

**Class of 1964**

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### WABASH COLLEGE DECEMBER 2021 CLASS LETTER CLASS OF 1964

Dear Classmates,

Well, here we are at the end of another Covid infused year. For me, however, it's been a time of reflection. When I see people around me who are suffering, hungry, and alone it's time for me and others like me to step up and practice what we've learned over time from our Faith, parents, teachers, professors, and other role models. One doesn't have to be a full time professional to accomplish much. Our Churches, Temples, and community organizations have many ways we can help. Food pantries are one example. However, there are simple ways to raise the spirits of those who need it, especially those in your community. You'd be surprised, as I have been over the years, how folks appreciate a visit, telephone call, or a note now and then. The Covid pandemic should not be defeating us, but a call for us to accept the challenge before us. I can think of no other group of people who are up to that challenge than Wabash men.

Here are recent notices I've just received from Steve Hoffman of the Alumni Office, and his stalwart crew, especially Pam Rager. It would be nice for them to receive a brief note of thanks from y'all for all they do.

For those who make a gift before the end of the calendar year, check out these ways you can support Wabash and see some nice tax benefits: <https://www.wabash.edu/news/story/11833>. Every gift directly supports Wabash students and adds to the momentum of the Giant Steps Campaign.

All graduates from the Class of 2021 have settled into their first destinations six months after Commencement. This once again bucks the national average of 59%.

<https://www.wabash.edu/news/story/11831>

Speaking of Career Services, the College has hired Cassie Hagan as the new Director of Professional Development and Center for Innovation, Business, and Entrepreneurship effective January 3. Many of you will be familiar with Cassie who was Associate Director from 2013-2019. She worked for two years as the Executive Director of the Crawfordsville-Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce. Cassie replaces Roland Morin '91 who passed away in August. <https://www.wabash.edu/news/story/11840>

Approximately 30% of students enrolled are first-generation college students and an additional 20% of Wabash staff were first-generation students. Here's a profile of four deans who are first-gen and a nice article in The Bachelor by Cooper Smith '23 (attached).

<https://www.wabash.edu/news/story/11824>

Have you checked out Whenever. Wherever. Wabash. yet? Whether it's highlights from the thrilling Monon Bell game, Office Hours with Dr. David Blix '70, live learning events with professors, Chapel Talks, podcasts, or on-demand videos, this is your hub to bring campus to your living room. Whenever. Wherever. Wabash. even contains games for your kids or grandkids and new backgrounds for your Zoom calls. Just go to [wabash.edu/www](http://wabash.edu/www) to explore.

Scarlet Honors Weekend returned on December 10-11 with more than 200 high school seniors and their families attending and 115 staying overnight. <https://www.wabash.edu/news/story/11849>  
Admissions applications are running 14% ahead of last year. Domestic applications are up 10% from 15 states. Indiana is up 12% in applications from its highest total in the last 5 years. And domestic applications from students of color represent 35.8% of the pool (a 5-year high).

Finally, let me wish you all a joyous and blessed Holiday Season, a Merry Christmas, a Happy Chanukah, a New Year filled with good health, prosperity, and a stellar year for Wabash College.

Yours in 'Bash  
Ron

# ‘Overcoming Barriers’: First-Generation Success



*Students in the Wabash Liberal Arts Immersion Program, known as the WLAIP, develop a sense of community and prepare students to excel on campus.*

**COOPER SMITH '23 | NEWS EDITOR**

First-generation students face different barriers to success from their non-first-generation peers. Accessing opportunities, managing expectations, and matching the language of academia can be a challenge. And these barriers prevent many students from realizing all of their opportunities.

“There is a coded language in institutions of higher education,” said Ben Bullock ‘23, a first-generation student from the United Kingdom. “Without access to these different codes, it can be really tricky for first-generation students to

benefit fully from everything Wabash offers.” Acknowledging the difficulties, they face, Wabash has tried to support first-gen students in myriad ways -- from official programming to fostering a sense of community.

“Coming to Wabash as a first-generation college student was definitely a challenge, but my professors, peers, and mentors never lowered their expectations of me,” said Bryce McCullough ‘23, a first-gen student from Greensburg, Indiana. “The resources and opportunities here have enabled me to be successful.” I am thankful to Wabash for being a place where first-generation college students like myself can overcome barriers to thrive.”

WLAIP, the Wabash Liberal Arts Immersion Program, is aimed at equalizing the disparity between majority and non-majority students. The summer program prepares incoming students for success at and beyond Wabash. Students in the program receive their first college credits and connect with professors and classmates, establishing networks vital to student success.

Incoming students are eligible for WLAIP if they fit at least two of three categories: first-generation students, students of color, and Pell-eligible students. Todd McDorman, Acting Dean of the College and Professor of Rhetoric, described the program’s ongoing success at retaining underrepresented students.

