



## WABASH COLLEGE

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### *Class Agents Letter*

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### Class of 1996

#### Class Agents

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It's been a while since you have received any letters. It's time to start things back up. It seems like only a short time ago when we were together on campus for our 10-year reunion. Next year is our 15-year Big Bash Reunion. **Save the Date now – June 3-5, 2011!** I will be hounding you with calls, emails, Facebook information, and whatever other means of communication I can muster to ensure that you have the info you need to request the hall pass, set the time aside, and get back to Wabash for another great reunion weekend. I won't be doing this alone – I need your help. Email me at [thecarpe@gmail.com](mailto:thecarpe@gmail.com), call me at 317-496-4085, or message me on Facebook to let me know that you are willing to help as a living unit rep, or a reunion planner.

Here is some info worth reading about what's going on:

1. Two looks at the Liberal Arts (below): One from the Wall Street Journal and one from our own Dean of the College Gary Phillips (Given at the senior breakfast).
2. Work has begin in the new football field - [http://www2.wabash.edu/blog/pa/2010/05/athletics\\_fields\\_construction.html](http://www2.wabash.edu/blog/pa/2010/05/athletics_fields_construction.html)
3. 260 deposits in hand for the Class of 2014...yep, class of 2014! Those guys were born in 1992-1993.... We're expecting some small amount of melt over the summer but we should see another freshman class of 250 in the fall.
4. The Glee Club is headed to Ecuador for a two week swing. [http://www.wabash.edu/news/displaystory.cfm?news\\_ID=8096](http://www.wabash.edu/news/displaystory.cfm?news_ID=8096)
5. Fiscal year ends June 30, 2010. Honor Roll is real time at: <http://www.wabash.edu/alumni/honorroll>. Every gift matters. Challenge your class to reach 40% participation or more. It's easy to give on line at: <https://www.wabash.edu/alumni/egift>

In addition to the business of the letters, I think the most interesting thing that can come out of these is the chance to share personal updates from our classmates. Where are you? What are you doing now? How are you? What reflections have you had that are worth sharing from a vantage point of being 15 years forward?



To start on this, I'll share a bit about where I am. My wife and I just celebrated our 10-year wedding anniversary. We have 2 daughters (Nora – 9 months, and Annabelle – 4 ½ years), and live in the same house in Carmel, IN that we have lived in for the last 9 years. I have run into several Wallys over the last year. Most recently, I ran into John Bradley for business. I work for Beckman Coulter and am looking at John's firm for staff augmentation. Prior to that, I have had a few random encounters with Bryon Foley (officiating a wedding that he was in, and running into him after a meeting of a community board that he sits on which happens to meet at the church I attend). In addition to the in-person encounters, I have run across lots of our classmates in

social media forums; particularly, Facebook. Love it or hate it, it's a great way to maintain a level of connection with people over time.

Look for more to come over the next several months. Key takeaways from this letter:

- 15-year reunion next June
  - You need to know and start planning
  - I need volunteers to help round up the guys
- Give me an update of where you are and what you're doing
  - Going forward, this is probably going to be the most important part of these letters...you can get your information on the college in multiple places, so it's not my role to be a redundant source of information. Rather, I'm going to focus on aggregating info on our class.
- Keep connected with Wabash.
  - Whether it's partnering with the college financially, with Chip on admissions, as a returning speaker, networking for recent graduates, or whatever sparks your interest, make it happen.

# Why Liberal Education Matters

By Peter Berkowitz

In 1967, when he discharged his main responsibility as honorary rector of St. Andrews University by delivering an address on liberal education to the students, the philosopher and civil servant John Stuart Mill felt compelled to defend the place of the sciences alongside the humanities. Today it is the connection of the humanities to a free mind and citizenship in a free society that requires defense.

For years, an array of influential voices has been calling for our nation's schools and universities to improve science and math education. Given the globalized and high-tech world, the prize, pundits everywhere argue, goes to the nations that summon the foresight and discipline to educate scientists and engineers capable of developing tomorrow's ideas.

**The aim of the humanities is to prepare citizens for exercising their freedom responsibly.**

No doubt science and math are vital. But all of the attention being paid to these disciplines obscures a more serious problem: the urgent need to reform liberal education.

