

What's Next? *New Horizons for Purdue and the State of Indiana*

Proposal for a Purdue Experiential Learning Center in Chesterton, Indiana

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As the 2002-2007 Strategic Plan of Purdue University comes to its successful end, it is up to the residents of Indiana, as major stakeholders in this venture, to work closely with Purdue to shape its new master plan for the future. We should strive to create a plan that will help eradicate the academic deficiencies within Indiana; develop programs to integrate the physical and intellectual assets of each region, and in doing so, advance Purdue University to an unparalleled level of higher education.

Over the next several months, as Purdue President Jischke visits regions throughout the state he will pose the five questions below to all residents. Particularly sought are the opinions of business leaders, opinion leaders, political officials, and other key constituents.¹

- ★ How has your county benefited from Purdue, and what needs are unmet?
- ★ How can Purdue and your county accomplish more?
- ★ What does your community need from a major research university?
- ★ What does Purdue need from your community?
- ★ How can Purdue improve its learning environment for students?

The responses to these questions are intended to answer the larger question of "*What is next on the horizon for Purdue as a key partner in the state of Indiana?*"

HOW DID *THIS* PROPOSAL COME ABOUT?

Almost one year ago, residents of the town of Chesterton battled with out-of-state developers proposing to build a high-density retail shopping mall with the promise of a bright and beneficial future for the town by providing job opportunities for its residents, especially their children. What the developers did not understand was that the townspeople knew there were other, much better types of development that would truly provide a worthwhile and prosperous future for them and their children. This battle against eco-destroying, high-density development with low-paying, dead-end jobs is being fought in every corner of Indiana and across the entire United States. Our children deserve better.

With this in mind, in early in 2006, I began systematically polling local and regional educators (elementary through college levels), business owners, various members of town government, and numerous residents of the Duneland area (Chesterton, Porter, Burns Harbor, Dune Acres, Beverly

¹ Found at <http://www.purdue.edu/whatsnext/>

Shores, and the Pines). Although I did not have or use the same five questions now posed by Purdue University, I was guided by similar advice from Chancellor Cohen of Purdue University Calumet to seek out the needs of our area and to draw up a proposal. The program descriptions in this proposal are drawn from the ideas and suggestions of Duneland community members.

THE RATIONALE FOR AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CENTER IN CHESTERTON

WHY CHESTERTON?

In looking around Porter, LaPorte, and Lake Counties, one notices that there are no institutions of higher education located in the Duneland area, which encompasses the towns of Chesterton, Burns Harbor, Porter, Dune Acres, Beverly Shores, and the Pines. Westville/Michigan City has Purdue North Central (PNC), Valparaiso has Ivy Tech, Valparaiso University, and a PNC branch, Portage has a Purdue satellite campus, and Gary/Hammond have Indiana University Northwest, Ivy Tech, and Purdue Calumet. Approximately 33,500 people live in the Duneland communities, and the area within a 15-mile radius (within Porter County) is home to some 146,798 residents.²

Ideal location. Chesterton, situated on the northern end of State Route 49, is easily accessed via the I-94, State Route 20, and the Indiana Toll Road all of which are within three miles of the downtown. There is an abundance of open land on which to build that will accommodate outdoor experimentation labs, as well as future expansion.

EDUCATION

The statistics discussed below are limited to the few that would be the most positively affected by an unconventional experiential learning center. Demographics are from the U.S. Census Bureau 2000 Census:³

Chesterton has a 92.7% high school graduation rate, yet only 30% of the residents hold a Bachelor's degree or higher. Similarly, the Porter county high school graduation rate is 88%, and the percentage of those with college degrees (BA & above) is 22.6%. Statewide, percentage rates are 82%, and 19.4% respectively.

Of the one thousand, seven hundred fifty nine 2003-04 graduating students in Porter County, one thousand four hundred twenty three (81%) indicated they were going on to higher education. Actual breakdown: one thousand two hundred sixteen for a four-year degree; one hundred eleven for a two-year degree; and ninety six for a vocational/technical degree.

From the 2004 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau,⁴ Indiana ranks 45th out of 51 states for having people 25 years and over who have completed a Bachelor's degree. Indiana's neighboring states ranked 14th (Illinois), 31st (Michigan), and 41st (Ohio).

² From the Duneland Chamber of Commerce website found at <http://www.chestertonchamber.org/Demographics.html>

³ Found at <http://www.stats.indiana.edu/profiles/pr18127.html>

Discussion

How many of those high school graduates who went on to college actually received a degree? The Northwest Indiana Times recently reported that Purdue University Calumet has upped its degree completion rate to 42 percent. This is great, but why is the college degree holder level so low in the Duneland area?

The figures reported for people with college degrees are low, however they do not capture college graduates who no longer live in Indiana. "Brain drain" has long been recognized as a serious problem for Indiana. On November 17, 2006, Purdue President Jischke was quoted in the Northwest Indiana Times as saying that "84 percent of Purdue North Central graduates stay in Indiana, creating not a brain drain, but a brain gain." The 84 percent retention is attributed to the "place bound" status of graduates. In addition to providing ground-breaking programs for "place bound" students, the proposed experiential learning center will aggressively pursue potential students who are not "place bound," who would otherwise attend out of state institutions, and ultimately leave the area.

