

the Installation of
Wesley R. Fugate, Ph.D.
as the 20th president of Wilson College

Monday, May 17, 2021

2 p.m.

Main Green

President Fugate's Inauguration Address

Madame chair; Trustees; faculty; staff; students; alumnae and alumni; delegates of learned societies, colleges, and universities; local business and community leaders; my own family and friends; and special guests, whether here or watching at home, I am honored and humbled to stand before you as the 20th president of Wilson College.

Sometimes the stars align, and in the case of the search for Wilson's 20th president, I believe that to be the case. It is perhaps fitting that I, as a first-generation college student, would one day become the president of an institution initially funded by a farm woman with no formal education who simply wanted to ensure that others had access to higher education. Today is the realization of a dream for me and a testament to how education is key to reaching your goals. I am so grateful to serve Wilson. I feel truly called to be here.

I especially would like to thank the Board of Trustees for your confidence in me to assume this role at such a pivotal moment in the College's history. You, like I, never imagined the challenges that presented themselves in our first year and a half together. I am grateful for your leadership and partnership.

I also want to acknowledge the former presidents who join us here today or online. Wilson's history has never been easy. The challenges these women and men faced over the last 42 years and the grace, intelligence, and fortitude with which they tackled these challenges, along with the other members of this community, drew me to this place and provide the foundation for Wilson's future. I am indebted to each of you for your warm welcome, your sage counsel, and your friendship. I am privileged to follow in your footsteps.

When the Inaugural Committee met in late February, once we realized that some form of an in-person event might be possible, Professor Julie Raulli declared that the Committee might be one of the longest-serving ad-hoc committees in the history of the College. And she just might be right.

I appointed the committee in early 2020, shortly before the world changed. Professor Raulli's declaration, in some ways, describes how the past 17 months have been completely unpredictable. So deep gratitude goes out to the women and men who have served on the Inaugural Committee, led by Vice President Cassandra Latimer, and those behind the scenes who have helped make today possible.

While today is not what we originally envisioned, it is a meaningful day for Wilson College, for my family, and for me. Many of you know that I have dreamed of being the president of a small liberal arts college since my undergraduate days, and I had many grand plans for what the inaugural festivities might look like. When the pandemic hit and all of us were burning the candle at both ends, it seemed as if we should just forgo this moment. But again, Professor Raulli and members of the Committee said to me: This is important. Wilson needs this moment. She was right. They were right, and I am so glad that we are here today marking this occasion together.

I must also pause ever so briefly to acknowledge the people who have helped me get here today. Despite not having the opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree themselves, my parents never let my brother and me ever think that not going to college was an option. They sacrificed so much to make sure that we got the best education and that we could experience the benefits of the life that comes from having college degrees.

Perhaps no one was more excited to hear that I would be Wilson's 20th president than them, and I would not be here without them. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for giving all that you did to ensure I could one day achieve this dream.

I have had two partners in life. The first is the guy who always knows what I am thinking, without me saying it. He is the man who joined me in the journey at Centre College and again at Vanderbilt. We shared a first home and our first careers. He is my other half genetically, and unfortunately for the College, Wilson probably got the lesser of the Fugate twins. Les, thanks for being with me through life's journey.

My other partner, who Wilson has gotten to know a bit better, is my husband, Cody. Cody has been remarkably understanding as we took on the mantle of the presidency—a role and life most presidential partners never asked for and one he assumed at such an unpredictable time. He has been patient when our time together is interrupted by the latest crisis and when, after a long day, I don't have the mental capacity to engage with him in his favorite activities. It hasn't been the first year and a half he had anticipated, but his support for me has never wavered. I can't wait for you all to spend more time with him as we transition out of this pandemic. Cody, thank you for all you have already given to Wilson, and thank you for being my person and for believing in me always.

I thank the other friends and colleagues who are with us today, many of who have traveled quite some distance. We were unable to invite as many as we had hoped, but I am grateful to each of you here today and to those watching at home. I especially want to acknowledge my colleagues from my prior institution, Randolph College. It was a

place that prepared me well to meet the challenges of this role, and I am honored by their presence here today. In particular, I thank Dr. Bateman for his kind introduction, the professional opportunities he provided me, and everything he taught me during our time together at Randolph.