“Through the first three graduating cohorts, we have a lot of good signs of success,” said McDorman. “One of the things we’ve sought to do in that program is to close the gap between first-generation college students and non-first-generation college students. Recent analyses... have shown that students who were eligible for WLAIP and went through the program are persisting [at Wabash] 18 percentage points higher than students who are eligible, but not enrolled in the program.” Dr. Robert Horton, Faculty Coordinator for Retention and Professor of Psychology, contextualized the program’s success.

“It’s the biggest effect of a program like this that I’ve ever seen,” said Horton. “There are some attitudinal responses from surveys that shed light on why it is that my WLAIP guys are more likely to retain and graduate. They feel more connected to each other. They tend to do some things in class. They’re a little less likely to miss class, less likely to be late, and a little less likely to not do homework. They’re more likely to feel connected to the College as compared to this relevant comparison group. So that gives us a little bit of light on why that might happen.”

Those success stories are more than mere statistics -- they are crucial victories for successful Wabash men. Ben Sampsell ‘24, a first-gen student from Mexico, said, “I honestly don’t know how I would have gotten through my first semester at Wabash without the support I received from the WLAIP faculty. The transition to college is hard for almost any high school student, but coming from the southernmost part of Mexico, my case was different from the outset. WLAIP gave me the tools and friendships that have allowed me to transition from a traditional Mexican school system into the liberal arts.”

Due to the program’s success, Wabash received a \$1 million grant last year from the Lilly Endowment to fund WLAIP for three more years.

But first-gen students face additional challenges even after they graduate from college. In a 2021 study, researchers from Michigan State, Iowa, and Minnesota found that first-generation students face increased barriers in the job market when compared with non-first-generation students with the same degree from the same school.

One of the causes of this disparity is a gap in access to opportunities outside the classroom. Nationwide, first-generation students are less likely to participate in internships, extracurriculars, and research opportunities than their non-first-generation counterparts. And these opportunities matter in the job market. The National Association of Colleges and Employers found that college graduates who had internships were 90 percent more likely to receive a job offer than college graduates who did not.

WLAIP also addresses that internship access disparity. After the initial WLAIP summer, the program connects students with paid research and internship opportunities. If a student in the program wishes to accept an unpaid internship, they can receive a \$3,200 stipend to make that opportunity possible. This generous funding levels the playing field, making unpaid internships, which often provide essential professional experience, available to more students -- regardless of financial background. Dr. Horton explained that around 90 percent of WLAIP students participate in an internship connected or funded through the program.

McDorman described several other programs that, though they may not exclusively benefit first-generation students, improve first-generation student retention and access to campus resources. The Writing Center and the Quantitative Skills Center provide all students opportunities to improve their classroom skills, learning from other successful students. And last summer, the College began a summer course program to help students behind in credits get back on track. For underrepresented students, who are less likely to enter Wabash with transferable credits from college prep courses, the Wabash summer course program provides an opportunity to level the playing field.

Dr. Zachery Koppelman, Director of the Writing Center, described the role of the Writing Center in supporting first-generation students.

“Writing Centers have historically served writers from less privileged backgrounds—including first-generation students,” said Koppelman. “One of the challenges for first-generation students is that they lack the tradition of a college education, which often means they are more comfortable with less formal, more conversational speech. This is even more pronounced in their writing, which is where the Wabash College Writing Center plays a critical role.”

Taken together, Wabash’s programs strengthen a sense of community and support first-gen success. And along with that success comes crucial discussions about what it means to be a first-generation student.

“Being a first-generation college student is important to me because it means that with a lot of hard work and a good amount of help from my parents, teachers, coaches, and my community, I can achieve my goal of receiving a quality education to better my future,” said Bryce McCullough ‘23. “But more importantly, it gives me hope that my experience is not a rare one for the next generation.”

First-generation identity was personal for Dean McDorman, a first-generation student himself. McDorman initially planned to attend a community college, but a private college offered him a generous scholarship offer that expanded his opportunities.

“It probably isn’t an exaggeration to say that it changed my life and it just opened up so many possibilities for me,” said McDorman. “And it’s one of the reasons I’m so excited about the things we do at Wabash for first-generation college students. I feel like I know firsthand how much difference the sort of education we can provide can make for them.”

McDorman isn’t alone -- many Wabash faculty members were first-generation students.

“I think it is sometimes surprising to people [just] how many of our staff were the first in their families to graduate from college,” said Dr. Horton. “About 20% of our staff [is first-generation].” First-generation identity inevitably shapes a campus community.

The fact that so many faculty members were first-generation impacts how Wabash continues to welcome and support first-gen students.

“I admire my colleagues who work so hard to make it so that students here don’t have to stumble through that,” said McDorman. “I think it speaks a lot to the dedication that faculty and staff have here. And it’s a large part of Wabash’s identity.”

On Monday, the College will celebrate first-generation students and faculty for the annual First-Generation College Celebration.

First-gen students and faculty will receive a Wabash “First-Gen and Proud” t-shirt and are invited to gather on the mall.



***Students in the WLAIP program develop a sense of community and teamwork through summer modules including a trip to the Indianapolis Rowing Center.***