

Wells Award Dinner for Kathleen Claussen

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Indiana University Bloomington

Wells Award Dinner

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1. INTRODUCTION

Good evening. It's a great delight to host my first Herman B Wells Award dinner as provost and to recognize and one of the most deserving winners one could imagine.

Most universities, have a giant of the past whose name, graces an award like this one. Indiana University has been fortunate in part because its award namesake was alive for nearly one hundred years. Only now are we getting to the point where our students have known an IU without the living Herman B Wells. Many of the buildings on this campus honor the memory of the leaders of the past: Owen, Wylie, Ballantine, Kirkwood, Lindley, Bryan. Great legacies were left by each one, and it's very much worth thinking about how, the present and future Indiana University benefit from, and continue their philosophies.

But more significant than his longevity here, and far beyond the contributions of those other fine learned leaders of the past, Indiana University has had only one Herman B Wells. At the dinner in his name, it's good to think about what he meant, and will always mean, to this campus. Beyond his specific accomplishments, which many of us know well, he showed us that the impossible could become reality. Though IU was already a fine institution when he became President while still in his thirties, he left it an adornment on the university world stage less than three decades later. He made it possible to say to anyone, anywhere, that Bloomington, Indiana, had become a great

place to live. By refusing to accept any number of Franklin Roosevelt's cabinet positions and university presidencies he was offered elsewhere, he showed the world that, as Voltaire famously said, everything you need truly is in your own back yard.

By defending Alfred Kinsey and the Russian Studies program at the height of the McCarthy era, Herman Wells demonstrated that ethics and principles never go out of style, no matter how risky the political climate. By making sure that IU was the first northern university to desegregate its housing, dining and recreational facilities as well as its sports teams, Wells made a statement that doing the right thing is always the best thing.

What's most striking about all of Herman Wells's attributes is the continual and ever-renewing excellence he embodied. Even in his nineties, he was still working successfully to launch locally significant entities such as the John Waldron Arts Center and WFHB radio.

We all know people who have had one or two great ideas in their time, or who have shown leadership or demonstrated excellence in one or two positions. But think about Herman Wells: student, entrepreneur, bank commissioner, professor, dean, president, rebuilders of Germany after World War II, adviser to the White House and the UN, yet also annually the campus Santa Claus, friend and personal mentor to so many students and faculty. His nobility and humanity knew no bounds.

2. WELLS AWARD WINNER: KATIE CLAUSSEN

Each year, we honor one graduating senior in Dr. Wells's name, with no expectation that any award recipient could possibly live up to his legacy, but with every hope that the Wells Award winner possesses at least some of his intelligence, generosity and effectiveness.

This year, the committee had an unusually easy task. Although IU is blessed with dozens of remarkable seniors, and at least hundreds and perhaps thousands who will make a significant mark on the world, one stands out.

Katie Claussen was born in Bloomington and moved with her parents to Pennsylvania, returning here as a Wells Scholar in 2002. It's no coincidence that a Wells Scholar has won the Wells Award. These were the only two programs that Herman Wells authorized in his lifetime to be named after him. For all his administrative and academic accomplishments, he knew that an outstanding university had to have and recognize outstanding students, such as Katie Claussen.

Katie began her career at IU by taking a risk; because of her interest in Latino Studies, she enrolled in a graduate-level seminar titled "Transnational Connections," and earned an A+. Truly a courageous and auspicious beginning.

Her successes, of course, grew from there. "She has the drive and imagination to find ways to transform her ideas into productive next steps and long term plans," says Charlene Brown, Associate Director of the Hutton Honors College, who nominated Katie for this award. After taking a course on international security issues, which utilized interactive video conferencing, Katie saw the potential of the technology and created other occasions to deploy it. After the December 2004 tsunami in Asia, she organized a video conference for students at several universities in the U.S. and Britain to talk with both victims and experts in the area of the disaster.