At the university level, enrollments in humanities courses have fallen precipitously and philosophical positivism is rampant. Many social scientists go beyond the sensible view that the scientific method is indispensable to achieving knowledge to a more dogmatic view that it is the one true form of reasoned inquiry and that only its results deserve to be called knowledge. The positivists disparage all other forms of inquiry and analysis as literature or journalism—by which they mean writings that are intrinsically unsystematic, subjective and of little intellectual value.

At the primary and secondary education level, according to UNESCO statistics, America spends more instructional time on math and science than almost any other country surveyed. We also spend significantly more money

per student than the countries that beat us in international math and science tests, including Japan and South Korea. Data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) indicate that over the course of a student's primary and secondary education, the U.S. spends around \$123,000 on educating students, Japan about \$92,000, and Korea about \$74,000.

Nevertheless, American primary grade students' overall test scores fall in the middle of the pack of the high-income, democratic countries that compose the OECD, while American secondary students' overall test scores tend toward the bottom. The highest achievers do pretty well, although their performance comes in below the average among the OECD's highest achievers.

So science and math education is a mixed bag, resources are not the problem, and reform is very much in the national interest. But science and math education reform begins with the reform of liberal education, of which it is a part.

Liberal education supposes that while individual rights are shared equally by all, the responsible exercise of those rights is an achievement that depends on cultivating the mind. Reading, writing and arithmetic are the basics that free societies rightly hold parents responsible for ensuring that their children master. Many of these children live productive and satisfying lives with the knowledge and training they acquire by the time they graduate from high school. Still, the liberal education to which our colleges and universities pay lip service represents the culmination of a citizen's preparation for freedom.

The drop in humanities enrollments has a lot to do with the pretentious and opaque theorizing that humanities professors have inserted between students and the study of history, literature and philosophy. Meanwhile, confused faculty and incoherent university curricula encourage students to equate liberal education with studying whatever they please. Education for freedom requires more systematic training.

How can one think independently about what kind of life to live without acquiring familiarity with the ideas about happiness and misery, exaltation

and despair, nobility and baseness that study of literature, philosophy and religion bring to life? How can one pass reasoned judgment on public policy if one is ignorant of the principles of constitutional government, the operation of the market, the impact of society on perception and belief and, not least, the competing opinions about justice to which democracy in America is heir?

How can one properly evaluate America's place in the international order without an appreciation of the history of the rise and fall of nations, and that familiarity with allies and adversaries that comes from serious study of their languages, cultures and beliefs?

A proper education, culminating in a liberal education, gives science an honored place. It teaches students, among other things, the fundamentals of the scientific method and the contribution that science has made to human security, freedom and prosperity; it exposes all students to the basic achievements of biology, chemistry and physics; and it encourages those with aptitude to specialize. At the same time, a liberal education brings into focus the limits of science, beginning with the impossibility of explaining the value of science and math in scientific

and mathematical terms—to say nothing of science's incapacity to account for the worth and dignity of the individual.

For the sake of science and math, for the sake of international competitiveness, and even more for the sake of defending the worth and dignity of the individual, the reinvigoration of the humanities and the restoration of liberal education as education for freedom must become a priority.

*Mr. Berkowitz is a senior fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution, where he co-chairs the task force on the virtues of a free society.*

## It's Your Call

Gary A. Phillips  
Dean's Breakfast Address  
Graduation Weekend  
May 15, 2010

Welcome Wabash men of the class of 2010 to the Dean's Breakfast on this the formal—and, for some no doubt, painfully early—start of your graduation weekend. I'm delighted to see you here along with many of the faculty and staff who have played an integral role in your life these past four years. Having faculty and staff around you to celebrate the occasion is as it should be. Your Wabash education is not something you could have navigated on your own, by your lonesome, as a solitary high plains drifter apart from classmates or wider community. The myth of rugged individualism, the story we Americans are nursed on from infancy to adulthood – namely that we succeed by the sweat of our individual brows, that we pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps – only discloses part of the reality. The fact is your success today is owing to something more than you. I hope you will not soon forget that you have arrived at breakfast this morning through the labor and commitment of others: a parent, grandparent, scholarship donor, alumnus, high school guidance counselor, admissions counselor, coach, faculty member, fraternity brother, and those many unnamed persons who have worked behind the scenes tirelessly, day in and day out, to prepare your meals, repair your living units, clean your classrooms, remove your trash, shovel your snow, reimage your computers, order your course books, care for your health, and watch over your safety. You have these unnamed persons to thank as much as the faculty whom you have come to know on a first-name basis. So, to that end, I'd like to invite the Bon Appetit staff to step out from behind the curtain and ask the graduating seniors to acknowledge Mary Joe, Keecia, and their outstanding staff, along with the Sodexo campus services staff, who have prepared for your meal today.

