

## Non-Traditional Harrison College Expands Offerings, Reputation

If a person lived for 110 years, there would be the risk of him or her being rather set in their ways. However, Harrison College (formerly known as Indiana Business College) just celebrated its 110th year in existence and is constantly evolving and adapting to a changing world.

“When we made the name change (in 2008), it really was about a strategic decision regarding the future and what the institution stood for,” explains president Jason Konesco.

The school once focused only on business programs such as accounting, management and secretarial courses, but has since added degrees and curriculum in information technology, veterinary technology, health sciences, criminal justice, fire science (including hands-on HAZMAT training for firefighters) and partnered with Conexus Indiana on logistics training.

A key focus at the moment is acquiring regional accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission. Konesco says this process is moving forward and is on pace to happen in the near future. Once that takes place, officials believe Harrison will be eligible to accept students who are getting tuition reimbursement from employers (most reimbursement programs don’t cover schools that lack this accreditation).

### Leaders and educators

Another major addition for Harrison, which features 12 campuses in Indiana and Ohio while serving more than 6,000 students, is developing a school of education.

“Right now we’re approving the program and identifying the faculty,” reports provost Dennis Trinkle. “Our goal is to get everything in place to enroll students in August 2013. We’re also exploring engaging with local schools as partners in some of their programs in jointly operated charter schools, or quasi-charter schools, and to what extent we should pursue being a sponsor. We have a lot of experience in education that would tie well into what we want to do with teacher training.”

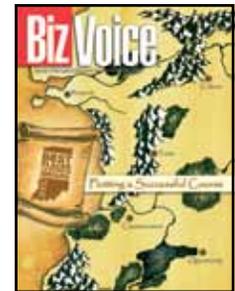
Harrison’s Leadership Certificate also focuses on talent and skill development. In partnership with well-known public speaker and professional development expert Simon Bailey of the Brilliance Institute, the school offers a co-branded leadership program that will help future managers hone their skills.

### What’s cooking?

Harrison stirred the proverbial pot by launching the Chef’s Academy in 2006. The school, endorsed and accredited

by the American Culinary Federation, is now nationally recognized as the cream of its crop.

“Disney recognizes only a select number of culinary programs in the country for whom they will allow students to come do internships at resorts across the country,” Trinkle qualifies. “They do a ranking and if you’re not one of the top 10 institutions, Disney won’t allow you to come. And we have been ranked in their top 10 for two years running, so we know we have one of the top culinary programs in the country.”



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Konesco relays that the Chef’s Academy has about 400 students at any given time, and the school does not want to “oversaturate the local market” with more graduates than are needed in the community. He explains that’s a practical approach the school takes with all of its programs.

Harrison recently enhanced its base, however, by opening a culinary academy in Raleigh, North Carolina.

“We had a desire to expand the academy’s reach, so we gave our leadership the opportunity to present it to (another) city,” Konesco offers. “After looking, we determined that Raleigh was the best place to serve a niche community with growth in conventions, restaurants and population. We launched in summer 2011 and had an open house with local leaders and local business owners. It was a great reception.”

### In business

Konesco adds that corporate partnerships will help the school cater to the needs of Indiana’s business community.

“We’ve hired a new vice president to lead that area,” he remarks. “It’s not something that’s brand new because we’ve done it in small ways over the years, but we’re taking a larger approach to attracting companies that have a desire to partner with institutions like ours. It’s a way to drive additional economic development and training for companies we’re engaging with.”

Trinkle submits that those partnerships will help the school work in tandem with the changing trends in higher education.

“It’s the future of higher education; today, the majority of college students are non-traditional students,” he says. “They are working-age adults. Most folks don’t think about that. Customized corporate training and non-degreed credentialing will be 80-90% of what higher education is going forward.



Harrison College’s new KnowU social media integration system is designed to help students interact more and enhance a sense of community.

That's so important for the dynamic workforce we have today. We realize that because we spend a lot of time talking with employer partners about what their needs are. Right now, we're working on big partnerships with area hospitals and logistics firms around that key training."

### Online, on campus

The school's new KnowU program also strives to address the chasm that can keep online students from feeling a sense of connection with the institution. KnowU allows students to learn in a more interactive, graphic-rich environment and promotes connectivity via social networking sites. Officials have also developed the system to keep these students on the proper path.

"If you scroll back two years, online learning looked the same all over the country," Trinkle asserts. "Most online learning was terrifically effective, but many felt like they were giving up a sense of community. So we asked, 'Does it have to be a compromise? Do you have to give up a sense of community, so Harrison and Harvard look the same?'"

"Now you don't. Tools have evolved a lot, so students can feel tied to each other and the institution, and you can do a lot with social tools to enrich the experience and leverage all the things that come out of a social environment."

He gives an example of an online career coach who helps students meet their specific needs.

"(The coach would tell the student) 'OK, you are now in the third quarter before graduation; this is the time to polish your resumé, take the interviewing workshop and start networking' – not six weeks before graduation when a lot of people finally think about it," Trinkle qualifies.

"Remember to do that, and here's where you go for assistance...' Those are things that help them get the most out



**The college's culinary program is lauded nationally. It prepares staff for Hoosier restaurants and resort operations, including Disney.**

of college and be able to hit the ground running when they graduate. That's gotten a lot of recognition nationally."

As far as the future, Harrison's leadership will continue working to make the school a go-to resource for employers looking to hire in various sectors.

"The next logical step will be master's degree programs," Konesco concludes. "But we're not going to veer from our mission, which is offering courses that are necessary in the communities we serve. It's always with an ear to the ground in terms of talking to business and community leaders and asking what they need."

**To view the May/June 2008 article on Harrison College (then known as Indiana Business College), go to the archives section of [www.bizvoicemagazine.com](http://www.bizvoicemagazine.com).**

#### INFORMATION LINK

**Resource:** Jason Konesco and Dennis Trinkle, Harrison College, at [www.harrison.edu](http://www.harrison.edu)

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