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## Cunningham Trip Builds Bridges with India

Rachel Hatch  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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**Contact:** Rachel Hatch, (309) 556-3960

## **Cunningham Trip Builds Bridges with India**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University Provost Beth Cunningham was chosen to travel this semester to India as part of a special program of the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES), which is known for the Fulbright Program.

Cunningham’s special program, known as the India Higher Education Administrators Seminar, sent 10 administrators to establish international connections with universities in India.

“The colleges and universities we visited really wanted to build collaborations,” said Cunningham, who spent two weeks in India this March. “This trip was to help us think about ways we could work together in the future as institutions of higher education.”

According to Cunningham’s studies, only about 11 percent of the eligible Indian population go on to higher education, a stark difference to the estimated 56 percent in developed nations. “The goal of India’s government is to raise that level to 20 percent within the next few years,” said Cunningham. “One challenge to that is the lack of faculty and trained administrators, which is what makes these trips so important.”

Participants in the seminar visited such institutions as the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, the Tata Institute for Social Justice and the University of Mumbai. They also met with members of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council. “Accreditation for universities in India and the United States is a very similar process,” noted Cunningham.

Cunningham and the others in the seminar asked and answered questions of the officials and faculty they met in India. “This was a fact-finding mission,” she said. “India is an incredibly complex place – its history, its people, its culture, its higher education systems, its many languages – but there are places where I could see our students and faculty.”

In the future, Cunningham said she hopes more Illinois Wesleyan representatives can make the journey to India to explore opportunities for faculty and students. “I would love to see more connections come from this trip,” she said.