Thank you.

The Dean's breakfast for seniors on commencement weekend is, as you may know, a Wabash College tradition extending over many decades and deans. Deans Byron Trippet, Ben Rogge, Butch Shearer, Dick Traina, Vic Powell, Paul McKinney, Don Herring, Mauri Ditzler, and Raymond Williams before me have used this occasion to address seniors about something of importance to the liberal arts and to the Wabash men of their day. If I may, I wish to bend your ears for a few minutes this morning to consider what it means to be *called for* something, and, in particular, to reflect on the ways a Wabash Liberal Arts education has prepared you to be summoned to a vocation, which depends first and foremost upon cultivating the art of careful listening.

The word *vocation* derives etymologically from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning “to call, summon, to invoke, to invite.” You find this Latin root in many common English words like *invite*, *invoke*, *advocacy*, *advocate*; *voice*, and other words that incorporate the stem *vox*, such as *evoke*, *evocative*, *provocation*, and *avocation*. Prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Christians spoke in religious

terms of vocation as God's call, God's voice, to the individual or the calling of humankind to salvation, more particularly to the vocation of the priesthood. For protesters like Martin Luther and John Calvin, the divine voice could also be heard calling men and women to secular occupations, or to what today we might call ordinary jobs. From this latter perspective calling takes a range of forms with sacred vocation enjoying no pride of place over the secular job. While there are distinctions to be drawn between *vocation* and *job* – for example, the one boasts a Latin lineage, the other Middle English rootage – the two are far more connected than not. We would do well to avoid putting too much stock in privileging one kind of calling over another, to steer clear of the name calling about being called, to eschew drawing hard and fast lines between vocation and job, the sheep and the goats, the saved and the damned, the sacred and the secular.

You find a version of the sheep-versus-the-goats privileging in discussions about the role of liberal arts education in training students for jobs. Some prefer to count liberal arts education on the side of the angels by contrasting it sharply with forms of more worldly schooling, like the technical training you find in community colleges or nonliberal arts curricula where the unapologetic aim is to land people jobs. Liberal arts learning, this view insists, is essentially disinterested, nonutilitarian, the very antithesis of the professional job-oriented training that an ITT Technical Institute offers. I find this is an unhelpful dichotomy, not only because it privileges so-called impractical over practical work, but also because it obscures something fundamental about the historical origin and nature of liberal learning. Eighteenth and 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal arts colleges in America were the training grounds for young men to become teachers and preachers. Wabash College, for one, was founded explicitly to educate men to meet the practical needs of the nation, that is to produce preachers and teachers, which explains why the College was incorporated in 1834 as the **Wabash Manual Labor College and Teacher's Seminary**. Very much practical job training, I would say.

After the teachers and the preachers came the doctors and lawyers, thanks to Charles Eliot, the entrepreneurial president of Harvard University, who was single-handedly responsible for establishing the liberal arts BA degree as an admissions prerequisite to Harvard's professional programs in the 1890s. He shrewdly engineered that move because in post-Civil War America, liberal arts colleges were losing educational market share in the rapidly expanding, and increasingly professionalized middle class. Long story short, liberal arts colleges became the preprofessional training grounds, the minor leagues as it were for the major league graduate, law, and medical schools. From the start the liberal arts were in the career-shaping, workforce-building, job-preparing business equipping graduates to make a living. Our Wabash career services office is dedicated to that end, but so too, we need to be reminded, are the Pre-health, Pre-Engineering, Pre-law, and Graduate Fellowships Committees.

If we admit that the liberal arts are in the everyday job preparation business that enables you to make a living, it's fair to ask is that the sum total of the mission? What distinguishes a Wabash College education over against that of the technical schools and conservatories? What justifies spending time and treasure pursuing a Wabash degree when you could train for a job elsewhere and far more cheaply? – Are you aware that the credit hour cost at Ivy Tech is 1/8<sup>th</sup> that of Wabash? -- Is the principle difference that instead of learning how to swap out a transmission or drop in a circuit board Wabash has groomed you to parse verbs, decline nouns, or repair your split infinitives?

