

Peter J. Frederick
Honorary Class of 1992

Peter J. Frederick — native New Yorker, teacher of teachers, student of learning — the men of Wabash are pleased to honor you as one of our own and join you into the ranks of Wabash men. When you arrived here in 1969 from Cal-State Hayward, you were a short-timer — coming to Wabash only to start an Afro house with Finley Campbell in the dawning days of the Malcolm X Institute of Black Studies. Your degrees — from Harvard, Michigan, and Berkeley — prepared you as an historian and student of American culture, and you immediately helped the College's African American students discover their own history — and more importantly their identities on this campus. Your temporary stop at Wabash lasted 35 years, during which you helped thousands of Wabash men interact with each other, with their history, and with their world. Your teaching style is, as a former student recalls, “always directed at getting students to discover history themselves. You understand that the past is a mirror in which we see our reflection and understand ourselves better because of it.”

You are also wired to be a truth-teller, and there are some truths that we often don't want to hear but need to hear if we are to be critical thinkers who live authentically and humanely in the world. In you, we recognize an honorary alumnus who makes us question our assumptions, recognize our biases, and more honestly defend the positions we take — even if the positions we ultimately take are in fundamental disagreement with you. And it's within those disagreements and differences that you find “teachable moments” — rare and wonderful opportunities to seize on students' emotions and experiences, then lead them to personal discovery. But you also once said that, “The genius of Wabash is not really in those defining critical moments, but lies in the day-to-day, student-centered, faculty-student close relationships committed to learning.” Those relationships, you said, are “the core and heart of the College.”

Relationships defined your tenure at the College. In particular, you created an intellectual and emotional home for those Wabash men whose color, orientation, background, or general worldview might have been out of the mainstream. By doing so, you expanded the Wabash community and honored the highest ideals of the mission of Wabash College.

While honing your craft of active, collaborative student-centered teaching and learning at Wabash, on NEH, Fulbright, and Newberry fellowships, and in authoring and editing two successful college textbooks, you became a champion in the early scholarship of teaching and learning. You developed teaching and learning programs at scores of public and private colleges and universities, led workshops at hundreds more, and played an especially critical role at Tribal Colleges and Historically Black institutions. In 2000, the American Historical Association recognized your gifts when it awarded you the Eugene Asher Distinguished Teaching Prize — the highest honor in your field.

Forty-five years ago, when Cal-State Hayward honored you for excellence in teaching, the citation listed “talking among your several hobbies.” But today, Wabash honors you for

listening — to generations of Wabash men as they sought to understand their place in history — and for helping all of us find our true voices.

Peter J. Frederick, the National Association of Wabash Men takes great pride in naming you an Honorary Alumnus in the Class of 1992. You are “Some Little Giant!”