

**The Wants of the Country:  
Wabash College and the Common Good**  
*Notes Toward Strategic Planning*

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**Our Foundation and Common Commitments**

Wabash College this year celebrates an important anniversary. One hundred and seventy five years ago, Wabash College was founded by a small group of determined men, leaders committed to providing liberal arts education to young men and to serving the needs of the state, the nation, and the larger world. In the founding document of the College, they made the following resolution, “Unanimously that the Institution be at first a classical and English High School, rising into a College as soon as the wants of the Country demand.”

As I have learned about Wabash College, as I have listened to hundreds of students, alumni, faculty, staff, friends, and supporters of the College, I have heard an enormous pride in Wabash, in the greatness in our past and the strength of our present, and an eagerness to make the most of the promise of our future. We share a commitment to educate students so they enlarge their individual and communal influence in the world, so that Wabash continues to play a prominent role in contributing to the common good. I tried to give voice to that grand ambition in the inaugural address when I noted that we are still learning, that we have more to learn and yet much to teach.

As we look ahead to the design of a strategic plan for the near future, we benefit from the good work that has been done in recent years. In the previous strategic plan the Wabash College community articulated our mission statement and core values.

In the Wabash College Mission Statement we declare: Wabash College educates men to think critically, act responsibly, lead effectively, and live humanely.

And in our Core Values we state what we as a community believe in: A rigorous liberal arts education, a personal context to teaching and learning, individual responsibility and trust, a socially, economically, and ethnically diverse student body, and a tradition and philosophy of independence.

**Our Strategic Planning**

As we take on the task to plan for the next five years at Wabash, we look to our past for our inspiration, we remain true to our mission, and we look to the College’s role in the larger world and to our continuing contribution – as students, faculty, staff, alumni, college – to the common good in Indiana, in the United States, and throughout the world.

The mission of Wabash pervades every aspect of the life of the College, from student decisions in residence hall or fraternity governance to choices in athletics and personal life, from this process of strategic planning to the day-to-day operational decisions made in every office on campus, from the intense engagement of faculty and students in our classrooms to their contributions to the College and the larger community. We need to discover and describe the ways in which all areas of the College contribute to the development of men who think critically, act responsibly, lead effectively, and live humanely.

I believe there are four central areas of discussion that should shape our work to create a strategic plan for the near future: our students as rising citizens of the world, our faculty as preservers and creators of true and effective liberal arts education; our college as a civil community of constant learning; and our responsibilities to the future and the larger world.

The strategic planning process will focus our energies and consolidate our purposes as the entire Wabash community of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the College works together to discover and articulate the opportunities and the challenges before us. These areas of discussion I outline below may not cover everything we need to explore. In the process of thinking of the future, additional questions may arise out of the work we do together. Yet these are the areas of discussion that are most pressing and most significant.

In this work, we will take advantage of planning that is already happening at the College and the ground covered by previous strategic planning processes. Every department, every area of Wabash looks ahead to the coming years as we think about the choices before us. College and faculty committees plan on many different levels. As we design our next strategic plan, we can utilize these ongoing planning committees and structures, supplement them with additional discussion and conversations where necessary, and produce the plans that will shape our thinking and guide our actions going forward.

I hope this will be a time of learning and teaching. As I said in the inaugural address, we have more to learn about the matters that concern us and we have much to teach one another and the rest of the world. I see this work to create our next strategic plan as part of this grand project of ongoing learning and teaching.

What then are the questions that animate our activity, that should engage us as we seek to prepare the next iteration of the multiple-year strategic plan?

As I talk with men and women connected to Wabash across the country – parents, alumni, trustees, family, friends, and potential students – as I witness the energy, opportunities, and questions on our campus, I see us needing to engage four key tasks of learning and teaching:

### **1) Learning and teaching about the men of Wabash**

As we look to the future, we have the opportunity to explore a central question: who are the *men of Wabash* who will be our central concern and the agents of our mission in the years ahead? Who will be the Wabash men of the next few years, of the next five or six years, of ten years ahead?

We pride ourselves in the diversity on campus among students and faculty. We also take great pride in our roots in Indiana, that over 70% of our students come from this state. Previous strategic planning called for more diversity, indeed noted diversity as a core value. We are learning of the great potential for diversity within the state of Indiana and beyond.

The diversity that strengthens and enriches us is not just a diversity in who we are or where we are from, but a diversity in our perspectives, in our experiences, in our interests, our contributions, in relation to our work in the Wabash community and out into the broader world. We must continue to articulate what we mean by that diversity, why it is important, and what we desire in shaping the community of Wabash College in the faculty and staff as well as in the students.