In November of 2019, I visited Wilson's campus in preparation for the site team visit from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and got to know our team here better. During a meeting with the cabinet, then vice president for institutional advancement, Cami Rawleigh, asked if I had considered what theme I might want for an inauguration. To be honest, even though I had dreamed of this day, I had not considered a theme. She said that my passion for the Honor Principle resonated deeply with many in the College community and that I should consider having that as a part of my theme.

From there, "*Wisdom. Honor. Justice: A Foundation for the Future*" was born. In some ways, it feels like I am building upon the themes of the two preceding installations. President Edmundson's inaugural address was entitled, "Honoring the Past and Embracing the Future." President Mistick's theme was "For the Love and Legacy of Wilson." As Wilson enters its second 150 years, we honor our past by making it the foundation upon which we build our future. What is that foundation? A place and legacy that we love, and a place that has learned to adapt to ensure that it continues to make a difference in the lives of students. And specifically for me, it is our commitment to *Wisdom, Honor, and Justice* that calls me to serve this wonderful institution.

The Past: *Wisdom*

If I were to ask most students for a definition of *Wisdom*, they might turn to Google, where they will find the definition: "the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, and insight." In other words, exactly the product of a great education rooted in the liberal arts and sciences.

I contend that there is absolutely no better education to prepare students to enter the world than one based in the liberal arts. It's where students are taught to think critically, creatively, and analytically, communicate effectively and efficiently, live and work honorably, and share the world with people who do not look, act, or think like themselves. Not unexpectedly, time and time again, that is exactly what CEOs say they want in their employees.

And I can speak to the value of such an education first-hand. I emerged from my own undergraduate college with a degree in dramatic arts and economics, which perhaps at first glance some might question as preparation to be a college president. But I contend, it is the perfect preparation. My education at Centre College taught me to think with a critical eye, to explore creatively, to communicate my message effectively and with passion, and to adapt to an ever-changing world.

Our history as a college has always upheld the importance of the liberal arts. They are a part of our DNA. And yet, we have allowed our approach to education to evolve, just as the liberal arts have evolved throughout history.

Going back to ancient Greece, the liberal arts consisted of the medieval quadrivium—astronomy, mathematics, geometry, and music. Over time, rhetoric, grammar, and logic, the trivium, were added to form the seven core subjects of the liberal arts.

Much like how the ancient Greeks evolved and broadened their definition of the liberal arts, so have we. Wilson has long viewed itself as a place that can offer the best of both worlds: professional education coupled with a strong grounding in the liberal arts, preparing graduates to be productive leaders in society. In fact, it was during President Ethelbert Warfield's tenure as president, the College moved away from a classical course of study to answer the call for more practical programs and a more vocational education.

And, with the launch of our animal programs, the College began to offer students an education rooted in the liberal arts coupled with a layer of professional preparation to ensure they entered the world ready for careers. For the 40 years since these programs began, we have been finding new ways to deliver a broad-based education in the liberal arts to our students. That tradition continues today with many of our degree programs, like nursing. Yes, our students learn the skill sets they need to be effective practitioners, but it's the compassion, the communication skills, the understanding of diverse persons, and the empathy for others that sets them apart in the workplace. Their success is due in part to the preparation afforded them through our liberal arts curriculum.

The Past: *Honor*

Our two founders, Rev. Dr. Tryon Edwards and Rev. James Wightman sought to “create a college for young women that emphasized intellectual training with a guiding basis of conscience and honor.” Fittingly, 16 years after our founding, in early 1905, the College adopted its beloved Honor System.

The system remained very much unchanged for 65 years until March 1969, when it was revised to help establish standards for both behavior and conduct off-campus as well as on-campus. It is from this revision that the current language for the Honor Principle is derived. The principle now states that “every member of the community will act with integrity in all aspects of life.”

The Honor Code itself was introduced in 1993. In it, each member of the College community is called upon to

“demonstrate personal integrity...respect the dignity of all persons...respect the rights and property of others...respect diversity in people, ideas, and opinions, and demonstrate concern for others, their feelings, and their needs for conditions which support their work and development.”

You can tell from the language of our founders, the Honor Principle, and the Honor Code, that at Wilson, *Honor* is more than do not lie, cheat, or steal. Here, *Honor* is about honorable living: the way you care for yourself and for others.

It is this principle that really drew me to Wilson. The Honor System resonates deeply with me. While it was never referred to at home as “honorable living,” I was introduced to this concept at an early age by my parents. They taught me to focus on doing what is right, even when it is difficult. They educated me to love others and to care for them deeply. They instilled in me that integrity is about what you do not only when others are watching, but especially, when they are not.

