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Building Bridges

At commencement, new graduates are urged to stay connected to IWU and to each other.



Elizabeth Robb '78

The University honored 446 candidates for graduation during Commencement on May 3. Elizabeth Robb, a 1978 IWU graduate, delivered the Commencement address at the Kemp Plaza in front of State Farm Hall.

Robb, who recently retired as chief judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit in Illinois, received an honorary doctor of humane letters degree prior to her address, titled “The Power of Connection.”

Focusing on the “bridges” aspect of the University’s 2014-15 academic theme “Walls and Bridges,” Robb spoke of the power of connections professionally, personally and to IWU.

Of the many connections made during the graduates’ time at Wesleyan, “not all of these connections will remain as strong and as important to you as they are today,” she said.

“But many will. Some will sustain you the rest of your life.” Robb also spoke of the strong connection she has maintained with IWU and its people for more than 25 years, including her service on the Associates board, supervising interns and counting other alumni among her closest friends.

“When an IWU graduate sends me a resume, or calls to ask for help in finding a summer internship or a full-time job, I eagerly assist. This is the power of the IWU connection. Use this power.”

Robb noted a recent study on the need to maintaining diverse social connections as key to managing stress, improving our immune systems and giving meaning to our lives. The study said technology such as texting and social media makes it easier to avoid forming substantive relationships in person. She urged the graduates to “nurture the friendships you have made here, and consciously work to form new ones wherever you go. Don’t rely on Facebook, match.com, Instagram, Twitter. Spend time in person relating to one another.”

Another invited speaker, R. Given Harper, the 2015 Student Senate Professor of the Year, also acknowledged our digital world where we can communicate, shop and work without leaving our homes. “It is imperative that you get out and collaborate with others to address the major challenges affecting society,” said Harper, the George C. and Ella Beach Lewis Endowed Chair of Biology and an avian ecologist. “I urge you to get out and experience the natural world, which provides the conditions necessary to sustain life. By experiencing nature you will have a better understanding of the reasons that we need to protect it, and you will find that its beauty can also be a powerful source of inspiration.”

Three faculty were invested as endowed professors: Educational Studies Professor and Chair Irv Epstein to the new Ben and Susan Rhodes Endowed Professorship in Peace and Social Justice; Associate Professor of History Gordon Horwitz to the new Davis U. Merwin Endowed Professorship in History; and English Professor James Plath to the R. Forrest Colwell Endowed Chair of English.

Closing the ceremony, President Richard F. Wilson noted the Class of 2015 will hold a special place for him, as its Commencement will likely be the last over which he will preside as president. “I shall leave with wonderful memories of your spirit, your creativity and your passion and with deep appreciation for the many kind messages and thoughtful gestures you have extended my wife and me over the last few months,” he said. “My fondest hope is that your life and career will be filled with as many exciting moments and rewarding opportunities as I have had as president of this wonderful university.”



Hundreds of graduates presented President Wilson with strands of mardi gras beads as they crossed the stage, in honor of his last Commencement before retiring.

[See a photo gallery, watch the Commencement video or read remarks.](#)

[Read more about the University's newly endowed professors.](#)