

April 1, 2020

To the Students, Alumni, Faculty, Staff, Parents, and Friends of Wabash,

I have been immensely proud of the efforts of everyone in the Wabash community who has come together in an exceptionally student-focused way to achieve our educational mission during this difficult and fragile time as all of us face a significant public health crisis.

What we accomplished in transitioning to virtual classrooms during the course of our spring break, just two weeks ago, is nothing short of remarkable. While our technology glide-path has occasionally hit a few bumps, faculty and staff have worked hard to implement fixes and to make changes, and students have been patient. Indeed, we heard from Professor Michele Pittard last Friday that one of her students said that the day's class was the best ever – not just since we went virtual, but for the entire semester!

This is unsurprising. After all, Wabash is, at its core, about relationships. We build relationships with students and their families long before they enroll at Wabash. And once here, our students bond with each other and with their teachers and coaches, our staff, and our alumni. Obviously, the relationships our alumni have with the College and with each other are the reason we once again boast the nation's number one-ranked Alumni Network. All of these relationships not only sustain us; they make us a truly distinctive college capable of accomplishing remarkable things even – perhaps especially – in difficult times.

Wabash is Open, Student-Centered and Live

Wabash is open and fully operational. Our phones are being answered, often as they are rolled over to a staff member's cell phone. For example, a call was placed to our main switchboard *Saturday afternoon* and Nikki Carpenter, who works in our Enrollment Office, politely and seamlessly answered and redirected the caller. Emails are being returned, meetings are happening virtually, and every office has the technology to support our students, alumni, and prospective students and their families.

You will also be glad to know that our Business Office is working diligently to determine when and how we will provide refunds to students for unused room and board. These are complicated calculations based on the type of scholarships and financial aid students receive, where they live, and other factors. We hope to be in a position to begin making these refunds by the end of next week.

Wabash also continues to put students first. Unlike many colleges that quickly evicted students, we have allowed students time to come to campus to retrieve their belongings or to do so by appointment. We have also allowed a number of them to remain on campus; these are young men who, for a variety of personal, family, and health-related reasons, need to be here. And with the assistance of our campus partners, we will continue to feed our students and provide them with the academic and health support they need to thrive in the final six weeks of the semester.

Finally, Wabash remains Live! Our Virtual Events Task Force has put together some online events to tie our community together. Already we've had some webinars and info sessions; a Humanities Colloquium was held Monday; and Professor Derek Nelson will give a Chapel Talk tomorrow, Thursday, April 2 at 11:10 a.m. – the first of five live-streamed talks in the month of April. Please plan to join us via our live-stream at www.wabash.edu/live.

I Am Encouraged

Early Monday morning I woke to an email message from Dayem Adnan, the President of the Wabash Student Body. Dayem and other student leaders have thoughtfully suggested re-investing unspent student activities fees in areas that will help the College. One of their ideas is to leverage a significant gift from the student body on our annual Day of Giving as a way of paying it forward – a remarkable response from our students.

Over the weekend, I picked up a Twitter thread from the father of a prospective student – a student whose interest in Wabash is high and who had planned to attend our Admitted Student Weekend two weeks ago. The father wrote that he was impressed with the engagement and attention his son had received from our Enrollment Office, albeit virtually and through text messages. He wrote that these relationships had only strengthened his son's decision to come to Wabash.

Every night for the last two weeks, emails have populated the Wabash student listserv as students who lead our Quantitative Skills Center, Writing Center, and Supplemental Instruction announce individual Zoom videoconference meetings with students who need extra help or tutoring. The Library Staff is available via live chat and email to assist students and teachers in getting access to online books, articles, and videos. IT Services has bundled all of these outstanding resources on a single webpage: KeepLearning@Wabash.

You may not know it, but every Thursday morning, the staff from the Schroeder Center for Career Development descends on Lilly Library for what they call "Coffee and Careers." Staff members advise students, look over resumes, discuss internships, and host recruiters. Obviously, those events have stopped. But the Schroeder Center staff is doing all of these same things on a virtual platform in addition to virtual office hours every day – two more reasons why our career services office is nationally ranked.

While everything related to our economy is uncertain, I am pleased that Wabash began working on a financial contingency plan two years ago. Three committees of the Board of Trustees worked with CFO Kendra Cooks and her staff to put in place strategies that would sustain Wabash in the event of a major market downturn. Those actions – and steps we have taken in recent weeks to strengthen our plan – will pay dividends for Wabash if economic conditions continue to weaken. As you are all aware from news headlines, higher education faces a difficult path forward. You should be proud that Wabash is well-positioned with great Board leadership to provide wise counsel, expertise, and guidance.

We're Making Difficult, Unprecedented Decisions

Of course, like every other college and university, we have been forced to make some very difficult decisions here at Wabash. Our approach, as always, has been to keep students first and foremost in mind.

- The annual Awards Chapel at which we celebrate the academic achievements of our students and faculty, is a long-standing tradition. While we can't be together for handshakes, hugs, and photos, we will have a Virtual Awards Chapel, which will be live-streamed at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 23. Please join us at www.wabash.edu/live as we celebrate our young men and their teachers.
- Late last week, I informed the seniors – and later the campus community – that we have made the difficult decision to postpone our on-campus Commencement Ceremony. Though nothing can replace our 182-year Commencement tradition, a committee has recommended and I have approved a live-streamed Virtual Commencement on Sunday, May 17 at 2:30 p.m. While our seniors will not be surrounded by their faculty, staff, coaches, and our Trustees, we will make the best of it. Each graduate's name will be read and a photo will appear on screen; we'll have a senior speaker; and I will use Caleb Mills' bell to ring out the Class of 2020. While these plans are being solidified, we are also beginning to imagine, with student input, an on-campus Commencement at a later time.
- The Board of Trustees, which meets on Commencement Weekend, has decided to have a virtual meeting, too. While there will be much business to discuss, the main action item is to approve the seniors who have met the requirements for graduation. The Board's virtual meeting will happen on Saturday, May 16.
- Our Annual Day of Giving has always occurred in April. We're pushing back this vitally important event until a time when we can properly celebrate and enhance our College's rich tradition of philanthropy. Rest assured, though: we will go forward with our Day of Giving at a later time because all of us must continue to support the Annual Fund and what it provides for our students.
- Big Bash Reunion Weekend, always held the first weekend in June, has been postponed, as well. We are eager to welcome back our alumni, especially those men and their guests from the Class of 1970 for their 50th reunion. We are looking at dates in the future that make sense for everyone involved.
- Finally, we have put a moratorium on all in-residence summer programs until at least June 15. Wabash has a remarkable on-campus research internship program and the amazing Liberal Arts Bridge to Business program, among others. We hope to be able to host these programs at a later point in the summer. It will also be helpful to have all of our residential living units empty so that they can be properly cleaned and repaired before students return in the fall.

Wabash College will celebrate its 200th anniversary in 2032. While that seems like a long way in the future, it is not. What we are doing today, in these difficult and challenging times, will shape our destiny. We need to look no further than the leadership that guided Wabash through World War II for the creativity and innovation that allowed Wabash to survive that turbulent era, and how it subsequently flourished.

While we continue to navigate through this crisis, I am heartened by the creativity and innovation of our faculty, staff, and students; by the outpouring of support and cooperation from alumni, parents, and friends; and by the overall Wabash Always Fights attitude we've shared in these difficult times. With our Giant mission, and our communal sense of purpose and resiliency, we will get through these troubled times, and be stronger for it.

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

With best wishes (from a safe social distance),

Gregory D. Hess
President