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Illinois Wesleyan Celebrates Class of 2014

May 4, 2014

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Illinois Wesleyan University celebrated the Class of 2014, one of the institution's largest graduating classes, during the 164th **Commencement** ceremonies May 4.

President Richard F. Wilson noted the Class of 2014 is the first to take classes in State Farm Hall and to walk across the Glenn and Rozanne P. Kemp Commencement Plaza to receive their degrees.

"This is truly a day to remember," said Wilson. "There is no rain."

Board of Trustees President George Vinyard '71 congratulated the more than 500 graduates. Illinois Wesleyan strives to help students to think deeply and live in a manner consistent with its motto – *Scientia et Sapientia*, generally translated as "knowledge and wisdom."

"This requires personal engagement that goes far beyond the search for objective truth and reaches deeper into the realm of what it means to be part of humanity in all its historical, social, esthetic, moral and spiritual dimensions," Vinyard said in expounding on the definitions of 'knowledge' and 'wisdom.'

Vinyard, President Richard F. Wilson and Provost and Dean of the Faculty Jonathan D. Green conferred an honorary doctor of humane letters degree upon Deanna L. Jent, a 1984 graduate of Illinois Wesleyan. An award-winning director and playwright, Jent delivered the commencement address "Story & Truth: The Dionysus Connection."

Jent noted that 30 years ago she was a theatre major on the other side of the podium. Calling on her vocation as a director and playwright, Jent spoke about the power of story and its association with truth.

"The truth is that you are graduating," Jent said to the graduates, including her son Christopher '14. "The story today is about your transformation — how a college education has changed you and will carry you through the next chapter of the novel you could call 'your life.'"

"You've learned that much in the world is not black and white; there are shades of grays and colors throughout," she added.

"Truth and story intermingle...examining opposing sides, of holding tension between this and that, knowing truth and story is in both of them, and that's not easy. But getting to these seats so you could wear those robes and hats wasn't an easy process, either."

Jent recounted a story of her years working as an administrative assistant both during and after she earned her Ph.D. in



Graduates line up for Commencement

theatre from Northwestern University. She expressed frustration that she didn't need years of school to file and type, only to be admonished by her grandfather, who told her an education is never wasted.

"What story had I been telling myself?" she asked the graduates. "It was a kind of Cinderella story, where I was banished to the office of secretary instead of reigning as the Queen of Academia, as I should have been. My grandpa's words helped me shape a different story, in which the job I was doing and the people that I worked with were not detours from my real life, but authentic parts of who I was becoming."

Jent also spoke of the need to tell the truth to others, but also to ourselves. "Find someone or some place where you can tell the truth," she said. "The messy truth, 'the way your life really is truth, the stuff I'm ashamed of' truth."

She said that for her, telling the truth meant **writing a play** that explored the dynamics of caring for a child severely affected by autism. "The story I wanted for my children, where all three had friends, found meaningful relationships and vocations and lived happily — that story was rewritten — for all of us," she said. "We had to find new ways to define 'normal' and 'success' and ultimately, I had to surrender to the narrative that was claiming us."

Summing up her wisdom since graduating from IWU 30 years ago, Dent advised the graduates to continually ask what story they are telling themselves and then examine how that story makes them feel and act.

"Boldly write your story, but when another story starts to write you, surrender to that new narrative," Dent said.

And last, Dent told the graduates, they should never be ashamed to tell a truth that is "brutiful," an amalgam of life coined by author Glennon Doyle Melton, in describing how life can be both beautiful and brutal at the same time.

In closing and in the spirit of Dionysus, Jent directed more than 5,000 audience members in the "wave" to celebrate the joy of graduation day. "Dionysus would be proud," said Jent.

Representing one of the many voices of the senior class, president Hannah Smith thanked faculty and staff, her parents and her friends as sources of strength, encouragement and enrichment. She noted the Class of 2014's four years at Illinois Wesleyan began with a volunteer day in the community and ended with a similar opportunity just a few days ago.

In addition to immersion in the Bloomington-Normal area, many students took the opportunity to join the global community as well, Smith said.

"With Illinois Wesleyan's strong commitment to students' cultivating a comprehensive worldview, a phenomenal 50 percent of our class studied abroad," said Smith.

Also speaking was the 2014 Student Senate Professor of the Year William B. Jaeckle, who spoke about the process of discovery in both our professional and personal lives. Quoting from John Steinbeck's forward to the 1948 edition of *Between Pacific Tides* by Ed Ricketts and Jack Calvin, Jaeckle noted that he, like most of us, is a work in progress.

"Discovery is a process," said Jaeckle, associate professor of biology. "What we know today is only a temporary answer to something that may be overturned by what we learn tomorrow, but the progress that we make as we do this work is enormously rewarding, or can be enormously rewarding, and is worth the effort that is required."

Jaeckle admonished the graduates to be brave enough to make their own observations, to see the fissures or to see new

solutions. This is how each of us continues our own work of progress, Jaeckle said.

“Take your new eyes and the tools you have learned while at Illinois Wesleyan University, and apply them to see new things and to continue to do your own good works. However, while you are working, please don’t forget to whistle, don’t forget to sing, don’t even forget to skip a little bit every day, because it makes life’s work a lot more fun,” he said.

During the ceremony four faculty were invested as **endowed professors or chairs** for their distinguished teaching, research and service. Those honored were: Biology Associate Professor David Bollivar, to the Miner Linnaeus Sherff Endowed Professorship of Botany; School of Nursing Director Victoria Folse, to the Caroline F. Rupert Endowed Chair of Nursing; Business Administration Associate Professor Robert A. Kearney, to the Edward R. Telling '46 Endowed Professorship of Business Administration; and Physics Professor Gabriel C. Spalding to the new B. Charles and Joyce Eichhorn Ames Professorship.

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