



## Class Agents Letter

**Class of 1970**

**Class Agent**  
**Ron Shelby**

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Wabash Brothers,

As another year comes to an end we can take time to reflect on the important events of the past year, including some that we might rather not have seen. But for those of us who made it to our 50th Reunion in September we will always have those sweet memories of getting together with friends from that special time in our life. It was certainly something special for me to see so many of you. Thanks for being there. And if you weren't able to make it back, you can be sure we were talking about you...only saying good things. That, in fact, was the kind of weekend it was. From Friday afternoon to Sunday afternoon it was one great and special time.

I would like to thank Steve Hoffman and his team for their support for our reunion. They supported us through 3 planning cycles, and my last minute request to move our Friday night dinner outside. Hats off to Pam, Mike and Steve.

Let's Stay in Touch

If you get the chance, copy me on your Christmas letter and I'll return the favor. If you agree, I can even share highlights with your classmates. Just let me know. Susan and I still live in Vero Beach. That is we live in Vero when we're not at the new place we picked up in Gainesville, Virginia this year. We're only 4 miles from our son and his family. It's a blessing to be able to see them often.

Wabash News

*In September, U.S. News & World Report* ranked Wabash 20th nationally as a Best Value School and included the institution in the Top Tier of National Liberal Arts Colleges. And here's one of the reasons why. Six months after graduation, 100 percent of the members of the Class of 2021 have settled into



a first destination—employment, graduate school, or service. It marks the fifth consecutive year in which Wabash graduates have claimed their first destinations following graduation at rates among the highest in the nation, a remarkable feat considering the current job market. Over the last five years, Wabash graduates have secured first destinations within six months at a rate of 99.2 percent, well above the national average of 59 percent at six months. Well done, Wabash.

The exemplary post-graduate success rates echo much of the news for the 189-year-old liberal arts college. In addition to the internship program and strong alumni network, *The Princeton Review* spotlighted 10 other areas, called “Great Lists,” that Wabash ranked in the top-30 nationally, including access to professors, career services, great financial aid, classroom experience, and athletic facilities. Wabash was one of seven schools nationally to be ranked on 10 or more of the publication’s lists.

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>

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).

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>

## The Bell Returns Home

By now I hope you've watched the Monon Bell Game on YouTube. It's out there in its entirety. I was never prouder of our guys as I watched this game. The Wabash College football team fought back from a 21-0 first-quarter deficit and outscored DePauw University 42-7 over the next 46 minutes to win the 127th Monon Bell Classic, 42-35, in front of a sold-out Little Giant Stadium crowd of 8,400. Wabash Always Fights, indeed. You can see highlights at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34emaxNQ4xo>.

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.

## Remember Wabash

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 .

Have a safe and happy December and a prosperous New Year,

Ron Shelby

Class Agent

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# ‘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.***