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## **President's Convocation Calls to Push Past Normal, Achieve the Remarkable**

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# President’s Convocation Calls to Push Past Normal, Achieve the Remarkable

Sept. 9, 2022

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — The Illinois Wesleyan University campus was encouraged to savor the excitement and optimism that comes with a fresh school year at the President’s Convocation on Wednesday, Sept. 7 in Presser Hall’s Westbrook Auditorium.

Prince Robertson, dean of students for inclusion and advocacy, opened the ceremony for students, faculty and staff by encouraging the audience to take an intentional moment later in the day “to pause, reflect and be thankful for the good that lies ahead.”

“Last year is now history, and you all now stand in a place of power where you can move mountains with the tapping of a keyboard, or swiping and tapping on your mobile phones,” said Robertson. “Let this invocation serve as your kick start for the 2022-23 academic year, where you take charge of the many gifts and resources you have here at IWU.”

Zehra Bakirdan '23, student senate president, said this new semester “feels normal” after several challenging years.

“We are being called as change-makers and leaders to push past this normal and create an extraordinary environment,” she said. “[The power this place holds to unite the Titan community is stronger than ever as we look to be extraordinary.](#)”

Provost and dean of faculty Mark Brodl agreed with Bakirdan, adding that this academic year already feels special.

“I think you feel it, too,” he said to the convocation audience. “So as we come together as a community at the start of this year, I encourage us to harness that excitement and optimism to make this a year of doing the remarkable, not only on our campus, but for our campus as well.”

Brodl went on to highlight the new challenges, programming and opportunities the University is facing, as well as the triumphs Illinois Wesleyan has overcome in the last 172 years.

“With the good work and strong efforts of the generations of students, faculty and staff that have come before us, we have a remarkable history to celebrate,” he said. “This outstanding institution is now under our watch — it is our time to do the remarkable.”

President Georgia Nugent reminded the audience of a new place arriving soon to campus: [The Petrick Idea Center](#), and of the ways the building will bring power, opportunity and resources to campus.

“The Petrick Center will be a place for collaborative, cross-disciplinary creativity with a conscience,” said Nugent. “It’s a pretty good description of what we aim to foster in this place all the time — creative thinking that brings together diverse people and diverse modes of thought with sensitivity to the ethics of what we do.”

Instead of speaking about the “abstract concepts and philosophical arguments about what we do in a university,” Nugent instead decided to tell the stories of several alumni and their accomplishments during and after their time at Illinois Wesleyan.

She highlighted numerous alumni, including [Debo Olaosebikan '06](#) who came from Africa to study physics at IWU before founding several successful companies post graduation; [Ben Killey '99](#) who studied pre-med and music at IWU before completing his residency at the University of Chicago and throwing himself into service as a volunteer ER doctor in high-need areas during the COVID-19 pandemic; and [Torri Newman '06](#) who was turned down time and again until her book “Falling” was finally published, earned a spot on the New York Times best sellers list and is headed toward film production.

“They came to this place just like you; with talents and troubles, with ideas and impediments, with dreams and disappointments. But what they experienced here, both the successes and the failures, enabled them to go forth from this place to exercise their talents and advance their ideas and realize their dreams,” said Nugent.

“So, on this beautiful fall morning, as we commence our academic year, I urge each of us to take up those ideals of collaborative, cross-disciplinary creativity in whatever we do — acting with a conscience — as we create our own story and pursue our dreams.”



The President's Convocation audience was urged to be extraordinary.