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From the President's Desk

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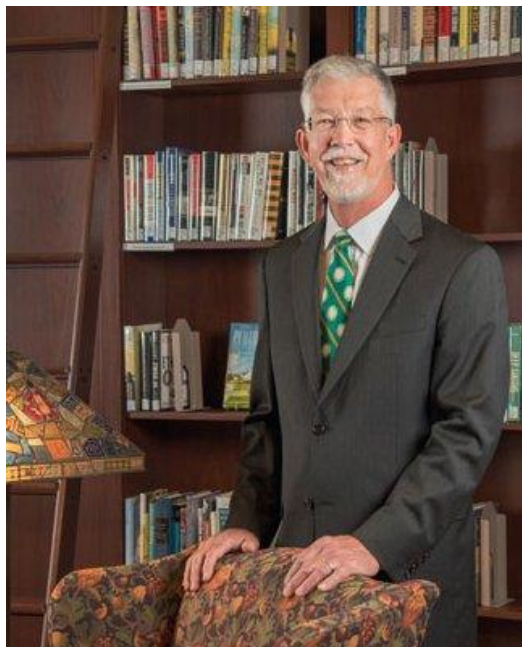
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From the President's Desk



I'm writing today from a very quiet campus. We have students here doing summer projects, and I happened to meet a prospective student-athlete on tour with her family today. But otherwise it's a time of year when faculty research (often in collaboration with students) progresses, and administrators get ready for the coming year. I travel a fair amount during the summer, meeting alumni singly and at Connections, attending conferences at which I can compare notes with presidents from schools like Illinois Wesleyan, and so forth.

Some of the things most impactful to this campus have happened recently in Springfield and may happen soon in Washington. The exciting news from Springfield in early July was that the state legislature passed a budget after the state had gone two years without one. About one-fourth of our students rely on Monetary Assistance Program (MAP) grants from the State of Illinois. These need-based awards had been in doubt. We made the decision last year to protect our students from the politics of the process to the extent that we were able to do so, and continued that policy this year. The passage of a budget that included full MAP funding was met with great rejoicing in Holmes Hall. We await with some trepidation the Federal budget proposal, which may include cuts in Pell and work-study grants, and other need-based aid on which many of our students rely.

MAP, Pell, and work-study are relatively small grants, but the reaction of current and potential students and their families to the possible loss of these funds has helped to bring home the dilemma faced by many

families. The average lifetime earnings premium accruing from a college education is roughly three quarters of a million dollars. While it is difficult to calculate a comparable figure for an individual school, we are among the very best institutions in the country in placing students on psychologically and financially rewarding career paths, and I'm confident in asserting that Titans earn even more. The data show that we are among the very best in the country at economically transporting students from low incomes to high, and we have a long history of attendance by first- and second-generation college students. An impressive 96% of 2016 graduates were employed or in graduate school within six months of graduation.

Unfortunately, barriers to entry and completion that may at first blush seem small, especially in comparison to the large and fairly certain returns that we offer, can be formidable. These obstacles grow as income falls. Many students or families with limited access to credit, for example, saw the potential loss of a \$4,968 MAP grant as catastrophic, and I have no doubt that our flexibility in providing contingent grants and loans allowed many of these students to remain at IWU. But there is another important threshold, which is the initial decision to attend a particular college or university. Increasingly, we see students who, often for want of a relatively small number of dollars, decide that they cannot afford to attend Illinois Wesleyan.

Middle- and lower-income families have never really recovered from the Great Recession, and this is especially true in Illinois. As a result, our potential students increasingly face financial barriers that, while objectively small in comparison to the financial reward accompanying an Illinois Wesleyan degree, nevertheless loom large as those students make comparisons between schools. We have aggressively controlled costs, but the special nature of the experience we provide is by its nature more expensive than the larger-scale, less-personal undertakings at many institutions. Our transformative mission has always proudly included children from middle- and lower-income backgrounds. Its continuation increasingly will depend on the support of the larger Illinois Wesleyan community, and especially the support of Titans. Thank you for all that you have done already, and thank you for your generosity in your continuing commitments.