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Illinois Wesleyan President Richard F. Wilson congratulates Justin Holloway, a member of the Class of 2009 who sang a solo during the University's Opening Convocation.

Class of 2009 Told Liberal Arts Invaluable as the World Becomes More Complicated

Aug. 19, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Mary Ann Bushman, associate professor of English at Illinois Wesleyan, told members of the University's entering Class of 2009 Tuesday that the more complicated the world gets, the more important their background in the liberal arts will be to them.

Bushman addressed the annual Opening Convocation during which the entering students officially matriculated. Following five days of orientation for the first-year students, classes for all students begin on Monday (August 29).

In her remarks, Bushman described the skills that are acquired from the liberal arts — “observing, questioning, seeking knowledge about context, re-examining the object, projecting our feelings and experiences onto the object, making hypotheses about the pieces that don't seem to fit our first interpretation.”

Learning to interpret these signs and symbols, Bushman added, is “a lifetime venture, an epic that never gets boring. It is hard work, and it can be dangerous work: the conclusions we reach may require us to actually do something about the issues we uncover. Or we may discover messages that we don't want to be true....It's not for the lazy or the timid.”

Moreover, Bushman said, a liberal arts education is particularly valuable today.

“To equip yourself to manage a complicated world that only gets more so, you will need all the liberal arts you can deploy,” she said.

Bushman is the winner of the 2006 *Pantagraph* Award for Excellence in Teaching.

In addition to Bushman's speech, the students also heard from Illinois Wesleyan President Richard F. Wilson, who encouraged them to take advantage of all the opportunities that they will have during their undergraduate careers.

“There is no shortage of intellectually stimulating activity on this campus, both inside and outside the classroom,” Wilson said. “The key is for you to take the initiative, to engage the opportunities.”

Wilson also told the students that they should not only become engaged on the campus but should also make the global connections that will become increasingly important as the world continues to shrink while making connections within the Bloomington-Normal community through civic leadership.