

April 10, 2020

To the Students, Faculty, and Staff of Wabash College,

I wanted to share with you some updates on our response to the COVID-19 global health predicament, and to connect you to some exceptional examples of what embodies the core of our College's tradition and commitment to be a thoughtful and engaged academic community.

If you have not already done so, I strongly urge you to take an hour to watch the Chapel Talks given by professors Jim Cherry and Derek Nelson. Both teacher-scholars gave our community thoughtful, timely, and inspirational words that challenge us to be our best selves and look for the good in others. You can watch (or watch again) these Chapel Talks at this address:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4983AAA18E1CE402>

We have two updates for Wabash students:

1. Refunds for unused room and board have now been issued to students who qualify. We are grateful to the good people in our Business and Financial Aid offices for working together to make these complicated, student-specific calculations.
2. The College will continue to pay those students for whom employment (WISE or Federal Work Study) is a part of their financial aid packages. Accounts will be credited based on the average number of hours worked in pay periods prior to Spring Break until the student's allocated hours have been exhausted. We hope this eases some of the financial stress we know many of our students are facing.

As of today, there are 35 students still in residence here at the College, and we expect that number will remain constant until the end of the semester. We appreciate the efforts of everyone who has come together in support of these young men. In particular, we are grateful for the compassionate people in our Student Life Office, as well as our dedicated partners, Bon Appetit and Sodexo.

We will enhance signage on campus reminding everyone that we are fully closed to the public. Our students, and the people who must be here to feed and house them, deserve a campus that is empty of all but students, faculty, and staff who must be here. While this is not in the spirit of our culture, it is imperative that we prohibit visitors, guests, and children from our campus for the time being. We ask that your own families follow this guidance and that you help explain to members of the Crawfordsville community what we are trying to achieve as they will undoubtedly be jarred by the signs announcing a closed campus.

As is the case at this time every year, the first question I get from most people is, "How are the Admissions numbers?" I'm pleased to say that I am inspired by the work of our recruiters in the

Enrollment Office and Athletic Department during this crisis. The number of high school seniors who have made enrollment deposits is about 25% ahead of last year and we remain hopeful for a very strong class. This doesn't happen by chance, even in the best of times. Our recruiters have reimagined dozens of events and activities in a virtual context; coaches have created self-made campus tours for their recruits who haven't visited campus; parents of current students are reaching out to prospective parents; our faculty have welcomed recruits into their virtual classrooms; and the list goes on. This "we're in it together" attitude not only sustains us, it strengthens us in every way.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to our faculty, who as Professor Cherry said are "attempting to build the virtual pedagogical plane in flight." Supported by our IT professionals, our faculty drew from the amazing relationships they forged with their students in the first half of the semester, made a quick pivot, and are now fully engaged in virtual classroom discussions. I hear stories from Dean Feller about the successes and challenges we've had thus far, but yesterday morning I got an email from the parent of a current student that really touched me. She wrote:

"Last Friday, my husband and I went out to run some essential errands. We came home around 9:00 p.m. to find our son in the kitchen on a video conference call with one of his professors getting some extra help on his homework... I have been hearing from other people about how online college classes are not going well, not covering material, not challenging students. Not so for Wabash. From my perspective, the College hit the ground running and has kept my son engaged and learning since this started."

It's worth repeating that the event this mom wrote about took place at 9:00 p.m. last Friday night. That speaks volumes about the care and dedication of our faculty. It also says something very powerful about how eager our students are to learn and succeed — regardless of time, place, or situation.

I thank all of our teachers and learners, our staff who keep our buildings clean and the communications flowing, our recruiters for attracting talented young men to our College, and to our alumni, parents, and friends for supporting us in good times and when we are challenged.

I'll close by again quoting from Professor Cherry's Chapel Talk.

"Crisis offers the opportunity to be the people we need to be. The person you imagine you would be in a crisis is you right now. So, what do we ask of ourselves and of you? To think critically, act responsibly, lead effectively, live humanely. How do we enact these goals, and values in a time of crisis, of social distancing, of plague? In the world that will be on the other side of it? This is and will be for us all to figure out together. And we will. And based on what we see when the mask slips, we will need to imagine new possibilities for the world we will have when this ends. We'll do that together. So, in the moments of calm, please be reflective in what this all means, consider what we ought to become in the aftermath of this."

Jim really gets this right, and I hope all in our community will use the coming weekend to reflect on his words. Whatever awaits us, we will be together.

Stay safe, stay healthy, and stay home. I promise you, in return, Wabash will stay strong.

Gregory D. Hess
President