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James Sikora To Address IWU Honors Convocation

April 10, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - James Sikora, professor of sociology at Illinois Wesleyan University, will receive the 2007 *Pantagraph* Award for Teaching Excellence and will present the principal speech at the University's Honors Day Convocation at 11 a.m., Wednesday, April 18 in Westbrook Auditorium of Presser Hall (1210 Park St., Bloomington). The event is free and open to the public.

Sikora's speech, entitled "Social Capital and the New Individualism" will highlight the program, during which Illinois Wesleyan students will be recognized for a variety of academic honors.

The teacher-scholar award is Illinois Wesleyan's top teaching honor. The honoree is selected by the University's Promotion and Tenure Committee based on nominations received from members of the faculty. The award recognizes teaching, scholarship and service. The 2008 winner will be announced during the convocation.

A member of the IWU faculty since 1979, Sikora received his bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois University in 1968, and his master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1970 and 1972.

Sikora is known for his active community involvement and his dedication to his students. Along with Illinois Wesleyan Professor of Political Science James Simeone, Sikora established the Action Research Center in 2003, pairing students with community partners. The Center allows students to immerse themselves in actual community work. "It teaches students more than the theoretical information," said Sikora. "They gain skills to operate effectively as citizens outside the University. They see what life out there is like." Projects range from gathering information on the area's homeless population to helping move a historic one-room schoolhouse to save it from destruction and to continue using it to educate school children.

Keeping a promise to himself to live as he teaches, Sikora also works actively in the community. Along with assisting on projects for not-for-profit organizations such as PATH, Habitat for Humanity, Heartland Head Start and Unity Community Center, Sikora is a prolific grant-writer. He is sought by many community leaders, such as the Bloomington Police, for whom he gained a grant for a community-policing program in 1994. "I've always been a sociologist who believes we should take what we know and use it to foster the quality of life in the community," said Sikora.

Respected both personally and professionally at Illinois Wesleyan, Sikora was named chair of the American Sociological Association's Committee on Teaching in 1991-92. He was also president of the Illinois Sociological Association in 1986. "It's the greatest honor to have direct input into one's discipline," said Sikora.

Though he dedicates time to his community and his profession, Sikora's passion remains in the classroom. "I enjoy seeing the students' enthusiasm and sense of wonderment when they enter a world they know little or nothing about. I think if they can walk away with one new idea after each class, then I've done my job," he said.



James Sikora

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