

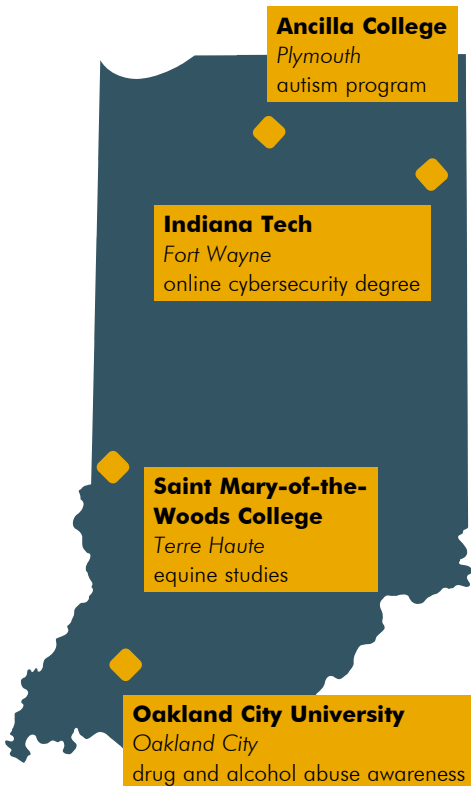
HIDDEN GEMS

Colleges Offer Unique Study Options

By Charlee Beasor

Indiana’s excellence in higher education among its major institutions is well documented. But not everyone yearns for a large university experience. The state also boasts numerous small and private schools with unique opportunities for students.

BizVoice® asked leaders from four such institutions from around the state to identify one program, class or offering that stands out and is individual to that school. At a glance, here are the colleges and the highlighted initiatives:



Ancilla College: Autism Program

College can be a difficult time for students. For those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), it can be more than just challenging.

The Autism Program at Ancilla College (APAC) is designed to make the higher education experience a more attainable one for students with the disorder. The two-year liberal arts college in Plymouth (about 30 miles southwest of South Bend) is the first institution of higher education in the state to provide a program specifically for students with ASD.

“We identified the need, not only locally and regionally, but nationally and internationally. It is an incredible situation. One in 68 births today are impacted by autism,” says Ancilla President Ken Zirkle.

Zirkle’s daughter works for a program in another state and she mentioned to her father that Ancilla would be an ideal place for a similar initiative. The college is situated in a quiet, rural area of the state, with between 500 and 600 students on average.

“We want to be a leader at the two-year level in a program for students that are on the spectrum. The students we’re dealing with are high functioning, very bright and they have to pass all the exams you’d normally pass to go to college. (They) will be in the traditional classroom and dining hall and interacting with other students,” he adds.

The small size and intimate feel of the campus is one reason Zirkle expects APAC to flourish.

“We believe because of our size and personal attention, we can work out some amazing things with these students,” he says. “It’s always fun to do the right thing for the right reasons. It fits so well with the background (of the college) and with the Sisters (the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ founded the college in 1937).”

The first cohort began in the fall of 2017 with six students; the goal is to have another 15 join for the 2018-19 school year. There is an optional dormitory available exclusively for students in the program with a dedicated person responsible for living with and assisting the students.

“We’ll be working with a lot of the four-year schools. These students will be able to transfer there; our job is to get them ready. This has nothing to do with intelligence, but with social skills and to be able to interact with others that will set them apart. We can see it in just one semester; we see a big difference in these young people, a difference in how they’re operating,” Zirkle expresses.



Students in the Autism Program at Ancilla College are supported with optional housing and assistance, but take the same classes and must pass the same exams as other students.

RESOURCE: Ancilla College at www.ancilla.edu

Indiana Tech: Online cybersecurity degree

The need for strong cybersecurity measures has never been greater. Thanks to a new online option at Indiana Tech, the opportunity to obtain a bachelor's degree in cybersecurity has expanded to a wider audience of students.

Indiana Tech is a private, four-year institution in Fort Wayne, with additional locations around the state and in Kentucky, Illinois and Michigan.

Brian Engelhart, vice president of marketing and communication at Indiana Tech, shares that the school's adult, graduate and online programs have grown in recent years. The main campus in Fort Wayne is home to about 1,600 students, while the school's total student population is closer to 8,500.

Indiana Tech previously offered a cybersecurity degree as part of its computer science program at the school of engineering. The online bachelor of science option opened to its first students in January.

"The skills are in demand. ... We've heard a lot from prospective students on the adult side. They want to get involved in this industry, into a program that can help transition or start a new career. This course material can be offered online very easily," Engelhart says.

"It exposes it to so many more people; more that can take advantage of the opportunity and at their own pace and fit it in if they're already working and go through the coursework while they keep working and have a family and have responsibilities."

He notes the degree is the same whether in person or online, though the in-person program does offer more lab work on-site.

"They really walk away with the same experiences and skills," he adds.

Engelhart points to the fact that Indiana Tech alumni are working in technology positions at top companies around the country, including Amazon, American Electric Power, Aptera, Cisco Systems and more.

