



Spring 5-7-2024

Next Generation of Titan Graduates Celebrated at 2024 Commencement

Julia Perez
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Perez, Julia, "Next Generation of Titan Graduates Celebrated at 2024 Commencement" (2024). *News and Events*. 6526.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/6526>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Next Generation of Titan Graduates Celebrated at 2024 Commencement

BY JULIA PEREZ | MAY 07, 2024

NEWS



BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – The graduating class of 2024 was honored Sunday during a commencement ceremony on the campus of Illinois Wesleyan University.

The greenery of the Eckley Quadrangle was accented by 340 robed Titans who accepted diplomas in front of State Farm Hall on the Glenn '22 and Rozanne Parker Kemp '27 Commencement Plaza before a crowd of more than 3,400 supporters.

- [See the Commencement program booklet](#)
- [Watch the Commencement ceremony video](#)
- [View the photo album from Commencement day](#)

Speakers at the 174th commencement ceremony spoke on themes of kindness and success, as well as perseverance, given that the class of 2024 graduated from high school and began college in 2020 amid disruptions from the global pandemic.

Noting that it was her last commencement ceremony after serving 20 years in college leadership, President S. Georgia Nugent spoke of the value of higher education to individuals and to society.



President S. Georgia Nugent speaks to graduates in front of State Farm Hall.

“Graduates, as you walk across the stage, you will be receiving not only a diploma, but the opportunity for a richer, fuller life than if you had not earned the degree,” said Nugent.

She pointed to data that shows that college graduates on average live longer and healthier lives.

“College grads vote more, volunteer more and are more likely to have leadership roles, whether in their profession, community or other pursuits. Members of the class of 2024, we have seen that potential in you as so many of you have taken initiatives and taken on leadership roles here on campus,” said Nugent.

Board of Trustees Chair Timothy Szerlong '74 recognized that graduates of Illinois Wesleyan tend to share three similar traits — first, a profound appreciation for the influence of their liberal arts education; second, lasting memories of the learning experience and support provided by faculty or staff; and third, cherished, lifelong friendships that began on campus.



Members of the class of 2024 stood to be recognized for academic achievements.

“Take the initiative to explore solutions with an enthusiasm and unwavering conviction. Demonstrate a willingness to step forward and ask hard questions, with a visible commitment to better outcomes,” said Szerlong. “This approach, supported by what you’ve learned here, will help you succeed, distinguish yourself and lead.”

President of the Alumni Association Board of Directors Derrick Tillman-Kelly '09 said all IWU students are equipped with the University motto which translates to knowledge and wisdom, and they embody the “do well, do good” advice of past IWU President Minor Myers jr.

“I invite you to put the knowledge you’ve acquired in the classroom and through your extracurriculars with the wisdom you’ve gained from living into practice to ensure that you continue to do well for yourself and your family and do good for society and our beloved alma mater. You’re exactly the new generation of Titans we need,” said Kelly.

He then welcomed the class of 2024 as the newest members of the [Alumni Association](#).

Bryson Connor '24 spoke on behalf of the graduating class, encouraging his peers to embrace fear and change, and to be bold while entering this new chapter.

“Utilize the experiences this school gave you to be bold as you grow. Create bold relationships with people who help you learn. Be bold as you continue your activism and political involvement,” he said.



Graduates gather before the 2024 commencement ceremony at IWU's Kemp Commencement Plaza.

“When you leave this campus, be bold when upholding the Illinois Wesleyan message of doing well and doing good. Be bold as you use the education you obtained here to break down barriers that distance people. Finally, be bold in celebrating your achievements today, you have earned it.”

Representing members of the faculty, Class of 2024 Professor of the Year and Assistant Professor of Nursing Monica Hall '90 reminded graduates of the importance and necessity of being kind and helping others.

“When we help others succeed, we create a ripple effect that extends far beyond ourselves. By lifting others up, we not only improve their lives, but we also create a more compassionate and supportive society. When we support and empower those around us, we build stronger communities and a more inclusive world,” said Hall.

Before addressing the Class of 2024 with a speech titled, “It’s Okay to Fail,” [commencement speaker T.J. Newman '06](#) was awarded an honorary doctor of humane letters degree. Newman spoke about her untraditional path beyond graduation.

After studying musical theatre at IWU, Newman moved to New York City with hopes of pursuing an acting career, which didn’t form as she had envisioned. After returning home to Arizona and beginning a job at an indie bookstore, Newman began to write.



Best-selling author and 2006 IWU alumna T.J. Newman spoke about her experience with failure and success during her commencement address.

She later worked as a flight attendant and was inspired at 30,000 feet to write her first thriller novel, “Falling,” which debuted at number two on the New York Times bestseller list in 2021. Her second novel, “Drowning,” was released in 2023 and also became an instant New York Times bestseller. Each will soon be major motion picture films after being sold in seven-figure deals.

“It’s OK to fail. It’s my failure as a Broadway actress that led to my success as a bestselling author,” she said.

Newman encouraged her fellow Titans to determine their personal definition of success “before someone else defines it for you.”

“Once you do — hold on loosely. If you cling to it too tightly, you might miss what’s actually meant for you,” she said. “My dreams might have changed, but not once did I stop honoring my authentic self. That is my definition of success.”