

Student-Business Connections

Chamber Hosting Statewide Internship Program

By Tom Schuman

The Indiana INTERNnet program is coming home. Although the effort to connect college students with learning opportunities and potential future careers in the state was never physically based at the Indiana Chamber, its origins are in Chamber research.

Indiana's Human Capital Retention Project (or "brain drain" report) was a series of studies taking an analytical approach to the state's perceived human capital problem. The Chamber collaborated with the Indiana Commission for Higher Education on the project, researched by the Indiana Fiscal Policy Institute and funded primarily by the Lilly Endowment.

Graduation Migration from Indiana's Postsecondary Institutions was released in March 1999. Two of the conclusions were: Indiana is a significant exporter of graduates with postsecondary degrees (36.2% of Hoosiers and 89.2% of non-residents leave the state after graduation) and the primary reasons for the departures are employment-related.

Beyond the well-touted lack of beaches and mountains in Indiana, students were leaving because, in their minds, employment opportunities were lacking. Yet, Hoosier employers in many of the same types of industries as these graduates were complaining about not being able to find qualified workers.

Indiana INTERNnet was one response. The rationale was that if more students learn (through internships) about Indiana companies and potential careers within the state, the brain drain would slow from a flood to a trickle.

The Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce and the University of Indianapolis were instrumental (with funding from the Lilly Endowment) in launching Indiana INTERNnet in 2001. An initial pilot project was expanded, with the current goal to continue that growth and take the program statewide.



Executive director Pam Norman will focus on adding businesses to the Indiana INTERNnet program.

The Indiana Chamber, as the state's largest business advocacy organization, was approached about assuming the management role and making that connection with the business community. Through 2005, 24,000 students registered with the program; approximately 1,800 companies offered 4,400 internship positions.

"The importance of keeping as many as possible of Indiana's best and brightest students in the state has not diminished since the 1999 study," Indiana Chamber President Kevin Brinegar states. "We did see this as a good opportunity to utilize the Chamber's statewide brand and reputation to build on what has already been achieved."

Mark Lawrance, Chamber vice president for corporate development, will be the staff liaison with the Indiana INTERNnet board of directors, chaired by David McKinnis, who leads Purdue University's Technical Assistance Program.

Leading the way

Pam Norman has been hired as executive director of the program. She began her duties at the Chamber in late January. Norman, a Butler University graduate, previously served as executive director with Ambassadors for Children, a not-for-profit organization facilitating volunteer vacations to assist children in need worldwide.

Norman was chosen from a lengthy list of candidates. She says her interest was sparked by "the challenge of expanding this program statewide to further its impact." Looking at the number of employer internships offered, she adds, "Clearly there is a need



for expansion within the employer group.”

The Chamber and Norman acknowledge the work done thus far and look forward to the possibilities.

“The greatest opportunity exists with small to mid-size businesses. Many do not have an existing internship program,” she says, “or would benefit from a review of their current offering. Through the development of an internship prototype, Indiana INTERNnet will serve as a resource for companies that may not have the staff in place to create or operate a meaningful internship program.”

The Indiana INTERNnet web site (www.indianaintern.net) is an important tool in making the needed university-business connections. Norman believes some enhancements, including the addition of resource pages, will benefit both participating students and companies.

Many Indiana colleges and universities already possess strong internship programs (see the previous story on Page 20 for a few examples). Indiana INTERNnet simply seeks to enhance those efforts by housing the pertinent information necessary for successful internship pairings.

Norman sees tremendous potential in the program, with the ability to bring together students, business leaders and the university community – for the betterment of all.

“Experiential learning programs are a given in higher education today. Many students report participation in multiple internships,” she notes. “These hands-on learning experiences go a long way in preparing Indiana students for the workplace. Human resources personnel should consider utilizing internship programs as a low-risk recruiting tool.