There is indeed something more, and it has to do with the way Wabash and other liberal arts institutions deliberately invite, provoke, summon, and train the ear to attend to a diversity of sounds – the voices of faculty, coaches, and students; the sounds of ancient and modern artists and artifacts; the reverberations of distant cultures and languages; the resonances of the physical and social worlds that speak in material ways. Wabash provokes you, seeks to disturb you, to get out of yourself, out of your orbit, out of your reverie or stupor, out of thinking first and foremost about yourself, out of an assuming and into a critiquing mode, out of an answering into a questioning mode about not one thing but everything. By training your ear to discern the scales and modulations of the world around you, by helping you tune in and attune to different issues and questions as they have been voiced over the ages, Wabash seeks to alter your hearing and change your life. It's what President White has in mind when he speaks about the grand conversation and listening carefully to all around you before speaking and acting, which is not at all easy, especially when people are inclined at times to talk over one another and to be hard of hearing. In addition to making a living, which everyone needs to do to pay the bills, a Wabash liberal arts education helps you to fashion a life, to make you lifelong, evocative listeners, to prep you for a call.

Where and how does such acoustic training happen? All of the hard work imposed upon you to learn to speak, to write, and to calculate coherently contributes to a constant unsettling, of working to make you better, stronger, of setting the academic bar higher and nearly out of your reach, of getting you to stretch and test your capacities, to take you beyond where you are, provoking you to do and be more. This is exorbitant, excessive work, which fits the ethos of this College where there is always more to do and to become and hardly ever enough time to finish what has been started. The liberal arts provocation is a discordant experience, and by design. Faculty intend to disorient you by having you encounter foreign worlds—yes the distant ones of China and Spain and Peru, but so too the closer-to-home ones of Latin grammar, biological systems, Islamic rituals, Mathematical theorems, and macroeconomic modeling. The disorientation reorients you to see and hear the familiar as strange and the strange as possible, to alter your experience (hopefully without drugs), and to discover that this world is massively thicker, weirder, more painful, more beautiful, and more eerie, than you could ever imagine. This work is intended to attune your ear especially to the questions, and to accountability and responsibility through the Gentleman's Rule, to think carefully and with empathy. Your Wabash liberal arts education specializes in calling you and calling you out: to audition for a play at Ball Theater, to the Glee Club in Slater Hall, to Thursday Chapel by Sphinx Club Rhynees, to Chapel Sing where past tradition rings to the present, to student clubs like the International Medical Relief for Children, to service with Habitat for Humanity in Crawfordsville, and the list goes on. From my office in the corner of Center Hall I hear voices all the time reaching across the mall to one another, for one another, at one another. It's this loud, persistent, sometimes cacophonous vocalizing that helps make Wabash a distinctive and effective, and at times frustrating and loud place to be, a human place, a liberal arts place. For all the valuable work that Technical training programs perform, they are designed primarily to get you expeditiously out the door and into the labor force; a liberal arts education seeks beyond that to get you out of yourself and into the habit of discerning fundamental issues and questions. Technical training focuses on making the student an effective problem solver; the liberal arts seek beyond that to leave you disaffected, with your ear cocked and straining to hear the problems that defy solution, developing an ear for the unanswerable. In the words of a famous Buddhist koan, a Wabash liberal arts education trains your ear to discern the sound of one hand clapping.

