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Award Winning Filmmaker Kevin Smith to Address Illinois Wesleyan Commencement on May 7

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Award-winning film director and writer Kevin Smith--whose screen credits include Clerks, Mallrats, and Chasing Amy--will address an estimated 535 graduates and their families at Illinois Wesleyan University's commencement for its 150th year on May 7 (Sunday).

IWU's 1 p.m. graduation ceremony (the processional of graduates and faculty begins at 12:45 p.m.) will take place on the Eckley Quadrangle unless inclement weather forces the event inside the Shirk Center, 302 E. Emerson, Bloomington.

Smith will receive an honorary doctor of humane letters degree for his contributions to the art and science of filmmaking.

IWU will award bachelor's degrees to about 320 female and 215 male students at Commencement 2000. It's estimated that about 21 students will graduate summa cum laude (3.90 grade-point average on a 4.0 scale), 67 students will graduate magna cum laude (3.70 grade-point average or higher), and 80 will graduate cum laude (3.50 grade-point average or higher).

The graduating class includes approximately 473 students from Illinois and students from 22 other states, as well as an estimated 11 students from six nations.

Graduating seniors represent 34 fields of study, the top six of which, in terms of the number of graduates, are expected to be in business administration, biology, English, psychology, political science, and nursing.

Kevin Smith Profiled

He has been called "the King of Gen X cinema."

Writer and filmmaker Kevin Smith received critical acclaim for his 1994 debut movie, Clerks, made on a shoestring \$27,575 budget.

"After a semester of college and four months of film school," Time Magazine reported in 1997, "Smith found himself back home working for \$5 an hour at Quick Stop, a convenience store. Light bulb! Why not a movie based on the life of a convenience store clerk? He wrote Clerks in a month and shot it at the store after hours, in black and white."

Clerks, a surprise critical and commercial hit, won prestigious awards from the Sundance Film Festival and the Cannes Film Festival.

Smith, who was born in 1970 in Red Bank, N.J., was co-executive producer of the Academy Award-winning film, Good Will Hunting. The 1997 movie, according to a synopsis, is about a "South Boston whiz kid [who] elects to clean the halls of learning rather than enter them, slumming his way through life as a janitor at [the Massachusetts Institute of Technology]." The film was written by and starred Matt Damon and Ben Affleck.

Smith's professional trademark has been writing and directing cutting-edge independent films, including Mallrats, Chasing Amy, and Dogma. Smith's films attract some of Hollywood's hottest young screen talent. Chasing Amy, a 90's take on boy-meets girl, featured Affleck and Joey Lauren Adams, and won the Independent Spirit Award for Best Original Screenplay. Dogma, a "comic fantasia," featured Affleck, Damon, Linda Fiorentino, Salma Hayek, and Chris Rock.

Clerks, Mallrats, and Chasing Amy comprise Smith's New Jersey trilogy. "All three films, however distinct in their narrative presentation and comedic style," according to Smith's production company web site, "share common themes. All are situated in the central New Jersey suburbs where Smith grew up and continues to work and live." Smith said that all three of the films depict a time that "for many was painful and forgettable: the years just after high school and beyond when we're being forced into adulthood. Everything seems raw and dramatic then. And when falling in love, emotional for us at any age, is especially turbulent."

"My generation believes we can do almost anything," Smith told Time magazine in the 1997 article. "My characters are free: no social mores keep them in check."

Smith is an avid comic book fan. He is the owner of Jay and Silent Bob's Secret Stash, a comic book haven located in Redbank, N.J. Smith also has written his own comic book titles, such as Jay & Silent Bob and Clerks: The Comic. Among other comic book projects are Daredevil for Marvel Comics.

Smith also spends much time at the web site of his company, View Askew Productions, at www.viewaskew.com, chatting with his fans.

Smith and his wife, Jennifer, are the parents of a daughter, Harley Quinn, who was born on June 26, 1999.

About IWU

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,070 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. A \$26 million library and a \$6 million student center are under construction. Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine ranks Illinois Wesleyan University 12th among the nation's top

1,600 private colleges in providing a top-quality education at an affordable cost. Also sharing IWU's rank are Princeton and Dartmouth.