



2-22-2023

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Recommended Citation

Perez, Julia, "Killian '25 Trades Places with President Nugent" (2023). *News and Events*. 4268.

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Killian '25 Trades Places with President Nugent

Feb. 22, 2023

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — History and political science major Liam Killian '25 explored how Illinois Wesleyan University functions from the inside while President S. Georgia Nugent made personal connections with students as the two switched roles on Feb. 20 for Presidents Day.

“It gives me a great opportunity to meet students in a different way and to be in the classroom and see what that’s like,” said Nugent about the swap, [a tradition she has introduced at each of the campuses where she has presided](#). “A part of it is for a student to learn more about what really goes on and to maybe dispel some myths.”

Killian said he applied to be “President for a Day” because he was interested in pushing past his bureaucratic image of the University to get a better understanding of the people and dynamics that keep IWU operating.

“I was surprised at being picked,” said Killian. “When I have had criticisms of the school, I’ve been very vocal about it. I didn’t think they would choose someone who would ask a lot of questions, and I’m glad they did. I feel like I understand the dynamics much better.”

President Nugent said she selected Killian based on the “mature and reasonable” voice in his application materials and his involvement on campus, including Ethics Bowl, Philosophy Club, art director for *The Argus* and his experience as a [Global Titan](#).

During his time in the president’s seat, Killian met with several Cabinet members and administrators, spoke with the Board of Trustees Chair Tim Szerlong '74 and had a call with Illinois State Representative Sharon Chung '00.

Killian said he appreciated the opportunity to ask questions and feel heard.

“When I had questions that were probably a bit intense, no one ever treated it any less serious or concerning. No one came after me with a patronizing response,” said Killian.



President Nugent takes notes during a World of Ideas class while swapping roles with student Liam Killian '25.

“Whether or not you agree with how things are being done, at their core, they’re doing what they genuinely believe is best. People here care about the students.”

President Nugent participated in Killian’s World of Ideas class taught by Visiting Assistant Professor of History Harlan Chambers. She enjoyed lunch and conversation with several of Killian’s classmates before joining in the preparation for an upcoming [national Ethics Bowl competition](#).

Killian and Nugent also share an affinity for philosophy — a passion that allowed for deep conversations, but also some fun during an animated discussion over dinner with members of Philosophy Club.

“We were having fun at lunch and dinner,” said Killian. “There were discussions not just about giant power structures, but tiny personal questions, too.”

Nugent even sketched a comic that Killian plans to publish in a future edition of *The Argus* student newspaper. In the comic, she is depicted as smiling in front of State Farm Hall while reading a book on the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Meanwhile in the next frame, Killian is frowning at a stack of paperwork on the president’s desk.

Killian said the experience changed his impression of the president from being what he thought was a “serious and stern figure” to one of a leader who could crack jokes and be personable with students.

“The more students I interact with, the better,” said Nugent. “I think it helps to break down some of the barriers and misconceptions on both sides.”

Both parties acknowledged how the landscape of higher education has changed — both for students and university leadership — after living through a global pandemic and rapidly changing world. Nugent said she picked up on anxieties and uncertainties that students are feeling as she attended classes. Killian said he has a better understanding of the challenges faced by small universities after speaking with administrators.

“I’m glad that there was a connection,” said Killian. “I felt like I was seen not just as an ornament at Wesleyan, but genuinely as a student that has opportunities and passions.”



Liam Killian '25 speaks with Director of Government and Community Relations Carl Teichman.



President Nugent connects with friends of Liam Killian '25 over lunch after switching roles with him for the day.

By Julia Perez