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Illinois Wesleyan Inaugurates President Eric Jensen

April 4, 2016

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — A new chapter in Illinois Wesleyan University history officially began April 2 when Eric R. Jensen was inaugurated as the University's 19th president.

Held in the Shirk Center Performance Arena, the ceremony featured calls to leadership from individuals representing various constituencies, musical performances and a poem for the inauguration written by English professors Michael Theune and Joanne Diaz.

In his inaugural address, Jensen broadly defined the term "collaborative engagement" which also served as the theme for inauguration activities. [Watch his remarks.](#)

Jensen said in his mind, the term refers to the institutionally personalized initiative Illinois Wesleyan will formulate to a nationwide movement that is not uniform among institutions. "It is a movement that is in part driven by demand, as prospective students and their parents include personalized academic experiences on their shopping lists," he said. "It is also, in part, a reflection of enabling changes on the supply side," noting that at its best, appropriate technology can allow faculty and staff to focus on "deep interaction" with students.

In response to these systemic changes, some institutions are responding with "signature work," a term popularized by the American Association of Colleges and Universities. "A defining trait [of signature work] is ensuring that all graduates integrate and apply their learning to complex problems and projects in ways that make clear not just to potential employers or graduate schools, but also to the students themselves, the great things of which they are capable," Jensen said.

He noted signature work varies greatly in content and design among institutions, but always "requires a level of student-faculty interaction that is simply not feasible at many, perhaps most, schools, and so it will never be integrated into their curricula." The institutions that do implement such initiatives will increasingly differentiate themselves from the rest and likely create distinct advantages in recruiting students, he said.

Such guided work serves to emphasize the enormous advantage that the breadth of a liberal arts education confers, he said. "We are, in the end, training leaders," he said, noting the liberal arts tradition in developing the whole person in preparation for leadership continues today. Later in his remarks, Jensen emphasized Illinois Wesleyan will continue "our notable focus on the whole person." He cited President Minor Myers, jr. and his oft-quoted remark of going into the world to do well, but more importantly, go and do good. "We are in the business, at some level, of encouraging students in the development of their better selves—of helping them understand how, in ways large and small, to leave the world better than they found it," Jensen said, noting collaborative engagement will not just preserve that heritage but also enhance it. He also noted broadening opportunities for collaborative engagement also means increased accessibility to economically, racially, ethnically and geographically diverse students.

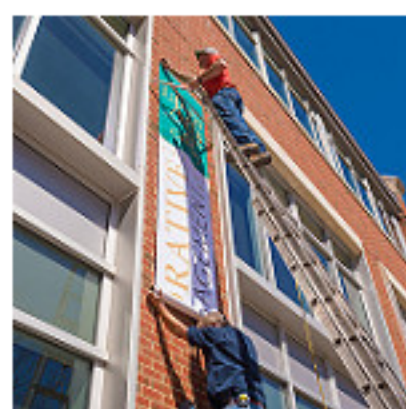
The official installation was conducted by chair of the Board of Trustees George Vinyard '71 and secretary of the Board Jean Baird '80 by presenting Jensen with the silver presidential medallion.

In celebrating Jensen's inauguration, the University community was joined by representatives from colleges and universities across the country, including Kathleen Murray '79, president of Whitman College in Walla Walla, Wash. When Murray was provost at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn., Jensen was provost at Hamline University across town, and it was Murray who first suggested Jensen take a look at the presidency of Illinois Wesleyan.

In an interview after the investiture ceremony, Murray recalled that initial conversation. "I knew [Eric's] work well enough to think this could be a match. He brings a lot of experience as a faculty member and a chief academic officer, and he's had to work through the difficult times that most of us [in higher education] have struggled with in the past decade," said Murray. "I think he has a really clear understanding of how to maneuver through that. And he's just a really nice guy."

The ceremony itself was the centerpiece of a weekend full of inaugural events and activities, from alumni presentations to a vocal jazz concert. Inaugural committee member Paxton Johnson '18 said seeing the committee's hard work come to fruition was personally rewarding. An English-writing major from Paxton, Ill., Johnson said an inauguration is not about one person, but rather an opportunity for the university as a whole to celebrate a new era with new leadership. "Having everybody come together, from students, faculty, staff to alumni, was the best way to celebrate IWU," she said. "I was honored to be a part of that."

Inauguration Photo Gallery



Watch Inaugural Week highlights, [Read all remarks from the Inauguration](#) or [Watch the ceremony](#)

By the Numbers

44: Colleges and universities represented in the procession

22: Members of the Inauguration Committee

800: Programs printed for investiture ceremony

54: Inches in height of new podium made by Steve Ogan, Assistant Manager of Maintenance Services

48: Inches in height of a standard podium

500: Chairs arranged by Physical Plant in the Shirk Center Performance Arena

1,630: Guests who were served food at inaugural events

120: pounds of pork and chicken prepared for the Backyard Barbecue

64: Gigabytes of data recorded over the weekend

6: "Big heads" of President Jensen available for photo opportunities

105: Social media posts using #ilwesprez



Beth White '11 poses with a "Big head" of President Jensen