

Wabash.

March 11, 2021

To: Wabash Students, Faculty, Staff, Alumni, Parents, and Friends
From: President Scott Feller
Re: Returning to “Traditional Form” in 2021-2022

Dear Friends,

As we hit midsemester of this very unusual year here at Wabash, I’m both reflecting on the one-year anniversary of the disruption to our College’s operations and anxiously anticipating a return to our traditional form for the 2021-22 school year.

A year ago, I was struggling to imagine how a college built on face-to-face interactions would transition to virtual learning. But I soon realized that the Wabash Always Fights resilience of our students and faculty, as well as the relationships established during the first half of the semester, would carry us through that difficult spring semester.

That early success moved me from a defensive position – worried that we might not meet the needs of our students or compare well with other colleges – to feeling like this was a unique opportunity to demonstrate our distinctiveness. In fact, we separated ourselves from others in that very first week one year ago. While other colleges were abruptly shutting their doors to students, we did the hard work required to offer a place to live for any student whose home situation was not conducive to learning.

About this time last year, while many faculty and staff were focused on [teaching virtual classes](#) and providing support to our students on and off-campus, the Healthy Campus Task Force, led by Professor Ann Taylor, made it their mission to provide a safe, fully residential, and in-person educational experience for our students this year. This was a bold move, especially given the near constant commentary that college students would be incapable of acting responsibly in the pandemic.

Our students quickly realized Wabash’s commitment to them, and they stepped up in remarkable ways. Many colleges took the easier path that had part or all of their students studying from home, but Wabash invited everyone to live and learn together. An astonishing 97% of our young men chose to live in residence and our fall 2020 enrollment was higher than the prior year.

The fall semester at Wabash was [distinctly different](#) from anything in our recent history – and also different from what students experienced at peer institutions. While many colleges and universities taught most classes virtually, Wabash took the opposite position and reconfigured classrooms so that the majority of classes were taught in person. All across campus we adapted our most cherished traditions – [Chapel talks](#) and [Chapel Sing](#) were held on the mall and faculty held office hours outdoors on benches made by Professor Derek Nelson.

I can't say enough about the work of our expanded Student Health Center and campus physicians, the dedication of our students on the [CARE Team](#), and the guidance provided by the Healthy Campus Task Force. And I feel more than a little bad that their reward for a successful fall semester was even higher expectations for this spring semester.

We developed an aggressive plan to test every student every week, procured the necessary test kits, and expanded our staff and infrastructure. Doing so has enabled us to enjoy student recitals, [theater productions](#), and the return of our popular Coffee and Careers program in the library. And we are thrilled that our Glee Club will be able to perform in concert later this month.

Our rigorous weekly testing protocol also meets the requirements of the NCAA. It's gratifying that our [basketball](#), swimming, [volleyball](#), lacrosse, indoor track, tennis, and baseball teams have competed in intercollegiate athletics in the last six weeks. The golf and outdoor track teams will begin competition next week, with soccer not far behind. We are especially proud to be the first college in our league to develop protocols allowing limited numbers of students and parents as spectators for these events.

We are putting the finishing touches on our plans for a joint, in-person [Commencement ceremony](#) during which we will celebrate the classes of 2020 and 2021 on Saturday, May 15 in the new Little Giant Stadium. There are still details to work out as we await guidance from the state health department, but we are excited to honor these outstanding young men.

Last night, as I participated in a Zoom discussion of the documentary *What About Me* hosted by the [Malcolm X Institute of Black Studies](#), I reflected on the adaptation and innovation that has characterized the last year and how we will take many things that we learned into the future. The chance for the documentary's producer and numerous alumni and friends of the College to join us virtually certainly enriched the conversation for all. Check out other opportunities for virtual engagement through [Whenever, Wherever, Wabash](#).

While this has been a challenging year that has tested our resilience, our students are excelling inside and outside the classroom and landing [fellowships](#), internships, jobs, and placements in excellent graduate programs. I am proud of the success we have achieved since last August and I am deeply grateful to the faculty and staff who made it happen.

And we're going to do it again next fall!

Though we had to alter this year's calendar – starting a little earlier in August in order to complete final exams by Thanksgiving – we are now planning for a return to our regular [academic calendar](#) next year. The 2021-22 school year will start with the Ringing-In Ceremony for new students on Saturday, August 21, 2021 with classes starting August 25.

We are anxious to have all who love Wabash travel to campus this fall. For those looking for a reason to check out the stunning new [Little Giant Stadium](#), the [football schedule](#) is posted online, including dates for the stadium dedication, Homecoming weekend, and the Monon Bell Classic.

The bottom line is that while we continue to live in uncertain times and can't yet predict precisely what next year will look like, we can be certain that Wabash College will be a step ahead.

On a final note, I would like to give an update on one of the most important components of the coming school year – the young men who will become members of the Class of 2025. While we have remained open for in-person campus visits by prospective students and their families, much of the recruiting process has been virtual – a big change for Wabash. Still, I'm proud that we have received an all-time record number of applications, and enrollment deposits to date are the second highest in school history. Even more exciting, the admit pool and the deposited students have the highest average GPA we have ever seen.

I am concerned, however, by national trends and our own analytics suggesting we are missing students disadvantaged by a combination of virtual school, overtaxed guidance counselors, and missed opportunities to visit colleges. Reach out today to a prospective student or influencer to share the Wabash story – our timeless record of exceptional outcomes and our timely response to the pandemic. While it is late in the cycle, we will work with young men to meet their individual needs as we have for nearly 200 years, though perhaps never with the intensity of the past 12 months.

I am looking forward to a return to the outward expression of our traditions, including being uncomfortably warm in August when I stand in the Chapel ringing-in the Class of 2025, but with a renewed understanding of our true tradition – the education of young men in a residential community.