The entire community must explore our understanding of and our hopes for the composition of the student body, faculty, and college community that would best serve the purposes and goals of a Wabash education and the “wants of the country” and the common good.

## **2) Learning and teaching about Wabash College as a Liberal Arts College for men**

The most recent strategic plan had as its stated focus effective liberal arts education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A commitment to Wabash College as a liberal arts college for men remains at the center of this mission. What must we continue to learn about the liberal arts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Through faculty and students, through discussion of curriculum, faculty development, tradition and innovation, how do we learn more about our success and what challenges lie before us at the same time we consider what we have to teach the rest of higher education, the rest of the nation? As we look to our Mission Statement goal of educating men to think critically, about what should the citizens of the twenty-first century be thinking and learning? What are the central questions that should drive our curriculum going forward?

The Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts, in its connections to colleges and universities throughout the country and its continuing engagement in the ongoing program review on campus, will play a role in shaping this discussion. Faculty discussions at every level from departmental program review to interdisciplinary committees looking at curriculum architecture will also shape this work.

## **3) Learning and teaching about the full implications of Wabash as a residential community**

As a residential community committed to standards of discourse and communication, action and service embodied in the Gentleman's Rule, we will always benefit from our continuing exploration of the central questions of how and where Wabash educates men to act responsibly, lead effectively, and live humanely. As a community of students, faculty and staff, alumni, and friends of the College, we affirm daily and cumulatively the Gentleman's Rule as a point of pride and distinctive marker of a Wabash education.

But how do we build on the understanding of Wabash College as our home? As we address this area of discussion, we will address the physical needs of the campus in the master planning process, we will explore our needs and goals in student affairs and student activities, and create an understanding of our best imagination for student life at Wabash.

The discussion of this purpose will involve all at the College in an exploration of student life; the nature and condition of our work as faculty, staff, and students; the concepts of play and sport; the role of the arts in campus life; the ideas of wellness; and the understanding of citizenship and what it means to be a gentleman.

## **4) Learning and teaching about the role of Wabash and Wabash men in the larger world**

What should be the appropriate role of Wabash College and the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of Wabash as citizens of this community, as citizens of many nations, and as citizens of the world? What are our responsibilities to act in the larger world especially as we look to the life of Wabash men beyond graduation? What is the appropriate role of Wabash College in the community of Crawfordsville?

Wabash College men have certainly proven over the years that they have the ability, capacity, and energy to become leaders in their public life, their communities, professions, and in many other areas. How does Wabash College educate men to lead effectively? How do recent initiatives in international studies and immersion experiences further our mission?

### **Our Results**

What will be the outcome of this work? The short answer is that we will in the next several months create a strategic plan that will enable all constituencies of the college to understand how

we will move through the next years. This document together with the campus master plan will guide our decisions and help us articulate the fundraising needs that will generate a comprehensive fundraising campaign.

The longer answer leads us back to the “wants of the country” articulated by the Founders 175 years ago. As we focus our attention on these areas of learning and teaching, we will be more able to speak clearly about the distinctive contribution Wabash College must make not only to the education of men, but to the national conversation about the essential need for and the continuing value of an effective liberal arts education.

Strategic planning is not a mere exercise. This is important work that will demand from all of us clarity of thought as we explore and articulate our best imagination of who we are as a College. In our dreams we will discover our responsibilities, and dreams and responsibilities must flow from one another.

Dreams without responsibility could dissolve into airy nothings. Responsibility alone can make us fearful of the future we have an opportunity to shape. As we understand and articulate the opportunities and challenges ahead of us, as we look at and address the financial needs that our strategic plan will reveal, we can ground our dreams in responsibility and practical vision that will drive an even greater future for Wabash.

Through this work and the campus master plan work that will accompany and be woven into the strategic plan, we will reveal those goals and initiatives that will drive the capital campaign. As I noted before, we always are looking ahead, but the strategic planning process is a special time of hard work and focused discussion which will result in positive change for Wabash. We all must play a role in this important work.

As we work together to create a strategic plan that will be both ambitious and useful, we can reaffirm the distinctiveness of Wabash College at the same time we expand our understanding of the needs of the world and the response Wabash must make to those needs. Wabash College has long contributed to the common good in many ways and certainly most obviously through its alumni leading and serving in communities far and wide. As we explore “the wants of the country” and our best imagination of the impact and influence Wabash can exert in the larger world, we will enrich our understanding of the greatness of this College and our continuing contribution to the common good far into the future.