

Metropolitan/Urban University Approach to Residential Learning Communities: Building Community One Building at A Time

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Abstract

Naming 23 new campus houses provided an opportunity to remember and recognize our culturally rich history and heritage by celebrating our campus heroes, community leaders, and major donors. This approach involves the family and friends of the honorees and is more than just names on buildings. Naming of the houses is one example of our institutional efforts to increase the campus climate for diversity, increasing campus pride and strengthening our connection to the metropolitan area.

Students who live on campus and in particular who live in “structured experiences” persist and graduate at higher rates than students who do not live on campus (Schuh 1999). Urban and metropolitan universities are continuing to grow and develop in response to the academic needs of their metropolitan mission (Levine 1998). Consequently, there is evidence to suggest that urban and metropolitan universities can benefit from creating intentional learning experiences as a part of their overall student success strategy.

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) in downtown Indianapolis, Indiana, provides an excellent example of an urban metropolitan university that combines its metropolitan university mission in an urban setting with a structured approach toward campus housing. IUPUI, founded in 1969, is an urban research university with an enrollment of approximately 30,000 students in 23 undergraduate, graduate and professional schools. Although IUPUI has had campus housing since 1914, the program has been limited with approximately one percent of the students living on campus (300 out of 29,000) in 2002. The long-term goal is to provide housing for up to 3,000 or 10 percent of the student enrollment. In response to increased student demand, IUPUI opened a \$40 million, 771-bed apartment community in 2003. This new residential learning community provides opportunities for collaboration with several academic areas within the university, which is intended to advance the metropolitan university mission including increased retention and graduation.

This paper includes a review of the literature related to the emergence of metropolitan universities and residential learning community efforts in the United States.

Development of the residential learning community including a unique approach toward naming the community at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) will be presented as an example of an urban metropolitan university's effort toward creating community. A summary of IUPUI's approach to facility design, funding, staffing, collaborations with academic areas, as well as collaborations with the Indianapolis community will be reviewed.

Metropolitan Universities

The metropolitan university, the most recent institutional model in American higher education, evolved from society's need to meet 21st century post-industrial knowledge requirements (Lynton 1995). In the early 1980s, a group of academic leaders from 13 urban institutions formed a coalition called "the Urban 13." The Urban 13 began meeting regularly to discuss how their institutions were different from all other institutional models: that is, how they were different from research universities, community colleges and liberal arts colleges. These 13 urban institutions were the first metropolitan universities. By 1996, 54 institutions identified themselves as such, forming an association of metropolitan and urban institutions called the Coalition of Metropolitan and Urban Universities (CUMU).

Metropolitan universities are very different from research universities. A metropolitan university has a "regional orientation and strong commitment to serve the intellectual needs of its surrounding communities and constituencies," whereas research universities tend to serve an entire state or nation (Lynton 1995, xiii). CUMU describes urban and metropolitan universities as:

- "Located in or near the urban center of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) with a population of at least 250,000.
- "Public and private, whose mission includes teaching, research, and professional service. We offer both graduate and undergraduate education in the liberal arts and two or more professional fields. The latter programs are strongly practice-oriented and make extensive use of clinical sites in the metropolitan area.
- "The majority of our students come from our metropolitan regions. Our students are highly diverse in age, ethnic and racial identity, and socioeconomic background, reflecting the demographic characteristics of their region. Many come to us by transfer from community colleges and other baccalaureate institutions, many are place-bound employees and commuters, and many require substantially longer than the traditional time to graduate, for financial and other personal reasons.
- "Oriented toward and identify with our regions, proudly and by deliberate design. Our programs respond to regional needs while striving for national excellence.
- "Strongly interactive. We are dedicated to serving as intellectual and creative resources to our metropolitan regions in order to contribute to their economic

development, social health, and cultural vitality, through education, research, and professional outreach. We are committed to collaboration and cooperation with the many communities and clienteles in our metropolitan regions and to helping to bridge the socioeconomic, cultural, and political barriers among them.

- “Shaping and adapting our own structures, policies, and practices to enhance our effectiveness as key institutions in the lives of our metropolitan regions and their citizens” (CUMU 2004b).

The CUMU further declares that metropolitan universities:

- Reaffirm that the creation, interpretation, dissemination, and application of knowledge are the fundamental functions of our institutions;
- Accept a broad responsibility to bring these functions to bear on our metropolitan regions;
- Commit our institutions to be responsive to the needs of our communities by seeking new ways of using resources to provide leadership in addressing metropolitan problems through teaching, research, and service.