Lest we quickly adopt a holier-than-thou attitude toward our community college and trades school cousins, we must recognize that ear training also happens elsewhere too. Provocation happens wherever good faculty care enough about students to engage them in careful listening, to demand attention to detail, to insist on high achievement, to invite themselves into the lives of students up to the elbows. Wabash always provokes. It does this in large measure because the structure of the curriculum and of our common life together extends the conversations so as to amplify the sounds of the big questions—the big questions like *Who am I?* and *How shall we live?*, articulated famously by Tolstoy in his Confessions, questions that in one form or another have lived through C&T and will now resound in the new All-College Course designed to train the next generation of Wabash students in the art of careful listening. You may have started off at Wabash wanting a job in medicine, law, teaching, or business, and you may indeed end up in one or another of these professions. The College will have done its best to equip you for job and vocation, however, if it has kept you from narrowing your vision and limiting your hearing too soon. One way we have done that is by not letting you declare a major until your sophomore year. Another is by compelling you to study in all three divisions of the curriculum, to take all-college courses, and to engage in language studies and gain foreign language proficiency; another by calling you to figure out how to live as Gentlemen and citizens. Liberal learning stretches time and everyone's patience by insisting that **you** take on the responsibility and time to learn how to read a text carefully, write an essay convincingly, voice an argument persuasively, and compute data effectively. The medium of the liberal arts is time, and there is never enough of it to be sure, to be engaged with a community that makes the familiar strange and helps you lose the tin ear that deafens you to the call to step forward to meet the needs of one another, the nation, and the world, to have a job and live a vocation. Since your arrival at Wabash you have been invited to audition for different parts, fine tuning your tympan, stretching both membrane and brain in order to hear clearly, taking time to get out of yourself, and along the way having your hearing tested beginning that first Freshman Tutorial presentation four years ago through to your oral comps for months ago, the culmination of your liberal arts ear training.

Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?

And there is evidence you are listening. You have studied feminist philosophy, African literature, and Chinese economic systems, you have gone on immersion trips to Washington, DC and studied abroad in Lima; rebuilt homes in New Orleans or built one from scratch right here in Crawfordsville; you have taught needy children after school in the MXI, traveled during spring break to South America to inoculate children against disease, and flown to South Africa to bear witness to your faith; you've planted a community garden to feed the Wabash community and volunteered to teach local school children; you have worked in Hays and Baxter science labs with faculty, or in an internship in the IMA in Indianapolis; and you have wailed at the loss of the Bell, close friends, and beloved faculty; and you have stood silent as faculty mentors have given you an ear full urging you to clean the wax out of your ears ... and the list goes on in a thousand ways. You are a talented bunch, and your hearing is improving.

Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?

Ralph Waldo Emerson, American essayist, philosopher and poet, once wrote: "Each man has his own vocation; his talent is his call. There is one direction in which all space is open to him." I ask you today to listen and to think about what is the one direction where space is now open to you? What talent calls you? Like much about Wabash that leaves the responsibility to decide on student shoulders,



this is **your** question to answer. No one can or should answer for you. It may require more listening and careful discernment than you had first thought, especially if that initial job hasn't materialized or your admission to law school has been denied. Will you continue to prick those ears to listen for the vocal cue that leads you in a new direction? Will you remain open to an uncertain voice?

Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?

Vocation is as inseparable from a job as hearing is from the ear. The one echoes through, resounds in the other. A job is what you do to make a living; and a vocation is what calls you to make a life. A job is what you do to bring home the bacon (unless, of course, you are a vegetarian); and a vocation, in the words of Parker Palmer, is "where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Let me repeat that: "vocation is where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." My fifth grade English teacher Ms. Miller's words ring in my ears this very moment admonishing me never to define a word by using a phrase that begins with "where." Well, it may be poor grammar, but to me and to Parker Palmer it makes good sense.

In his Fire in the Belly: On Being A Man noted American author Sam Keen says about the inseparability of vocation and job: "There is no easy formula for determining right and wrong livelihood, but it is essential to keep the question alive. ....we have to stop pretending that we can make a living at something that is trivial or destructive and still have a sense of legitimate self-worth. A society in which vocation and job are separated for most people gradually creates an economy that is often devoid of spirit, one that frequently fills our pocketbooks at the cost of emptying our souls." How will you fill your souls?

This morning you've filled your bellies with breakfast while I've given you an ear full about listening. Tomorrow afternoon Dean Olsen will call you by name to step forward to receive your diploma. Hear this as a summation of all that Wabash has done to provoke you, to evoke your best, to invite you into a wider community, to train your ear.

And hear your Wabash education as a summons. Listen intently for the peal of Caleb Mills' bell as President White rings you out, the sound that called you into the College four years ago and now beckons you away as Wabash gentlemen not just to a career of meaningful work but also to a vocation of highest responsibility.

Wabash has prepared you to read, so now let your life be read by others. Wabash has taught you quantitative reasoning, so now let your life add up to something more than yourself. Wabash has proudly taught you to be articulate, so let your life speak. Wabash has taught you to listen, so let your liberal arts learning speak.

Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?

Gentlemen, what you do next is your call.