

Ohio  
Wesleyan  
University

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**OWU PRESIDENT ROCK JONES CONVOCATION REMARKS**

**Thursday, August 20, 2015**

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## 2015 CONVOCATION REMARKS

### Rock Jones, President of Ohio Wesleyan University August 20, 2015

Members of the faculty and staff, family and friends, and, most importantly, members of the Ohio Wesleyan Class of 2019, it is a great honor to welcome you to this convocation marking the opening of the 174th year of academic life on this campus.

We gather beneath a canopy of trees surrounded by historic buildings, including the magnificent newly renovated Merrick Hall, that remind us of the enduring legacy of OWU as a community of scholarship and learning.

Today you join the tens of thousands of individuals who have embraced the ideals and values of the place our students know as Oh-Wooo, and four years from now you will be prepared to take your place in the larger world.

Ohio Wesleyan was founded in 1842 with the support of the local Methodist church and the citizens of Delaware.

Our founding charter, written more than 170 years ago, states “the University is forever to be conducted on the most liberal principles, accessible to all religious denominations, and designed for the benefit of our citizens in general.” These founding principles have informed our history and shape our destiny to this day.

The pledge to forever conduct the University on the most liberal principles reflects our commitment to the values of liberal education, sometimes known as the liberal arts.

At the heart of a liberal education stands one bold purpose: the liberation of the mind. A liberated mind questions assumptions that are oppressive and ensures the dignity and worth of every human being.

A liberated mind hungers for knowledge. A liberated mind is free to explore new ideas and ancient truths.

At Ohio Wesleyan, we believe in the power of ideas. Innovations in science that cure disease, that leverage technology to improve the quality of life, and that enhance food production to solve world hunger emerge in an environment where minds are liberated from old ways of thinking and new ideas are embraced.

In the end, we want you to embrace this world of ideas in ways that uniquely prepare you for a life of impact that makes the world a better place, wherever you choose to live, and whatever work you choose to pursue.

When in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century our founders spoke of being accessible to all religious denominations, they put a stake in the ground for an enduring commitment to diversity.

Still today in our society, people live in enclaves (neighborhoods) that are exceedingly homogenous. But this is an institution that welcomes students from an extraordinary range of backgrounds, family structures, national origins, and religious expressions.

We value the diversity of our campus, and we learn much from living in close proximity with individuals whose life experiences and world views vary widely.

Finally, our founders spoke of an education designed for the benefit of our citizens in general. This is the “so what” of an OWU education.

We are committed to preparing you well for life beyond OWU. But there is a higher calling to an OWU education.

You will be challenged here to think about the nature of your life work and the purpose of your life journey. You take your place today in a University where for more than 17 decades students have taken on the mantle of making the world a better place.

In 1917, Ben Arneson began his 36-year tenure as a member of this faculty, and in 1947 he established the Institute for Practical Government and Public Affairs, which now bears his name.

Each year, Professor Arneson challenged his students to sign the following pledge:

*“With a view to serving the public interest and regardless of the nature of my future vocations I pledge that, upon leaving college, I will devote a portion of my time to active and definite participation in public affairs.”*

This education is not just about you. With the advantage of an OWU education, you will be ready to devote your life to serving the public good. You will be prepared to exercise creative and innovative leadership that leads to a more just world, a more sustainable planet, and a more meaningful and fulfilling life for all people.

You will make a difference.

When you make a difference, you will follow in the footsteps of tens of thousands of OWU alumni who, with the benefit of this liberal arts education, have made an impact, often in ways that reshape our society and change our world.

Branch Rickey witnessed a brutal moment of racial segregation as a student when he saw a black teammate denied a hotel room as they traveled together in 1903. He pledged that he would devote his life to confronting this injustice.

In 1947, against the guidance of every other general manager in baseball, Branch Rickey invited the courageous Jackie Robinson to take the field with the Brooklyn Dodgers, breaking the color barrier in America’s national pastime and helping set the stage for the Civil Rights Movement that would fundamentally reshape the structures of American society.

Branch Rickey acted with courage and conviction in response to a commitment he made as a student at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Sherwood Rowland grew up here in Delaware and earned a degree in chemistry at Ohio Wesleyan. He took science classes here in Merrick Hall.

His groundbreaking work as a chemist was the discovery in 1974 that chlorofluorocarbons, then widely used in aerosol sprays and freezers, contribute to ozone depletion.

He would later write that “within three months (he and his collaborator) realized that this was not just a scientific question, but a potentially grave environmental concern involving substantial depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer.”

Rowland received intense resistance from industry and from much of the scientific community for more than a decade. But he persisted, because he knew he was right.

He ultimately received the Nobel Prize in 1995, and today his research is universally admired as landmark in its impact on our understanding of changing atmospheric conditions and the subsequent impact on our climate.

