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University Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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## To Class of 2018: “YOLO – Seize the Most from a Liberal Arts Education”

Aug. 20, 2014

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Illinois

Wesleyan University welcomed the Class of 2018 as the newest Titans Aug. 19 during New Student Convocation. With nearly 35 percent of the class students of color or international students and students coming from 22 states and 17 different countries, the Class of 2018 is the most diverse entering class ever at Illinois Wesleyan.

Tony Bankston, dean of admissions, told the students their classmates included: 61 students who had a close family member also attend Illinois Wesleyan; 67 students who are the first in their family to go to college; members of the first women’s lacrosse team at Illinois Wesleyan; a student who was a junior reporter at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London; a first-place champion at a national karate tournament (the only woman in her group); someone who has performed music at both the White House and the Vatican; another who is related to Werner Klemperer, the actor who portrayed Col. Klink on the television series *Hogan’s Heroes*; and five sets of twins.

Keynote speaker Kathleen Montgomery, associate professor of political science, addressed the new students as the recipient of the 2015 Kemp Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence – the University’s highest teaching honor.

Sharing a story of her teenage daughter scrawling “YOLO” on their dusty family car, Montgomery said she immediately thought of the 1989 film *Dead Poets Society* after learning YOLO is an acronym for “you only live once.”

In the movie, an English teacher played by the late Robin Williams uses the Latin phrase *carpe diem* to remind his students that our lives are finite – therefore we must “seize the day.”

*Carpe* can also be translated as “to use” or “make use of,” Montgomery said. It is in the latter sense that Williams tells his students: “carpe diem – seize the day boys, make your lives extraordinary.”

Invoking another popular comedian, Montgomery noted actor Jack Black has said, “YOLO is just *carpe diem* for stupid people.”

“Personally, I think this is a complete misinterpretation of both expressions,” Montgomery said. “I’m actually interested in what happens when we pair the expressions.

“You only live once therefore seize the day,” she added. “This is how I want to relate YOLO to the project you are just embarking on now, a liberal arts education.”

Montgomery reminded each student that the sole mission of the next few years would be to become a broader, deeper, more interesting and more interested person.

“This is probably the last time in your life where everyone around you will be dedicated to your development,” said Montgomery. “After graduation, in grad school, law school, med school or that first job, it will be a time for proving, a time for pouring out what you’ve learned. This is a time for filling up.”

Seize the liberal arts education that is right in front of you, Montgomery advised, and don’t get so mired in anxiety about what happens after this. “We often get so caught up in what comes next that we forget to explore and enjoy what’s right in front of us,” she said. Recognizing the pressure that students feel to select a marketable major with job prospects that seem practical, and the anxiety they and their parents exhibit toward a job market that often looks increasingly precarious, Montgomery advised students that, yes, they should check out internship possibilities at the Hart Career Center.

“Part of seizing your liberal arts education is filling your life with experiences, *doing* things,” she said. “But here’s a secret: *practical* will find you.”

Montgomery reminded the students Illinois Wesleyan is promoted as a place to pursue their passions, but it might be equally accurate to say the University is a place to *find* their passions and purpose.

“The only equipment you really need is an open mind and a willingness to



The Class of 2018 sings Alma Wesleyana for the first time.

engage,” she said. “If you invest in becoming a broadly educated and interesting person, there may be very practical dividends.”

She told the story of one of her former students who did a class research project on Estonia. The student wasn’t a political science major; he was taking Montgomery’s course to fulfill a general education credit. During his senior year he interviewed with a financial management company in Chicago, where, it turns out, the interviewer’s wife was Estonian.

“They ended up having a great conversation about Estonia,” she said. “I’m not saying that knowledge of Estonia got him the job. I’m just saying it never hurts to have a well-stocked cupboard.”

President Richard F. Wilson told the students the president is responsible for two traditions at New Student Convocation. One is formally matriculating the new Titans as members of the Illinois Wesleyan student body, but the other is more light-hearted. Wilson led students through their first recitation of the University’s motto, “Scientia et Sapientia” (which roughly translates to “knowledge and wisdom”).

“We hope you will accumulate the former and convey the latter,” said Wilson. “You should do more with your time here than simply acquire facts and information. Learn how to use that new knowledge wisely for the benefit of others. If you are successful, you will find that your life will be transformed, and your time here will be more meaningful than you have ever imagined.”