



Class Agents Letter

Class of 1988

Class Agents

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Dear 1988 Little Giants,

I was on campus this past weekend for the annual Class Agents Forum. Over the course of the past 35 years, since we started our senior year, so much has changed; so much has stayed the same. President Feller provided updates to us on the state of the College. Though not surprised, I am pleased to report that Wabash College is still doing a first-rate job educating young men to think critically, act responsibly, lead effectively, and live humanely in a difficult and ever-changing world.

This August, the College matriculated 267 freshmen—the second largest class in a decade. This is no small feat given the demographic challenges facing higher education across the country. Of these entering students, 26 took part in the Wabash Liberal Arts Immersion Program (“WLAIP”) funded by the Lilly Endowment. This program enables promising prospective students who face certain systemic challenges to begin acclimating to the College’s rigorous demands. WLAIP has proven to be an important factor in rendering the College’s retention and graduation rate to be among the best in the Nation. In this regard, our four-year graduation rate is 83%. To put this in perspective, U.S. News and World Report’s data analysis of our entering student population predicts Wabash College to have a 78% graduation rate. Thus, we are overperforming the metrics by 8%. By contrast, several of our peer institutions, Oberlin and Denison among them, are significantly underperforming their predictive outcomes. It should come as no shock to any of us that Wabash College will often confound the pencil pushers doing analytics in green eyeshades. Just ask DePauw’s football team from 1985 (Wabash 28–DePauw 8).

As the pool of college-age students in the United States continues to contract and the value of a college degree has fallen under scrutiny in many quarters, parents and potential students often ask about the return on the investment of their tuition dollars. Here again, Wabash College is doing very well. Forbes online reported last month that Wabash College is ranked ninth on a Degree Choices list of national liberal arts colleges based on an analysis of the economic benefits students receive from attending college. As reported by the College, “[Wabash] was one of five schools on Degree Choices list singled out for “over-performing” on this economic-based ranking vs. other reputational or resource-based criteria, balancing both the economic benefits of attending college with the return on investment that includes landing a good job following graduation.”



Finally, this year's U.S. News and World Report Rankings have placed our dear alma mater at 55th among national liberal arts colleges; additionally, it rated the College as the 25th Best Value School. These are remarkable achievements and should make all of us proud. President Feller reports that one of the important variables evaluated by the ranking organizations is alumni participation in annual giving. For the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2022, our alumni participation in annual gifts to the College once again hit 40%. We have achieved this remarkable number for nine straight years. This percentage places us within the top ten national liberal arts colleges in terms of alumni giving. Quite frankly, it is remarkable.

As it concerns the Class of 1988, I am so proud of our efforts. We had 85 donors from our class and we placed **third** among all 75 classes from 1948-2022 who had members making gifts. Well done and thank you! Total annual fund gifts exceeded a record \$3.9 million dollars and included gifts from 5,200 donors. Please keep up the good work by making a gift this fiscal year.

So much for the data analytics. This May will mark the 35th anniversary of our graduation. As such, I am so looking forward to seeing all of you in June at Big Bash for our 35th reunion.

Please mark your calendars for June 2-4, 2023. It will be such a blessing to have a time to catch up on our respective life's journeys, to renew cherished friendships, and to embellish memories of our sacred time at dear old Wabash. As we prepare for the revelry of Big Bash, I'd love for you to share photos from your time at Wabash. Please send them to me at jwilliams@defur.com. I will compile them to share at our reunion. To jog your memories, I am sharing a few photos from my scrapbook from 1986-1988:



Tom Jakubowski and I with our dates at a Purdue Chi Omega party in 1986. (My date is now my wife, Jennifer). It was a skating event and Jacko was a fantastic roller skater even after a few beers.



This is the Sigma Chi sweetheart dance from 1987. Left to right: Anne Mikesell who married Todd Mikesell (Class of 1987), me, Jennifer Williams, Dr. Tim Smith, Dr. Mark Fritz, Mark's date Trish, and Tom Johnson.



Dr. Tim Smith at a party in the fall of 1987. The beer was frozen. We had to stick it in the oven to get it into liquid form. Smitty is testing it to see if it is done. We persevered.



Ben Grisemer, me, and Andy Craig at a dance. Andy was up late studying the night before so he seems to be exhausted.



Bill Ahrbecker, Andy Craig, Ben Grisemer and me drinking on New Year's Eve. Andy and Bill are grooming each other by checking for lice. I am just proud to be part of an event with wallpaper from the Partridge Family's house.

I hope you all are well. Please reach out to me with any news you'd like to share. Likewise, if you know of anyone who'd be a good prospect for Wabash College, please let me know and I will see that admissions gets in touch with him or use this handy online form: wabash.edu/refer. I look forward to seeing all of you soon.

Sincerely,

James R. Williams