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Remarks of Class President

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Illinois Wesleyan University

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Remarks of Class President

Kathryn G. Breisch '12

Sunday, April 29, 2012

Four years ago, we stepped onto the Illinois Wesleyan campus as fledgling first years. Although we had no idea what to do, we knew what to do: set alarm, don't hit snooze a third time, attend classes, pass classes, make friends, realize that biology wasn't our forte, drop biology and change majors, pass *different* classes, get involved, and take advantage of every opportunity.

Throughout our college careers, we learned about forming our own social groups—remaining wary of friending mysterious people like Amber Brown. We played sports and excelled enough to win a handful of championships. It turns out that this athletic training came in handy when we had to learn how to juggle four plates at a time when the cafeteria went trayless. We learned about love and equality from Zach Wahls, about the power of the sympathetic imagination from Jorie Graham, about social justice from Sister Helen Prejean. And, of course, we learned how to bust a move from President Wilson.

During our time here, we have been challenged: challenged to discover greener chemical compounds, to run competitive businesses using simulations, to compose the perfect piece of literature, to analyze Alexis de Tocqueville's political theory...and even to learn how to spell Alexis de Tocqueville. We have even created challenges for ourselves, pursuing research honors, presenting at the John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference. We became tutors and lab assistants, mentors and team captains, leaders in Greek life and student senators.

And it's a good thing we did all of this. As a result, we are better for it: we are smarter, wiser, more fit. In short, we are now exceedingly well-prepared for...the Zombie Apocalypse. Why the Zombie Apocalypse? Because Professor Weis promised me five dollars if I mentioned the Zombie Apocalypse during my remarks. Professor Weis, just so you know: I'll accept cash or check.

For the record, I'm pretty sure a Zombie Apocalypse will not happen any time soon, but this is not to say that the past four years have been easy. In many ways, they've been quite difficult. Globally, natural disasters have shaken whole countries. Nationally, we have monitored the economy with baited breath. And closer to home, we have faced the loss of colleagues and friends.

But during our time at Illinois Wesleyan, we have been equipped to engage such circumstances. Of course, we have been prepared intellectually by being exposed to new ideas. From music theory to game theory to political theory, general education has introduced us to multiple disciplines of learning. Our liberal arts education has expanded our knowledge repertoires in numerous and surprising ways. But our education didn't stop there. Inside and outside of the classroom, Illinois Wesleyan emphasized social justice, sustainability, diversity. As a result, we are enabled to navigate the future with aptitude, awareness, and compassion.

From this foundation, we have been encouraged to make our own way. Our education became what we chose to make of it. We were encouraged to own our learning by conducting independent research, participating in student groups, and engaging the community. By hearing such a diverse array of speakers with bold, new voices, we began to find our own voices. We have been granted a *holistic* education, one that has deeply informed us and also empowered us to, in the words of Minor Myers, do both well, *and* good.

Such an education is a rare gift, so a simple and earnest thank you is deserved. After all, most of the members of the Class of 2012, myself included, could not have gotten this far without our families, professors, and support networks. The education that you have helped us obtain, has, and will continue, to shape who we are.

To my fellow classmates: enjoy this well-deserved celebration, and in the future, take your personal transformation out into the world to contribute—with both knowledge and wisdom—to its transformation. Congratulations and best wishes to the Class of 2012!