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Spring 5-26-2010

Argus Issues Available in Online Searchable Database

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NEWS RELEASE

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Argus Issues Available in Online Searchable Database

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – There was once a time when looking back meant spending hours in the library looking through a multitude of yearbooks and newspapers, but now The Ames Library is helping Illinois Wesleyan alumni do it with the click of a button. Two of the main historical reference points for campus history – *The Argus* and *The Wesleyana* – are being made available as a full-text searchable online database.

According to Meg Miner, Illinois Wesleyan's archivist and special collections librarian, both *The Argus*, the campus newspaper that started in 1890, and *The Wesleyana*, the campus yearbook, are valuable for research and memories. "Current students and alumni often have questions about events and places on campus, but others have an interest too: administrators, genealogists and researchers from other universities for example," she said. Although new issues of *The Argus* are currently being added to the database within a few days of their release, Miner says the goal is to have them uploaded by the time the paper "hits the street."

The effort to make *The Argus* available online was started in 2001 by former Archivist and Special Collections Librarian Anke Voss. Since 2003, image-only PDF files of issues of *The Argus* from 1894 through the present have been browsable online. In order to archive that monumental task, more than 2,800 issues had to be removed from their hardcover library binding and searched for pages and issues that were missing or severely damaged.

"It's really amazing that we have as few missing as we do, but it's still disappointing we are missing all of the issues from fall 1992 to spring 1923," said Miner. Once documents were created to fill in for missing pages, *The Argus* issues were shipped to an external company to be microfilmed, scanned as image-only PDF files – which were then uploaded to the Internet – and reprinted on acid-free paper.

Last fall, the collection management tool that is used to host the online archives of *The Argus* completed an upgrade that would allow for an easier search of this type of document. Miner, who anticipated these upgrades last summer, sent the original scans of *The Argus* back to the company that first made them and had them made searchable. The process used to make

these image-only PDF files searchable is known as Optical Character Recognition (OPR). OPR embeds a text into a PDF file so that machines can read it for searching. These new files along with the upgrades to the program allow for a word that is searched to show up highlighted on a particular page. In February, student workers began uploading the modified files one year at a time until the database was complete.

"The effort to digitize copies of *The Wesleyana* began two years ago when the Alumni Office decided they wanted electronic copies to be available for the 25 and 50-year reunion classes," said Miner, who believes current students will also benefit from digitized copies of *The Wesleyana*. "Students who have family members who attended Illinois Wesleyan enjoy seeing what they and their classmates were like, and others find photos and information about students in yearbooks that just do not exist elsewhere," she said.

Copies of *The Wesleyana* from 1939 – present are expected to be browsable online by the end of the summer and searchable by next spring.

For additional information, contact Miner at (309) 556-1538.

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