INCOME INEQUITY

In 2000, the Census Bureau reported the median family income in Chesterton was \$55,530. While this figure is respectable, an issue that needs to be addressed is the significant inequity between the wages of male and female workers. The median earnings of year-round full-time male workers were reported to be \$50,599, while the median earnings of year-round full-time female workers were a mere \$28,300. This income inequity is incredibly significant in single parent households in which a female is the head of household and main breadwinner.

HOW CAN PURDUE HELP CHESTERTON AND THE DUNELAND AREA IMPROVE THESE SITUATIONS?

What goals would residents hope to achieve from having a Purdue Experiential Learning Center located in Chesterton?

1. Provide residents with real world, hands-on training/experience so they may apply what they've learned in the classroom to real life situations, thereby expanding their marketable skills, which will increase their income earning ability.
2. Raise both high school and college graduation rates.
3. Keep college graduates in the NW Indiana area
4. Promote economic development in Chesterton and the area.

It should be noted that these goals fit with the *current* goals of Purdue Calumet, particularly, an experiential learning center in Chesterton speaks directly to the 4th goal of the Purdue University Calumet 2005-06 Strategic Plan⁵ to "Expand our partnership role for advancing positive change and economic growth in our region." Also stated in this goal: "We are committed to maximizing our

⁴ 2004 American Community Survey R1402. Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed a Bachelor's Degree: 2004. Found at <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

⁵ Found at <http://www.calumet.purdue.edu/strategicplan/goals.html>

responsiveness to Calumet Region issues. And, “Additionally, we plan to be a bridge that connects various entities of the Calumet Region.

HOW DOES AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CENTER DIFFER FROM THE USUAL COLLEGE "SATELLITES"

Even though there are campuses located within reasonable driving distances of Chesterton, the usual satellite campuses that start up in towns are usually light in offering and faculty. But, what I propose for Chesterton is a unique "Experiential Learning Center." The key word is "experiential." An experiential learning center would include internships, service learning, practicum, apprenticeships, externships, applied studies, credit for prior/life experience, volunteering, mentoring, contract learning, cross-cultural learning, experimentation, community support programs, corporate training, and distance learning combined with field study.

The programs offered would be "out of the box" ideas *<unlike anything offered elsewhere in the area>* that would involve internships and field work; innovative programs that reach down into high schools to academically engage students before their Senior year; complete, start-to-finish programs that would serve the needs of the community such as training in business methods and operation; specialized workforce re/training with internships to gain experience; development of town/county "required" environment programs for prospective developers, urban planning, and so forth.

What is *not* envisioned is a run-of-the-mill satellite campus offering only basic required classes, which serves primarily as a "feeder" to larger campuses. The programs to be offered would be designed to fulfill particular needs and meet specific goals and objectives of the Duneland communities and the larger region. The programs and courses offered at the Purdue Experiential Learning Center would be uniquely designed as to *not* be in competition with the offerings of other Purdue campuses (PUC, PNC) and regional academic institutions (Valparaiso University, Ivy Tech, IUN). In fact, these innovative programs could work in tandem with the programs offered at other area campuses.

Visions of what could be...

INTERACTIVE PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The Chesterton area has an exceptionally high rate of high school graduates (92.7%) and a college program designed to engage high school juniors and seniors would help to ensure that they continue on with their education. At the junior level (or earlier), students would attend a series of introduction to college classes at the Learning Center as part of their high school curriculum. Seniors, would attend more general education classes as part of their high school curriculum, and at the same time earn college credits. This early “banking” of college credits would not only give them a head start on their academic career, but it would also give them a feeling of “investment” in a degree program, thus making them more likely to continue.

In general, people, especially young ones, do not know what great things they are capable of accomplishing. If role models are not present who can show a young person how to achieve success, to inspire them to further their education, and to aim high, then something else must be in place to do so. An interactive program for high school students would serve as a mentor for all students, especially helping those without role models. Children who are not sure whether to go to college or to work are known to local educators as “bubble” students. Often these students have parents who do little or nothing to encourage them to go to college.

It was suggested by a local high school educator that the learning center could offer a program designed for the parents of high school students. This program would instill in the value of higher education, and show them the importance of education to their children’s futures, as well as to illustrate how to encourage their children to continue their education beyond high school.

COLLEGE KICK-OFF PROGRAM

This program is designed to encourage individuals, *of any age*, to start their academic career while working and staying close to home (placebound). After taking a course in “the college experience,” a small offering of general classes would be available such as, but not limited to, English (writing & literature), Communication (speech), Psychology, Computing, and Business Administration. It is hoped that once the person is invested in their academic career, s/he would be more apt to continue on in a degree program at Purdue Calumet or Purdue North Central. In this capacity, the learning center could serve minimally as a feeder to the other larger Purdue campuses.

