

IUPUI Faculty Retiree Luncheon
“The Future’s So Bright I Gotta Wear Shades”¹
Gail F. Williamson, Professor Emerita

Good afternoon Chancellor Paydar, EVC Johnson, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor Ferguson, Office of Academic Affairs colleagues, school deans, fellow retirees, and friends. I am pleased to be here on this special occasion to celebrate the 2019 retiring faculty, your many accomplishments and contributions to your respective school, the IUPUI campus, the University and the Indianapolis community. I am very appreciative of the IUPUI Office of Academic Affairs, particularly Senior Associate Vice Chancellor, Margie Ferguson, for giving me the opportunity to address you this year when unforeseen events prevented my participation last year.

Who knew that 6 weeks before my retirement in June of 2018 that I would face an undiagnosed lumbar spinal stenosis? Following many months of physical therapy, cortisone injections, difficult mobility, and lots of pain, I had outpatient back surgery late last year. I am happy to report that I am literally back on my feet and the future looks bright! I am especially indebted to the many IU healthcare professionals who through their skill, knowledge and patience assisted me in my recovery and for the help of family, neighbors and friends who were there for me when I could not manage all of the daily tasks of living for so many months. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the IUPUI Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Faculty Affairs in the School of Dentistry for their ongoing concern and support.

I know many of you may have faced far greater and more difficult health challenges than I, but I feel very blessed and grateful to be here today and humbled by the invitation to bring remarks.

The theme for my comments is a take-off on the title of the mid-1980’s song, *The Future is So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades*. I will endeavor to tell you why....

I have seen many positive changes since my initial faculty appointment in 1974 to the Department of Radiology within the School of Dentistry. I never imaged all that I would accomplish over the subsequent four decades. I greatly appreciate all of the opportunities afforded me during my long

academic career and the many colleagues who willingly mentored, encouraged and helped me succeed. I will be forever grateful for their faith and confidence in me.

When I look out over the audience I am overwhelmed by the collective teaching, research, service, community engagement, and scholarly contributions represented here today. The body of work is immense and the impact broad and far-reaching, touching the lives of innumerable students, colleagues, and members of the local and global communities in more ways than we will ever know or realize.

I wish to share a few of the changes I have witnessed over the years and I am sure you will be able to relate to at least some of them. First and foremost, I am impressed by the evolution of the IUPUI campus. When I embarked on my academic career, the campus consisted primarily of the health profession schools and the undergraduate campus was still developing and spread across several locations. Little on-campus student housing was available and there were few places other than the Union Building and University Hospital to even have lunch. But look at IUPUI now! This award-winning campus has expanded with many new state of the art buildings including an inviting campus center, student housing, beautiful landscaping, two-way streets with multiple stoplights to enable easier navigation and so much more. I remember running across Michigan Street from the dental school to Coleman Hall to access the underground tunnels that connected the north side of the campus. They were especially useful during bad weather. Now so much of the campus is connected by the walkways over Michigan and New York streets and building connectors to further unify the campus, the collective student body and the community of scholars.

Downtown Indianapolis was in decline at that time and not thought to be particularly safe. Now Indianapolis is a world-class city, vibrant and attractive as well as an active community partner with the IUPUI campus.

Other transformations I have observed are a marked increase in the diversity of the faculty across the schools including the students that we teach. When I joined the School of Dentistry faculty, I

was the only fulltime female faculty member in my department and there were few female or minority faculty in leadership positions within the school. That was likely the case in many of your schools at the time but I am gratified to see an ever-increasing level of diversity among the Academy although there still is more work to do in this arena. It is also exciting to see the increased diversity of the collective student body and the success IUPUI has achieved in making the campus more welcoming, inclusive and equitable as evidenced by being a seven time winner of the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award.

Another major evolution is the use of technology and the impact it has had on our academic lives. This will really date me but I remember when I was invited to co-author my first textbook. One of my friends in Operative Dentistry asked, “You’re not going to type the manuscript are you?” Well, faculty had little access to computers within the school and I am not sure we even had any at the time. So we went over to the Medical School Computer Lab where I used DOS and floppy discs to write the manuscript. It’s hard to imagine that scenario now with all the technology we use on a daily basis to facilitate our work and to teach our students. And who can forget when we thought dual slide projection was innovative? PowerPoint and other presentation software systems have revolutionized our teaching and how we share our work with colleagues.

In the last decade of my academic career, I completed a three-year Fellowship in the IUPUI Office of Academic Affairs under the guidance of Mary Fisher, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Executive Vice Chancellor, Uday Sukhatme. Some of the projects that I engaged in as a fellow continue to bear fruit today including:

- Strategies to facilitate the advancement of Associate Professor faculty to achieve full rank
- Development of school-level faculty mentoring programs through the creation of the IUPUI Mentoring Academy
- Formulation of school and/or departmental-level promotion and tenure guidelines and
- Establishment of campus-level professional development programming to support administrators and promotion and/or tenure for all faculty ranks

I was gratified to hear that IUPUI has recently expanded mentoring programs beyond faculty and students to include IUPUI staff members. I would like to acknowledge, Librarian, Tina Baich, for her leadership and furtherance of the mission and goals of the IUPUI Mentoring Academy.

As a former Chair of the IUPUI Promotion and Tenure Committee and former Acting Assistant Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs, I was pleased to learn that there was a record number (144) of promotion and/or tenure cases in the most recent cycle. I want to thank my colleagues Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Margie Ferguson, and Assistant Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs, Rachel Applegate, for their continued leadership and efforts to encourage and support faculty advancement.

In closing, I want to congratulate you and, once again, acknowledge your many achievements and contributions that helped your respective schools and IUPUI to continue to succeed and become what they are today. Although you are at the end of rewarding and accomplished academic career, you are also embarking on a new beginning in whatever comes next for you in retirement. The opportunities are vast and exciting and may include continued professional pursuits, travel, more time with family and friends, philanthropic and community activities, service as volunteer faculty or more likely some combination, thereof, which is my plan. As one of my retired dental school colleagues said, "The beauty of retirement is that you finally get to do what you want, when you want." Whatever path you choose in retirement, I know you will find the sweet spot for yourself and continue to lead long productive lives. I wish you the best of health and happiness in retirement. Remember, *The Future is So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades*. Thank You.