“This statewide expansion will allow Indiana INTERNnet to touch the lives of more students, provide assistance to more businesses and ultimately increase the graduate retention rate in the state.”

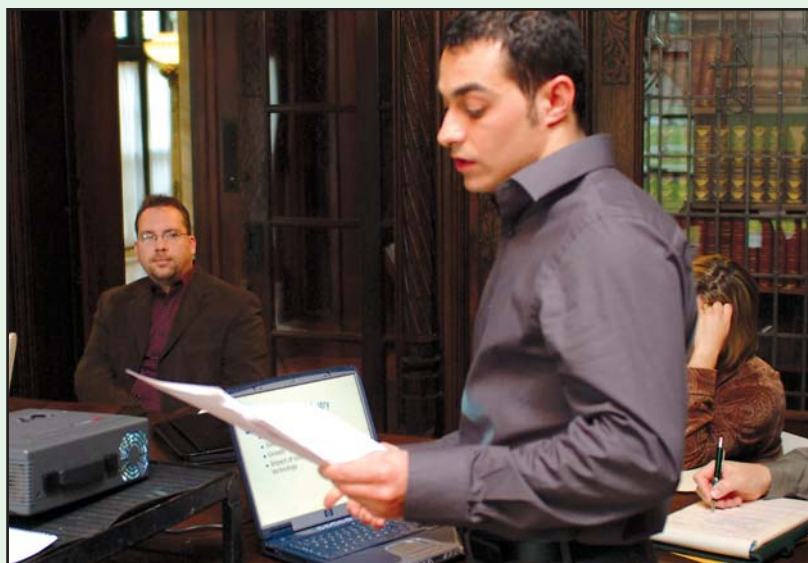
Regional effort

Indiana INTERNnet spawned a related regional effort in one area of the state, with the Greater Fort Wayne Chamber of Commerce instituting the Graduate Retention Program as part of its workforce development initiatives.

Mike Landram, vice president of workforce development for the Fort Wayne group, explains that part-time field representatives are being utilized to make direct contacts with businesses. He says the part-time aspect of the job is an attraction for some. The program provides leads for the representatives, who work to increase the number of companies offering internships.

Participating schools that help fund the program (along with local foundations and the city of Fort Wayne) are Huntington University, Indiana Purdue Fort Wayne, the Indiana Institute of Technology, Manchester College, Taylor University and the University of St. Francis. The field representatives are actively recruiting businesses in a nine-county area.

During its first year, the Graduate Retention Program



Kamran Samadov presents the Marian College consulting team’s recommendations to a group that includes InfraWare CEO Nick Mahurin. Samadov, graduating this year, is a triple major in accounting, finance and management information systems.

generated an additional 182 internship opportunities. At least 42 students took advantage of those internships, according to Landram, who added that the number is likely higher. Additional tracking of when internships are completed is an area that needs improvement.

A key to success, Landram believes, is businesses getting involved for the right reason.

“For a company, it’s not trying to help a student find a job to stay in Indiana. They have to look at it as another source of talent coming in and helping their company,” he states. “This will provide them help with some projects or backburner issues that might not otherwise get done.”

Taking a supply-demand approach, Landram says the student supply is there. The Graduate Retention Program hosted a pair of Live, Learn & Intern summer events in 2005 that were a way for interns to enjoy each other’s company in a social setting and also learn more about living and working in the Fort Wayne area.

“On the demand side, that’s where I focus my energies,” he adds. “We have to get more business people to the table and get diversity in the type of internships.”

Landram cites Indiana INTERNnet as an important tool in exposing students to opportunities on a statewide basis. The regional model is one way of reaching that goal, he contends, with university partners and foundations coming together to offer support.

From the business standpoint, “it’s improving the regional workforce as employers would like to see it improved.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Pam Norman, Indiana INTERNnet program, at (317) 264-6862 or www.indianaintern.net

Mike Landram, Graduate Retention Program, at (260) 424-1435 or www.graduateretention.com