Rowland acted with courage and conviction as a person who learned his basic science and developed the capacity for moral thinking as an undergraduate at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Seated behind me today is Kara Trott, from whom you will hear in a few minutes.

Kara is the ultimate example of the benefits of a liberal arts education. She received a degree from Ohio Wesleyan with majors in philosophy and political science.

Today, she is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Quantum Health, an organization that has brought an entirely new approach to health care. Her clients include some of the largest corporations in the country, and her company is among the fastest-growing in Ohio.

She leads with courage, conviction, and an extraordinary ability to imagine new ways of thinking and new ways of delivering service and care. She will be the first to tell you that these are the hallmarks of a liberal arts education and the benefits of four years at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Today you sit where Branch Rickey, Sherwood Rowland, and Kara Trott once sat – among a group of young men and women taking their place as students at Ohio Wesleyan.

You have four years on this campus in front of you, and more importantly, you have a lifetime ahead of you that will grow out of your experiences here.

It is an extraordinary moment in time, for you, and for your families who sit behind you or who watch with pride from the far corners of the planet.

Your arrival today also marks the reopening of Merrick Hall.

Merrick first opened in 1873 as a science building, the result of the visionary thinking of our founders who imagined a building devoted exclusively to the teaching of science long before such buildings were common on small college campuses.

Today, the renovated Merrick Hall stands as a reflection of the vision of today's faculty for a liberal arts education that acknowledges the importance of connections – connections of ideas explored in the classroom with engagement in the real world (we call it The OWU Connection), connections of knowledge across the disciplines (we call it Course Connections), connections of theoretical understanding with practical application (we call it theory to practice), and connections between a campus in Delaware, Ohio, and a host of places across the country and around the world (we call it travel learning).

In this building you will map out your plan for making these connections.

This renovation is the result of an anonymous gift of an alumni couple who benefitted from an Ohio Wesleyan education and who met on this campus.

Their gift reflects their confidence in the future of their alma mater, their confidence in you as the next generation of students on this campus, and their gratitude for the impact of this institution on their lives.

Their gift establishes a legacy from which each one of us benefits, and it serves as a reminder of the powerful impact of connections made on this campus.

Now, I realize this all is heady stuff – liberating the mind, embracing diversity, serving the world.

College also provides opportunities to expand your horizons in so many other ways, and to have some fun along the way. Athletics, Greek life, student government, volunteer service, study travel, and a host of other opportunities will come your way.

You can't do it all, but you can select opportunities that are familiar as well as those that are new.

Along the way, I challenge you to be responsible in the decisions you make. As a community, we hold ourselves accountable to the standards and values we embrace, and we hold one another accountable to those values.

There is a clock tower at the foot of the historic walk that passes three of our 19th century buildings, University, Slocum, and Sturges Halls.

The tower was installed in 2005 by the Class of 1955 on the occasion of their 50-year reunion. They inscribed these words: "May your time in this place open your mind to a lifetime of learning, your heart to creating memories and enduring friendships, your life to infinite opportunities."

Today, you begin *your* Ohio Wesleyan experience. Here you will lay the foundation for lifelong learning, you will form friendships that are enduring, and you will discover infinite opportunity.

This is your moment. Embrace the challenge, and seize the opportunity.

Welcome, and best wishes in all that is ahead.

And now it is my great pleasure to introduce Kara Trott, a 1983 Ohio Wesleyan graduate and member of the University's Board of Trustees.

As an Ohio Wesleyan student, Kara was a double-major in politics and philosophy.

Today, she is the founder and chief executive officer of Quantum Health. Kara's firm is an award-winning consumer navigation and care coordination company that serves the healthcare needs of self-funded, public- and private-sector employers across the United States.

Before founding Quantum Health in 1999, Kara successfully designed and executed research-based consumer intercept strategies for organizations such as Citibank, Ford Motor Company, and Coca-Cola.

She then brought her unique expertise to healthcare, making Quantum Health the first company in the industry to apply consumer behavior mapping strategies to healthcare. And customer satisfaction went through the roof.

For her innovation, Kara has been honored with countless awards, and her company has been listed as an "Inc. 5000 Fastest Growing Company" eight times since 2007.

Earlier this month – because of accomplished graduates like Kara – Forbes Magazine ranked Ohio Wesleyan at No. 17 in the nation and No. 1 in Ohio on its list of "America's Most Entrepreneurial Colleges."

Of the top 20 schools on the list, 17 are premier liberal arts colleges like Ohio Wesleyan. OWU graduates have the skills to innovate, adapt, and succeed. And there's no better example of the power of the liberal arts and of the entrepreneurial spirit than Kara Trott.

Please join me in welcoming Kara back home to Ohio Wesleyan.