Honorable living is so critically important to the history of this place and the way in which we think about governance and shared responsibility to one another. And at a time when our global community is rife with societal challenges, it seems appropriate to refocus on the importance of *Honor* in our past, the present, and our future.

The Past: *Justice*

Wilson’s history has always been one of access and justice. In 1869, when the College was founded, there was resistance by many to women receiving a college-level education. Fewer than two dozen women’s colleges existed in the country. Wilson would find itself playing a pivotal role, opening doors for women to get the very best education possible.

And as a Presbyterian-affiliated institution, we can trace our call to justice to Micah 6:8, where we are taught to “do justice and to love kindness.” At the time of our founding, a movement was taking place to apply Christian ethics to solve social ills. And with that, the social justice movement at Wilson began as we prepared women to go into the world to address societal problems.

One of the most well-known societal issues to which Wilson contributed was supporting a woman’s right to vote in the United States. Hannah Patterson, a member of the class of 1901, was a prominent suffragist serving as chair of the Woman Suffrage Party of Pennsylvania and secretary of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Her work, with that of so many others, led to the August 18, 1920 ratification of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, granting women an equal right to vote.

Of course, our history has other connections to justice. For example, did you know the College was built upon grounds associated with a prominent abolitionist, Col A. K. McClure? Even with historical ties, however, Wilson’s road to justice has been bumpy at times. In March of 1927, the College had its first official application from a qualified black student, but the admission committee voted 2 to 1 not to admit her. It would not be until 1952, after much effort from students and a letter from a highly-regarded alumna supporting the idea, that a black student would enroll. And, it was not until 1958 that Doris Oswell Brunot would become our first black graduate.

In November 1960, the student government association launched a very successful public boycott of a local restaurant that refused to serve black Wilson students. In 1963, two Wilson students teamed up with a black Chambersburg resident to expose housing discrimination. Three Wilson graduates were among the 700 northern white students to participate in The Mississippi Freedom Project in 1964. This work is simply a part of who we are. And it must continue, and it does continue, with the work of the Presidential Commission on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

The concept of access at Wilson has taken different forms at different times. It was not until after World War II that the first men would attend classes as part of an effort to educate servicemen returning from war. By 1974, the College had its first residential male students, but only in small numbers. During President Merriam's tenure, we provided access to adult students through our Division of Continuing Studies. During President Jensen's tenure, we expanded access through our women with children program, now known as the Single Parent Scholars Program. Under President Mistick's leadership, we more thoroughly became coeducational and developed programs to help families understand that Wilson was an affordable choice. Higher education delivers the promise of tomorrow, and Wilson believes that we play a critical role in providing that promise to all people, regardless of their background.

And our sense of justice is not just related to people. We also seek environmental justice. In 1994, with the creation of what would eventually become the Fulton Center for Sustainability Studies and our program in environmental studies, we have sought to help take care of our planet for future generations. Justice is a part of who we are.

I know first-hand how justice can impact one's life. You see, growing up, I myself was blind to many of the injustices to others. It required exposure to these important lessons during my years of higher education and beyond to develop my own understanding of the trials people face in this world simply because of who they are. I have faced those challenges myself, and I know now, more than ever, that I am called to help ensure that all have access to a quality education, preparing them to make a difference in their communities. I am grateful to call home an institution that has been and continues to be equally committed to this cause.

Today's Reality

So, what about the Wilson of today?

When I arrived in January of 2020, we were dreaming together of what Wilson's future might be while a deadly virus was beginning its grip on the world. And suddenly, Wilson was faced with the realities of this pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. We have been hit hard. Our faculty and staff have faced trying circumstances, but with creativity and a lot of hard work, have delivered on our promises to students. Our students have found the silver lining during the darkest of days. As we see the light at the end of the tunnel for the pandemic, we are faced with the understanding that the world has

changed. The new realities created by the pandemic will be with us for years, and thus Wilson must adapt while remaining true to who we are.

I have often remarked that Wilson is a resilient place. Time and time again our community digs deep and finds a path forward. You can see that resilience in 1879, sometimes referred to as our darkest fiscal year, when Trustees feared the College would have to be shuttered, and in 1883 when the Trustees informed the faculty that the school would close, but because of the generosity of the Chambersburg community, the board reversed its decision. It emerges again in 1979 after our near closure when a group of dedicated alumnae fought to re-open the College after a vote by the board to close. You can see it again in 2012 as we became coeducational for our traditional undergraduate population. And you see it now as we boldly persist into the future.

