



Patrick F. Leahy

Freshman Orientation | June 30, 2013

Thank you, Mark, for that introduction. And thank you, Adoma, for the great work that your entire orientation team does to welcome our students. Good afternoon, everyone. On behalf of our entire Wilkes community – faculty, staff, and current students – I’d like to welcome all of you to Wilkes. Permit me to welcome in a special way our faculty and staff members who join us on campus today in a different capacity than normal. Today, they come as parents of incoming freshmen themselves. Welcome. Tomorrow – July 1 – I celebrate my one-year anniversary as President of Wilkes University. It’s been an incredible first year for me. Let me share with you a few things I have learned during my first year that may be relevant to all of you.

First, this is one of the most unique higher education institutions, not just in this region, but in this nation. Very few colleges or universities offer the broad academic program mix – from mechanical engineering to theater arts – and the range of extra-curricular activities – from football to robotics – at a school of our relatively small size of under 2,500 undergrads. I like to think of it as the opportunities of a big research university with the culture of a small, liberal arts college. It’s the combination of those two characteristics that’s quite unique.

Second, our faculty and staff members are singularly focused on students – small class sizes, individualized attention, faculty-student research collaboration and lifelong friendships. This is a place where the idea of mentoring is imbedded into our DNA. While I am your president, we will ask the following question before making any decision: How does this decision impact the student experience here at Wilkes?

Third, people associated with Wilkes care – I mean really care – about this place. For those who work and teach here, Wilkes is not just a job; it’s a vocation. For students who study here, Wilkes is not just a school; it’s a way of life. For those who graduated from here, Wilkes isn’t just their university; it’s their alma mater – in the Latin “their other mother”. I hope during your time here at Wilkes you will come to understand these traits as I have during my first year.

So, to the students I say this: In 6 weeks or so you will have a unique opportunity afforded very few people. That is, you will have an opportunity to study at a private, four-year American university. Let me explain. There are over 7 billion people on this planet. Roughly 1.2 billion of them are between the ages of 15 and 25. This fall, fewer than 5 million people from around the world will be enrolled in a private, four-year American college or university. That’s just one of every 250 people more or less your age in the world. Said another way, that’s less than one half of one percent! I call that a unique opportunity. The ancient Greek historian, Plutarch, said: “The whole of life is but a moment of time. It is our

duty, therefore, to use it, not to misuse it.” Your moment is coming in just a few short weeks. In fact, throughout your life, there will be nothing quite like this moment. All of us here at Wilkes can’t wait to share in this special moment with you.

And, to the parents I say this: It’s probably hard to imagine that your son or daughter is going off to college. After all, wasn’t it just yesterday that you were teaching him or her to walk, or to ride a bike, or to swing a bat? I know. I have four kids of my own who are growing up way too quickly. I have come to learn one of the harsh ironies of life. When raising kids, the days are incredibly long, but somehow the years are incredibly short. You are your children’s first and best teachers and coaches and mentors. We are honored to play a role in the next phase of their development. In fact, we consider it a privilege – one that we take very seriously.

I know it is hard to fathom, but in just 47 months we will all be assembled again to celebrate another transition – your graduation. That day will come quickly. And, when it does, you will walk across the stage at commencement a different person, having changed in ways that you cannot now imagine. Let us begin this transformational journey...together. My best wishes to each and every one of you for a restful summer and a wonderful Wilkes experience to come. Thank you!