblage of bones is of no use without muscles to move it. Similarly, these muscles are of no use without a circulatory system to provide them with needed nutrients and oxygen. Each of the body's systems has a special purpose, but each would be useless without the assistance and special functions of the other systems of the body. In the same way, each of us has unique gifts and abilities, but unless we work together with others who offer different talents, our efforts are often futile. Be thankful for the abilities you've been given, and be grateful for the opportunity to partner with others who have different ones than you. Keep growing in your own gifts and use them well, but also help others as they work to develop and share theirs. Our body's systems work together to allow us to stand strong. Unite with your fellow humans so we can stand strong together, because together is the only way we can stand.

As you leave these undergraduate years behind and move on to new adventures, I urge you to remember these life lessons from anatomy. Generously give of yourself to others. Choose words and actions that build others up rather than tear them down. Remember that just as our body needs all of its systems to function properly, you need others, and they need you.

Congratulations, class of 2019, and may the best be yet to come for each of you!