Her enthusiasm for video conferencing technology blossomed into an organization she helped create, Conversations About Service and Engagement, which has involved students from more than 15 countries in substantive and exciting exchanges on a wide variety of topics. One particularly memorable conversation involved the proposition by students from Senegal, arguing in real time over the video conference link, that the Senegalese constitution was better than that of the United States.

For most students, founding such an organization would be enough of an achievement for an undergraduate career. But here is where Katie Claussen most resembles Herman Wells: in the restless curiosity and determination to continue to create new opportunities for others and to learn new things. I'm told by many that we could be here for hours citing all her activities, but how about this one: she designed a course which she is teaching through the Hutton Honors College this semester on the topic of citizenship, and in that course has involved faculty from a number of different disciplines. She also coordinated a successful conference on global citizenship this semester, sharing her activism with others outside the classroom.

As Charlene Brown says, "Katie is dedicated to creating new knowledge and understanding as well as action." She has earned all A's or A-plusses throughout her four years, has secured research grants, has had work published, and has participated in several national and international conferences. She has also worked part-time as an Advocate for Community Engagement in the service-learning office. In short, Charlene says, "Her activities are impossible to summarize in a short time and her potential is difficult to convey in full measure. It's hard to imagine a limit to her efforts and impact in the future."

The superlatives continue from other quarters, and I suppose that comes with the territory of awards, particularly those given to only one person from such a large pool of possibilities. Still, what strikes me about the comments people have made about Katie Claussen is the way she combines intellect, imagination, persistence, and a pervasive desire to serve others. Anne Marie Thomson, one of her professors in SPEA, described Katie as "tireless in her commitment to civic engagement ... she has a kind, thoughtful, but persistent manner that gets things done by inspiring others."

Dr. Thomson notes that Katie Claussen undertakes all her learning and service with a "deep commitment to America's youth and a vision for the role these young people can play in a democratic society." That certainly is reminiscent of Herman Wells!

True pioneers, by definition, create new paths. As Charlene Brown explains, “No list of disciplines can capture the wide range of [Katie’s] mind and concerns.” To accommodate her voracious intellectual appetite, Katie took advantage of IU’s strong individualized major program, which makes it possible for highly focused and organized undergraduates to design a major. Katie created a major in Comparative Social Policy and Ideology and paired that with a Spanish major, both of which speak to her deep interests in Latin America, citizenship, and participatory democracy. Dennis Conway, faculty member in Geography, comments that Katie’s “political savvy as well as her commitment to the highest ideals of democratic principles distinguish her from her peers.” Katie’s having received several A+ grades in both undergraduate and graduate Geography Courses, Professor Conway notes, demonstrates her diligence as a student and her love of learning.

She will have a chance to further immerse herself in academic subjects next year, for she will attend the University of Northern Ireland in Belfast as a winner of the prestigious Mitchell Scholarship. She was a contender for the Rhodes Scholarship, but turned down her finalist interview because – as has been typical of Katie’s career – she has a good sense of what she wants to accomplish, and thus accepted the Mitchell award to spend the year in Ireland.

After that, who knows what the future holds for Katie Claussen? She has been accepted to the law schools of her choice and will continue her volunteer efforts wherever she goes. Like Herman Wells, she has limitless potential; we can say with certainty that already, she has given IU much more than it could ever expect from a single student. On behalf of the faculty of the Bloomington campus, I’m proud to present to you the 2006 Herman B Wells Outstanding Senior, Kathleen Claussen.

3. CLOSING REMARKS TO CONCLUDE THE EVENING

This has truly been a day of celebration that started this afternoon when we honored our highest achieving students here at Indiana University. This evening has been a special

pleasure. We have had the rare opportunity to share dinner with a student who brings together service, learning, and innovation in an effort not to advance her own agenda but to help others.

Please, let's again honor Katie Claussen not only for the ways she has changed at Indiana University but for the way she has changed Indiana University.

(lead applause)

Thank you all for coming.

Note: This event was originally scheduled on April 1, 2006, but because of a schedule conflict it was rescheduled for April 2nd. Could be a funny reference.