PROGRAM FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO WANT TO EMBARK ON A CAREER

This program would initially be designed for individuals who hold one or more low-paying, unskilled jobs, such as retail, restaurant, and basic services, who would like to gain the necessary skills to develop a career with upward potential. For example, a single mother who works as a waitress, retail clerk, house cleaner, and/or cook, might aspire to work in an office which offers regular scheduled hours, good working conditions, and most importantly, benefits. What would this woman need to achieve this goal?

Naturally, she would need basic office skills – computer training, phone skills, business writing, light accounting, business etiquette. But, even with all these, she still would need “experience” to get hired at most places. This program would unite with local businesses to hire advanced students as temporary office workers within an internship structure. She would earn wages at a comparable rate, would be able to hone her learned skills, and gain the experience so desired by employers. Employers would observe and comment on her progress. When she has completed the program, including a successful internship, the woman would receive a certificate. It is also possible that the company at which she interned would hire her permanently.

HANDS-ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM

This program is designed to train and help people to successfully identify, prepare for, and start-up their own business. This program will encourage entrepreneurship where doubt and inexperience have stopped ambition. It will also promote new economic development and growth in the area.

This program would be similar to, but not the same as the Entrepreneurship program at Purdue University Calumet. In this case, aspiring entrepreneurs (students), *who do not already have businesses*, would be the focal point. The program would consist of a series of courses such as business accounting, marketing, computer training, business management practices, ethics, and business law. Via workshops and brief internships with various local business owners, the student would get a real picture of the local business climate. From the beginning of the program, the student will work on identifying the business s/he wants to start (if not already identified), including where it will be located, with the goal of having a viable idea by midpoint in the program. From that point on, the focus will be on creating a business plan, and its ultimate execution. Execution of the business plan will be guided by the program instructor and local business people.

ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING/INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

Environmental concerns such as air pollution, ground and water contamination, plague the northwest Indiana region. Much of the more recent environmental problems are caused by urban sprawl, which is marked by unrestrained development such as overly dense housing developments and mega-sized shopping malls. It is especially important to have a program that not only addresses these issues but also searches for solutions. In the Chesterton area the lakes, streams, ponds, wetlands and watersheds are the most negatively affected by the ever-increasing sprawl.

This program would work as an experiential extension of the Purdue University Calumet Water Institute. Using courses created by the Water Institute that are specific to the Chesterton area, students would attend classes at the learning center while participating in internships at local organizations, i.e.: the Indiana National Lakeshore, Indiana Dunes State Park, Coffee Creek Watershed Conservancy.

Another aspect of the program would be a certificate program targeted at companies/corporations and individuals who wish to build subdivisions, malls, or other large developments in the Chesterton area. Certification from attending a course designed by the Water Institute could become required criteria to get necessary permits and zoning ordinances in Chesterton and other local towns.

Similarly, courses in Urban Planning could be included which would train residents, local officials and prospective developers how to moderate the urban sprawl so that they are creating living spaces that include a sense of community, a sensibility for the surrounding landscape, and containment of cookie-cutter overly-dense housing developments. An experiential learning center would be the perfect home for an “idea incubator” for innovative planning design in Porter County.

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY EXPERIMENTATION LABS

The proposed experiential learning center would provide state-of-the-art indoor and large outdoor labs to carry out actual research. For example, recently, a local student who had designed a fire-resistant liquid to apply to flammable construction materials needed to conduct actual burn tests to determine the level of its fire-resistance. But, because his college did not have a designated area available to do the actual burn tests, he took it upon himself to construct small structures in the back yard of his home to conduct the tests. The tests were successful, however, the home grown testing methods could have negative impacts on the future success of his product. Had the tests been conducted in a controlled-conditions lab, the results would have more scientific merit, which in turn would give his product greater credibility.

PROFESSIONAL CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAM

Continuing education courses for business and educational professionals could be offered at the experiential learning center. Periodically business professionals such as computer technicians, administrators/managers need to update their knowledge or learn the new techniques of their vocation. Often business professionals choose to broaden their skillsets to advance their career. Educators who do not hold permanent teaching licenses are required to earn six credit hours every five years in order to satisfy the continuing education requirement of the Indiana license renewal system. The Chesterton location of the experiential learning center would make it convenient for area educators and business professionals to attend classes.

WHAT'S NEXT ?

Looking to the future, I can only hope that the ideas presented in this proposal will be taken seriously, and that the Purdue-Chesterton Experiential Learning Center envisioned will become reality. It goes without saying that such an academic undertaking would be an incredible asset to Chesterton and the entire Duneland area. It would provide a world-class educational institution in our own back yard, provide jobs such as would come with the operation and maintenance of a small campus, teaching positions, and would raise the overall economic and intellectual standing of the area. The greatest asset would be the benefits received by local residents, such as higher education, re-education, workforce, economic, and environmental training and development. Additionally, a dynamic outreach program for high school students would help raise the graduation rate as well as promote the continuation of their academic career.

Thank you for reaching out to the residents of Indiana to gather input for your next strategic plan. I am passionate about bringing Purdue University to Chesterton as I think it is a far better use of our precious land than shopping malls, and will provide an extraordinary opportunity for residents to engage in a self-sustaining, ever-improving direction for the future.