Our Plan for the Future

So what will Wilson's future be? Fortunately, over the past year, we have all contributed to its future. Students, faculty, staff, alumnae and alumni, and Trustees have all collaborated to develop a new strategic plan entitled "Future Wilson: The Phoenix Rises." The plan was approved on Friday as part of the Board of Trustee's meeting.

What does the plan tell us? Let's turn to the College's new mission statement:

Wilson College empowers students to be confident and critical thinkers, creative visionaries, effective communicators, honorable leaders, and agents of justice.

Our plan affirms that we will still hold true to the characteristics that make us Wilson: *Wisdom. Honor. Justice.*

The Future: *Wisdom.*

Wilson will remain focused on helping students at all levels develop *Wisdom*. We will do that by remaining rooted in the liberal arts, the very best preparation to enter this rapidly changing world, but we will examine our curriculum to make sure it serves the needs of today's students. We can provide both the critical thinking and communication skills to help students navigate the increasingly dynamic society and make a difference in their communities as well as the career-focused preparation to help them find a good job immediately after leaving these hallowed halls.

We will place even greater emphasis on an association between the curriculum and life outside the classroom to ensure student success. *Wisdom* is developed holistically. It takes place in the classroom, but it also takes place in a hallway conversation with a faculty member, in the dining hall when people of different cultures learn about each other, on the field of competition, in the counseling center, and in the residence hall. Our goal must be to help every student who enters Wilson as an undergraduate cross the Commencement stage in four years or less, prepared for a meaningful life of work and service.

At the same time, we recognize that Wilson has become so much more than an undergraduate residential college. As we have adapted our programs before, particularly over the last decade, we will continue to invest in graduate studies and online programming that serve the needs of our students and the region.

The Future: *Honor*.

Honor must remain at the core of what Wilson is. We must not shy away from talking about it nor holding each other accountable for it.

At a time when our country and world need it most, we must prepare graduates to be honorable leaders who lead honorable lives. Our graduates must lead with integrity, care about each other as individuals as well as society, help those who are disadvantaged, and protect our planet.

And that is a differentiator. When our graduates seek employment, they will stand apart as a candidate who can demonstrate *Honor* and care for others and the planet.

The Future: *Justice*.

We must continue our legacy as a place that seeks *Justice* and build upon our unique history. We must continue to educate women in ways that give them the confidence and tools to be successful in a world that does not provide them equal opportunity. We must find ways to make our community more diverse and equitable for all populations. Not only is it the right thing to do, but the demographic challenges facing higher education require it. To help lead those efforts, today I am pleased to announce our search for a director of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This critical position will be housed in student development and will help build community within our diverse populations and lead our efforts around inclusion on this campus.

Of course, Wilson must continue to have the courage to be bold in these endeavors, just as it was bold to name an openly gay, first-generation college student as its 20th president. Education can be a great equalizer. It changes the trajectory for not only the person receiving it but their subsequent generations. When given the chance, and with the right support, all people can succeed, and Wilson can be the place where that life-changing process happens.

But *Justice* cannot occur without access. Wilson's commitment to affordability must continue, and we must be creative in our thinking about how to make Wilson even more affordable to today's students. And we must be bold in communicating this affordability message. Wilson is a life-changing experience and affordable for all students and families. Thanks to the generosity of our dedicated alumnae, alumni, and friends, our generous financial aid makes a Wilson education more affordable than many public 4-year institutions in our region. Everyone needs to hear that message time and time again. So let me repeat, a Wilson education is often more affordable than many public 4-year institutions.

Student Success.

The recently approved vision for the College is “Creating Possibilities. Forging Student Success. Transforming Lives.” I am not sure I could put it any better. This is what we have always been about and what we will continue to be.

And yet, I lift-up to you one particular area where I think we must do better. The demographic changes expected over the coming years mean that student success is more important to Wilson’s future than ever before. We must build upon the good work of Associate Dean of Advising Deb Austin and embrace an advising model that helps students navigate our curriculum, helps them discern a path for the future, and steers them to various support systems available to achieve success. In other words, great advising helps a student find their place at Wilson and in the world.

