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Matt Kurz
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Celebrated Princeton Philosopher Appiah Addresses President's Convocation

September 1, 2011

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Urging students and others in the audience to view a subtitled film each month as one way to better understand global cultural identities, Ghanaian-British-American philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah delivered the featured address at the annual President's Convocation at Illinois Wesleyan's Westbrook Auditorium Aug. 31.

Named by *Foreign Policy* magazine as one of the top 100 global thinkers in 2010, Appiah is the Laurance S. Rockefeller University Professor of Philosophy and the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University. His speech highlighted the University's Summer Reading Program, which gives incoming students, faculty and staff an opportunity to participate in a shared intellectual experience through discussions. This year, the new students explored issues related to diversity with the 2011 Summer Reading Program selection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), Jhumpa Lahiri's Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of story stories.



Kwame Anthony Appiah speaks at the President's Convocation.

In his speech, Appiah related his central theme of cosmopolitanism — the philosophy that all of humanity belongs to a single moral community — to Lahiri's book, to the teachings of ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes and to his own multicultural heritage.



President's Convocation guest speaker Kwame Anthony Appiah meets with Ateh Tetteh '15 at a reception after the convocation.

Appiah pointed to three lessons we should take from Diogenes, a controversial thinker in his own time “who dreamed of global citizenship 24 centuries ago.” Among Diogenes’ beliefs, said Appiah: “We don’t need a single world government, but we must care for the fate of all human beings, inside and outside our own societies.” The Greek philosopher also believed “we have much to gain from conversation with one another across differences.”

Incorporating examples from Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, a collection of short stories about Indian-American immigrants dealing with culture clashes and generation gaps, Appiah brought to life his own cosmopolitan view of the world and his belief that such a view can enrich our lives and interactions

locally as well as across boundaries of national and cultural identity.

“Cosmopolitanism begins with a respect for roots; which is why I began by telling you something of the places — in England and in Ghana — that produced the cosmopolitan who stands before you today.” Appiah told the students, faculty and visitors in attendance, “Your destiny in the real world will be the product of the way you make something new and original out of the identities you have inherited, just as Jhumpa Lahiri’s characters in her fictional worlds, beginning with the identities they were born with, make their individual lives in the places where they have ended up.”

Appiah currently serves as chair of the board of the prestigious American Council of Learned Societies. Known as a moral philosopher whose work focuses on the questions of identity in an increasingly global and interconnected world, he has published widely on the topics of ethics, African and black cultural studies, racial identity, political theory and philosophy of the mind.

Contact: Matt Kurz, (309) 556-3203