"Knowing that there are companies looking for skilled people and that they look highly on Indiana Tech is a good thing. Alums come back and they might be looking for somebody to join their team. In some instances, we have alums that come back and might serve as an instructor – using their real-world experience and teaching in the classroom," he says.

The collegiate Cyber Defense team is another part of Indiana Tech's cybersecurity and computer science program. The team competes against other schools in protecting or attacking a cyber network.

"It shows the caliber and curriculum of our students," Engelhart contends, noting that the school's team has competed against other Indiana engineering schools and come out on top the last three years.

RESOURCE: Indiana Tech at www.indianatech.edu

Oakland City University: Focus on drug, alcohol awareness

Students at Oakland City University have come face-to-face with the stark reality of driving under the influence (DUI): a car that had been totaled in a DUI incident was placed in the middle of campus.

The car example – along with a spring break pledge banner for students to sign and an emphasis on making smart decisions – is part of the university's focus on having a strong drug and alcohol awareness and mental health awareness program.

The private university in Oakland City (about 40 miles north of Evansville) has about 1,800 students between its main campus and several other locations around the state. It was one of five Indiana institutions of higher education to receive a grant from the Indiana Collegiate Action Network (ICAN) to support its ongoing awareness programs.



Oakland City University has focused on alcohol and substance abuse education and awareness, a drive that is supported by a grant from the Indiana Collegiate Action Network.

"The Mental Health Association of Indiana has been very good to Oakland City University over the last couple of years," says Danny Dunivan, provost and dean of the Chapman Seminary program. "We have received the ICAN mini-grant because of several reasons: geographically where we are within the state of Indiana and knowing some of the drug problems that we have locally.

"They felt like we're putting an emphasis on education and really awareness of the effects of drug and alcohol abuse. ... It's been very good to put funding behind our educational efforts here and we appreciate their partnership for sure."

Other efforts include getting the study body to buy into the campaign to raise awareness of alcohol abuse. A hashtag, #SOLOOCU (Strike Out Lame Options, Oakland City University) – a play on the Solo Cup brand that is often associated with drinking alcohol at the college level – engaged students on social media outlets over spring break.

"We had a very strong response on social media from our student body," Dunivan notes.

"This year the emphasis is on opioid and prescription drug abuse, with what we're seeing in our country regarding heroin and the opioid epidemic. We've written that grant this year to put more of an emphasis on that," he reveals.

The university was founded in 1885 and was "known as a teacher-preacher college," offers Brian Baker, associate vice president for advancement. "But we think we've developed into a whole lot more than that in 2018."

Oakland City University is the only accredited school of higher education for General Baptists in the country. The Chapman Seminary offers graduate degrees in Doctor of Ministry, Master of Divinity, Master of Divinity – Pastoral Care and Master of Theological Studies.

RESOURCE: Oakland City University at www.oak.edu

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College: Equine studies

Sara Schulz says she doesn't understand why the equine studies program at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College (SMWC) in Terre Haute is still a best-kept secret.

"We're still really unknown and I don't really understand that. It's shocking how many people in the local community don't know that we have an equine program and realize what it is," she asserts.

Schulz, assistant professor of equine studies and department chair, points out some notable facts about the program:

- It's the only four-year equine degree program in the state of Indiana and one of only a few in the country.
- It offers three different majors: general equine studies, equine business management, and equine training and instruction (with minors available in equine studies and equine science).
- The school's competitive Western Equestrian Team was in the top four in the nation in 2015, having competed against Big Ten schools.
- The academics are rigorous; students accepted into the equine studies program are in charge of caring for the horses and stables on campus, including being on call on the weekends in case of inclement weather or if a horse is sick. Students also give up one holiday per year to stay on campus and take care of the horses.

At one time, Schulz says, about a third of the students enrolled on campus were involved in the equine department, the degree program or the competitive team.

Most students accepted into the demanding degree program are trained riders or have some background of working with horses. While it's possible for students to come into the program without that know-how, she notes that it is difficult to make up the experience in four years.

"I'm not saying it's not doable, but they've got a lot of ground to make up. We typically will gear them more toward equine business management or equine studies – if you don't come in with a substantial riding background," Schulz offers.

"Plus, they have to take a riding test to get into that major. It happens, and they are successful. But it's not just riding around the arena on the horse, making a play day of it. We have serious science classes that are



The equine studies program at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College in Terre Haute is a rigorous, science-based academic field of study. It is the only four-year bachelor's degree program in equine studies in the state.

required across every major. It's a highly science-based program."

Students who graduate from the program go on to become veterinarians or head into business management, running and managing barns and therapy barns. Others have gone into equine law, equine photography and more.

Growing the program is a goal and

reaching out to more male students could help with that. Previously, the college admitted only women but opened enrollment to men in 2015.

"I think gradually the word is getting out there. We are starting to get some men (interested). We might have one in the program next year," she asserts.

RESOURCE: Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College at www.smw.edu