We must enhance, as Professor Wooley has described it, the “culture of care” that permeates this institution. Every single one of us, faculty, staff, Trustees, alums, all of us, must be focused on student success. Every interaction or decision could be the one that propels a student toward a degree or in the opposite direction. From chatting with dining staff to seeking clarity from the financial aid team, from an email with an adviser to a request for a transcript from the registrar’s office, each interaction has the potential to help a student achieve their dream of a college degree. What a tremendous and weighty responsibility. We must all embrace this opportunity. Student success is, and always should remain, our North Star.

The Community

We must also step up and live into our responsibility in the greater community. As I look out today and see community leaders either in person or online, I thank you for your engagement and support of Wilson. As we look to our future, we see an era of being even more deeply involved in the community around us and highlighting for all to see those ways in which we already contribute to the health and well-being of the region. The success of Wilson is good for Chambersburg and Franklin County, and the success of Chambersburg and Franklin County is good for Wilson.

We must strengthen our resolve to work collaboratively, to seek solutions to the challenges facing our greater community. We have outstanding faculty and students whose thought leadership and research can help propel the region into a prosperous future.

And thus, we seek the region’s support. We covet your internships for our students and jobs for our graduates. We want to hear your needs and how we can help provide the educated workforce you seek.

We aim to contribute to the well-being of our community through the cultural activities and programs provided by the College. And we desire to be a part of the solution to make this a more diverse and inclusive community.

Wilson College has forever called Chambersburg home, and I long for the day when the signs around town say, Welcome to Chambersburg, home of Wilson College!

Being Bold.

As we begin the process of enacting our strategic plan, we must be bold. Now is not the time to rest on our laurels. Now is not the time to expect that doing the same thing we have always done will sustain any college or university through the next decade and beyond. The business model for much of higher education is severely strained. In order to thrive, Wilson will have to make difficult choices and dream imaginatively.

We must accept and embrace that student interests are different and explore curricular and co-curricular programs to meet their new needs. And to be successful, we must meet students where they are with different modalities for learning. That's why we are already expanding the role of technology in our delivery of education and services.

Small colleges simply cannot go it alone these days. Already, we are seeking partnerships to be more efficient and provide additional opportunities for our students. We must build upon and expand our existing partnerships with high schools, community colleges, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania, and other consortia. And we need to explore other forms of partnership that are increasingly being formed to help institutions weather the demographic challenges facing higher education.

One Wilson

When I came to Wilson, I talked about my desire for us to see ourselves as One Wilson. Together, we will dream and forge ahead. If there has been one silver lining to this terrible pandemic, it has been to force us to unite in ways we could never have expected. We must not let the receding pandemic diminish our resolve to collaborate and speak with one another with honesty, transparency, kindness, and understanding, fully embracing and living the intent of our Honor System.

Please indulge me for a moment, and allow me to speak about my outstanding colleagues on the faculty and staff. This year has been enormously taxing. We have all sacrificed so much to support students and see Wilson through this challenge. I am so deeply grateful for all, each and every member of our team, has done to help us through this moment. As we seek to advance Wilson, we must do so while forging a culture that supports each of you and acknowledges all that you have given to this place.

Working together, we can build a future for Wilson that helps the Phoenix not only rise but soar.

We cannot do this work without the generous support of our alumnae, alumni, and friends. For 152 years, you have given generously to Wilson to ensure that she continues to make a difference in the lives of students, and we will need to count on you even more in the years to come. So many of you have already answered our call, and

for that, I thank you. And as the world returns to some normality, I look forward to traveling the country, hearing the Wilson stories of our alums and friends, and helping them find ways to invest in the future of Wilson and her students.

The Phoenix Rises

The years ahead of us will not be without significant challenge, but it is because of every member of the Wilson family that I am optimistic about our future. This community is what gives me strength and inspires me.

Wilson is a gem in the world of higher education. We are a community united around the student experience and not afraid to adapt to our constantly changing world. As we have in the past, we will face tests, but together, as One Wilson, we will find paths forward that will build upon our strong traditions of *Wisdom*, *Honor*, and *Justice* and help us advance, ensuring Wilson will continue to shape the lives of our students well into the future. Small but mighty, we boldly persist.

With Gratitude

The power of an education like the one Wilson provides is that it opens doors. Who would have ever guessed that this first-generation college student would one day lead a college like Wilson? I believe that with an education, everything is possible. I am a testament to that truth. The work we do at Wilson is so critical--so important. I am grateful for the opportunity to lead this remarkable institution supported by a remarkable set of colleagues. Thank you for walking alongside me as we strive to make a difference in the lives of our students and in this community. Together, we will accomplish much.

Thank you.