

# Academy for Teaching and Learning

North Carolina A&T State University



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## The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education at North Carolina A&T State University

### WABASH NATIONAL STUDY OF Liberal Arts Education

NC A&T Wabash National Study Co-Directors:

- Dr. Karen Hornsby, Assistant Professor, Department of History
- Dr. Scott Simkins, Director, Academy for Teaching and Learning

The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education is a national longitudinal study investigating the “teaching practices, programs, and institutional structures” that promote or retard student growth in a variety of liberal education outcomes, including cognitive skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, moral reasoning, and integrative learning, as well as outcomes related to leadership, intellectual curiosity, openness to diversity, and overall well-being.

More broadly, the Wabash National Study explores “the extent to which students develop because of their college experiences, the conditions that contribute to this development, and ways that institutions can more readily assess and act on this knowledge to enhance their impact.” The Wabash National Study employs a comprehensive collection of assessment tools, including surveys and measures of academic proficiency, to measure student growth over four years. The results of the Wabash National Study, because of their breadth, allow institutions to develop an “institutional narrative” describing the strengths and weakness of their students and their learning environment, while also suggesting ways in which that learning environment might be improved.

### NC A&T Results from the Wabash National Study at NC A&T State University

North Carolina A&T State University began participating in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education in fall, 2007, with 722 freshman students (nearly half the incoming freshman class) completing a series of assessments in fall, 2007 and 315 students in this same cohort completing a related series of assessments in spring, 2008.

**Overview of NC A&T Wabash National Study Results.** Results from the Wabash National Study assessments have highlighted a variety of factors impacting student success at NC A&T:

- Entering NC A&T freshmen exhibit low critical thinking, writing, and moral reasoning skills relative to other Wabash National Study institutions. Little measured improvement in these skills is exhibited over the first year.
- Entering NC A&T freshmen suffer from an “aspirational gap.” Students report very high life aspirations but fail to display the dispositions, skills, and behaviors that will help them achieve these aspirations, a result that appears to hold throughout the first year.
- NC A&T freshmen report higher levels of academic challenge and high faculty expectations than at other large institutions participating in the Wabash National Study. However, overall levels remain low for all institutions.
- NC A&T freshmen report experiencing lower levels of good teaching and faculty interest in student learning than students at other large universities in the Wabash National Study.
- Variation in student growth within the institution is generally larger than the mean difference between NC A&T and other institutions. We need to better understand which practices, programs, and institutional factors are most effective for which students.
- NC A&T freshman students report doing less reading and writing than their peers at other large universities. They also spend much less time studying; over 60% of NC A&T freshman in the Wabash National Study report studying fewer than ten hours per week outside of class.

**NC A&T State University Wabash National Study Results (Reports).** The links below provide you with

direct access to the full Wabash National Study Data Reports for NC A&T State University.

- [Fall, 2007 Wabash National Study Incoming Student Data - NC A&T State University](#)
  - Incoming Student Data Report (41 pages, pdf)
- [2007-2008 Full Year Wabash National Study Results - NC A&T State University](#)
  - Overview of Results (12 pages, pdf)
  - First-Year Change on Outcome Measures (50 pages, pdf)
  - Full-year Findings (275 pages, pdf)

**Wabash Results and First-Year Retention.** In addition, analysis of NC A&T Wabash National Study and NC A&T institutional data reveal important relationships affecting second-year retention of students. As expected, credit hours completed during the freshman year are a strong predictor of persistence to the sophomore year. Further, successful credit hour completion during the first year is also statistically linked to a set of teaching variables such as prompt feedback, course organization, and clarity of learning outcomes, areas of weakness for NC A&T identified in the Wabash National Study results.

### Active Responses to NC A&T Wabash National Study Results

First-year Wabash National Study results for NC A&T are being used to develop and implement initiatives aimed at promoting increased academic performance and retention, including:

**(1) Wabash-Provost Scholars Program.** Wabash-Provost Scholars are a group of undergraduate NC A&T students trained to conduct focus group sessions that provide a more in-depth view of specific Wabash National Study results. The Wabash-Provost Scholars initiative led to a comprehensive student-developed report of focus group results and recommendations in spring, 2009. A new cohort of Wabash-Provost Scholars was trained in late September, 2009 and will begin conducting focus groups later this semester.

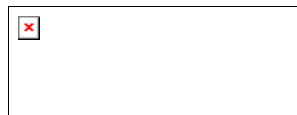
**(2) Early Alert–Supplemental Instruction Initiative.** Analysis of NC A&T Wabash National Study data led to the development of a campus-wide Early Alert/Supplemental Instruction initiative in fall, 2009 aimed at increasing first-year retention rates. This initiative combines early and frequent feedback to freshmen students who are underperforming in their courses with required supplemental instruction led by tenure-track and lecturer-level instructors. Three University Studies courses (UNST 120, UNST 130, and UNST 140) are serving as pilot courses in fall, 2009, with plans to expand the concept next year to high-failure-rate courses across the university that enroll high percentages of freshman students.

**(3) Academy for Teaching and Learning Workshops.** The Academy for Teaching and Learning is leading a series of workshops in fall, 2009 aimed at improving clarity of course learning outcomes, promoting prompt feedback, and enhancing pedagogical practices. The ATL is also hosting a workshop led by Donna Engelmann, Alverno College, that illustrates how engaged pedagogical practices, intentional assessment, and careful attention to clarifying learning expectations can improve institution-wide student-learning outcomes. Alverno is an internationally recognized leader in these areas.

### Wabash National Study Links

Direct links to Wabash National Study information:

- [Overview of the Wabash National Study](#)
- [Outcome and Experiences Measures](#)
- [Participating Institutions](#)
- [Center of Inquiry Blog](#)
- [Research Findings](#)
  - [High-Impact Practices and Experiences from the Wabash National Study](#)
  - [Overview of Findings from the First Year of the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education](#)



North Carolina A&T State University has been generously supported by the Center for Inquiry at Wabash College (IN), the group leading this national four-year longitudinal study. In addition to providing assessment materials, data analysis, and comprehensive reports, members of the Wabash team, along with accompanying Teagle Scholars, have made multiple trips to the NC A&T campus, sharing A&T's Wabash Study results with students, faculty, staff, and administrators. In addition, the NC A&T Wabash National Study co-directors have been invited to participate in multiple Wabash National Study-related workshops at

Wabash College, including a Wabash National Study Retention Workshop (May, 2009) focused on developing institutional retention initiatives based on Wabash and institutional data analysis. Participation in this workshop directly led to the Early Alert-Supplemental Instruction Initiative implemented in August, 2009.

Overall, we view our participation in the Wabash National Study as a partnership between the Center of Inquiry at Wabash College and North Carolina A&T State University. That partnership continues to yield valuable insights into the conditions, practices, and institutional structures that affect student growth at A&T. The data generated from the Wabash National Study help us identify and address gaps in student learning and serve as the basis for further inquiry into the causes of those gaps. We look forward to our continuing partnership over the remainder of this longitudinal study and the potential for new opportunities to work together on projects aimed at improving student learning outcomes. More important, we look forward to learning from the Wabash National Study team and their associated Teagle Scholars on how to use Wabash National Study data to create "conditions that matter" for improving student learning outcomes and the overall learning environment for our students.

For further information email *Dr. Scott Simkins* or phone (336) 334-7705 x2237

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