



## **Class Agents Letter**

**Class of 1972**

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### **Class Agents**

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Gentlemen:

On September 13, I attended the Class Agents Forum at Wabash. Presenters included new Dean of Students, Scott Brown; Dean for College Advancement, Michelle Janssen; Director of Alumni and Affinity Group Engagement, Ron Dostal; Director of Advancement Initiatives, Susan Dyer; Associate Director of Advancement Initiatives, Hugh Vandivier; and President Scott Feller. Here is my summary of what I learned that day.

### **Building Bridges**

Dean Michelle Janssen reported that one of the College's initiatives will be seeking out and involving Wabash brethren across the generations. As she put it, the College will be "building bridges" to draw more Wabash men together. One thing I realized that day is that we, the Class of 1972, are in line for a 55<sup>th</sup> Reunion in Spring 2027, less than two years from now. I have spoken with fellow Class Agent Rick Fobes about exploring the possibility of organizing another, but more informal, reunion for us that year. I will reach out to some of you about that soon.

### **Community Center**

President Scott Feller reported on this and the following several topics.

The Sparks Center is now gone. To build the new Community Center will require contractors to dig sixty feet deeper than the old foundation. The cypress beams are in storage awaiting use in the new Community Center. Building the new Community Center will be a two-year project. Dining for students is now provided



in “Grub Hollow,” as described in my letter last year. Here is the Community Center webpage for those interested in the project:

[wabash.edu/communitycenter](http://wabash.edu/communitycenter)

The site even has a Construction Cam!

## Enrollment

The new class of 270 freshmen matriculated in August, and there are 908 students on campus. This may be the fullest the campus has ever been because everybody must live on campus. Nevertheless, keeping this kind of enrollment in the future is a worry. Around 2010, the birth rate dropped, creating a demographic cliff. Moreover, only 45% of Indiana college-age males are enrolling in college, a figure that used to be 60%. Also, Indiana does not have a net inflow of people. The Hoosier population is aging, and there are fewer children. As a result, the College is going after men who might not go to college except at Wabash. The College is sponsoring athletic camps and programs of various kinds for high school sophomores. The College is also recruiting in Texas, Arizona, and other states without declining populations. Strong alumni groups in those areas are a big advantage in doing this.

## Annual Fund

(Supplemented by comments from Susan Dyer and Hugh Vandivier.) The Annual Fund this year raised almost \$4,000,000 – \$3,983,898 to be exact – which was another record. For twelve years in a row, participation in giving has been over 40% of alumni. (FYI, our class’s participation rate was 39.2%, ***one donor away from 40%! Argh!***) Another worry, however, is the reduction in government funds for scholarships. The College will need to make up the difference. The 40% of alumni contributing to the Fund is an extremely high percentage. Wabash’s peers are lucky to get 20% participation. A participation rate of 15% is not rare. Nationally, there are fewer small dollar donors to colleges, and most colleges are relying on fewer but larger gifts. That is not the case at Wabash, where every donor and every dollar given is tremendously important and appreciated. (Please keep that in mind if you are not a regular giver!)

## **Endowment**

The Endowment stands at \$440,000,000, which is another record. It could be \$460,000,000 soon. Reasons for the Endowment's strengths are (1) fiscally conservative spending, (2) good fund-raising, and (3) solid investment returns. Less reliance on the Endowment allows the College to seek more aggressive returns.

## **College Rankings**

What resonates for Wabash? There is a disruption in higher education. People are looking at what is important differently. Prestige is losing importance, and results are gaining in importance. The publications that rank Wabash do not rank us high on prestige, but they do rank us high on outcomes. Higher rankings used to be based on how much a school could charge and how many applicants it could reject, both of which are terrible measures. What benefits Wabash is its graduation rate and its job/graduate school placement statistics.

## **Mental Health**

There has been progress made in the mental health of students. A national survey said that only 36% of college students were thriving. At Wabash, that figure is 54%. While better than the national average, and while better than it was before the pandemic, that percentage is still not great. People at the College are trying to better understand the problems of young men and the generational change that is taking place.

## **The 2032 Bicentennial**

Finally, President Feller referred to the upcoming 2032 Wabash College Bicentennial, which, incidentally, will coincide with our Class of 1972's 60<sup>th</sup> Reunion! Questions are being asked: What are Wabash's ideas for its third century? Will we enter it in a strong position? What does Wabash want to be?

## **New Dean of Students Scott Brown**

Greg Redding stepped down from the Dean of Students position so he could take his sabbatical and return to reaching, and Scott Brown was named to replace Greg as Dean of Students in June. Scott earned his bachelor's degree in English at the University of California, Irvine, a master's degree in higher education and student affairs from Indiana University, and his Ph.D. in student personnel administration from the University of Maryland. He has more than thirty-five years of experience in higher education, including being a dean at six different colleges. I spoke with Scott at homecoming, and I was told by people there that he has deeply integrated himself into Wabash already. At the forum, Scott spoke about how excited he was to be at Wabash, and he gave his initial impressions: (1) The rhetoric is real; the Gentleman's Rule and the Mission are special and abided by. (2) Relationships at Wabash are hard-wired, and the College is student-centered. (3) Wabash men exhibit a balance of confidence and humility; they also exhibit stability, positive restlessness, and resourcefulness. I think he has figured it out already!

## **Football Roundup**

The Wabash football Little Giants have started their season impressively under new Head Coach Jake Gilbert (Wabash '98), going five and one through week six and suffering its only loss to nationally ranked John Carroll University by three points after a furious fourth quarter comeback. Of course, the 131<sup>st</sup> Monon Bell Game is coming up at Wabash on Saturday, November 15. DePauw is also nationally ranked this year. With a new aggressive head coach who knows what the game means to Wabash, I expect a fantastic game this year.

I encourage you to check out all the Wabash athletic teams' updates at:

[www.sports.wabash.edu](http://www.sports.wabash.edu)

**WABASH ALWAYS FIGHTS!**

## Final Thoughts

I hope you are all well. Please send news about yourself to Rick Fobes ([rwfobes@gmail.com](mailto:rwfobes@gmail.com)), Tom Ristine ([thomashristine@gmail.com](mailto:thomashristine@gmail.com)) or me ([jbridge@psrb.com](mailto:jbridge@psrb.com)). Please stay in touch! In the meantime, I wish you all the best!

Yours in Wabash,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John". The script is cursive and fluid, with the "J" being particularly large and stylized.

John Bridge