Our teaching must:

- Educate students to be informed and effective citizens, as well as capable practitioners of professions and occupations;
- Be adapted to the diverse needs of metropolitan students, including minorities and underserved groups, adults of all ages, and the place-bound;
- Combine research-based knowledge with practical application and experience, using the best current technology and pedagogical techniques.

Our research must:

- Seek and exploit opportunities for linking basic investigations with practical application, and for creating interdisciplinary partnerships for attacking complex metropolitan problems, while meeting the highest standards of the academic community.

Our professional service must:

- Develop creative partnerships with public and private enterprises that ensure the intellectual resources of our institutions are fully engaged in mutually beneficial ways;

- Include close working relationships with elementary and secondary schools aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of the entire metropolitan education system;
- Make the fullest possible contribution to the cultural life and general quality of life of our metropolitan regions. (CUMU, 2004a)

The specific approach urban and metropolitan universities have toward teaching, learning, research and civic engagement inspires new ways of creating community including learning communities.

Learning Communities

For many universities, including IUPUI, increased institutional intervention in the academic lives of students is a response to increased attrition and decreased graduation rates. Universities have taken several approaches toward constructing what are typically referred to as “learning communities”. According to Levine (1998), learning communities can be categorized into three models: pair or clustered courses; cohorts in large classes; or team-taught programs.

Astin (1985, 1993) has long held that learning communities would be an effective response toward addressing the sense of isolation and lack of belonging that students may experience on a college campus, especially at large institutions. Astin’s view is that learning communities whether based in campus housing, based on an academic theme, or based on a co-curricular interest will enhance a sense of belonging and identity for the student, thus improving academic performance.

IUPUI’s approach toward learning communities is a nationally recognized model that encompasses all undergraduate units at IUPUI (Evenbeck 1998). A first year seminar is the foundation of the learning community model that includes “teaching all the critical elements needed for success in college... and ...also include[s] content that is school or department specific” (IUPUI 2004b). All first year, first semester students at IUPUI must select a learning community based upon an academic area of interest. Instructional teams, including a faculty member, a librarian, an academic advisor and a student mentor facilitate each seminar. The first year seminars are faculty lead, emphasize critical thinking, communication skill development, and are designed to facilitate an established set of learning outcomes described as the “Principles of Undergraduate Learning”.

The seminar is designed to model behaviors and environments that are expected throughout the student’s time at IUPUI. As such, the seminar is designed to be a small class size that utilizes active learning techniques, is highly collaborative, civil, connected to campus activities, and engaged with the metropolitan community. Attendance is expected. It is common for one or more of the instructional team members to contact a student should he/she miss a class.

The opening of new housing at IUPUI provided an opportunity to re-vision housing at IUPUI and to increase its contribution to advancing learning and community. Collaborations between housing and the IUPUI learning community effort was an obvious next step. As such, the development of residential learning communities is the newest effort toward creating community, enhancing learning and improving retention at IUPUI.

IUPUI: An American Metropolitan University

From its inception in 1969, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis became one of the largest and most robust metropolitan universities in the country (Gray 2003). IUPUI is located in downtown Indianapolis, which is the state capital of Indiana. This university partnership is the administrative joining of the two powerhouse Indiana institutions, Indiana University and Purdue University. In 1891, faculty from the IU Bloomington campus traveled more than 60 miles to teach the first college course in Indianapolis as a part of a university extension program. By 1969, some schools and programs were over 100 years old while others were developed as the IUPUI campus grew over the years. Gray points out, the exact moment of creation is unknown but several factors influenced IUPUI's birth, including the Indianapolis and central Indiana communities' belief that a strong university would be an integral part of the Indianapolis downtown revitalization and anticipated vibrant future success.

In 2004, IUPUI enrolled almost 30,000 students, employed more than 6,000 faculty and staff in 23 schools with many of the schools nationally ranked.

More than 180 degrees are offered including associates, bachelors, masters, and a variety of doctoral degrees. In 2003, IUPUI was the seventh largest grantor of health related degrees in the country. "The vision of IUPUI is to be recognized as one of the best urban universities" (IUPUI 2002). The mission of IUPUI is to provide for its constituents excellence in:

- Teaching and learning;
- Research, scholarship, and creative activity;
- Civic engagement, locally, nationally, and globally;

With each of these core activities characterized by:

- Collaboration within and across disciplines and with the community;
- A commitment to ensuring diversity, and,
- Pursuit of best practices (IUPUI 2002).

Metropolitan Residential Learning Communities

The mission of the IUPUI department of Housing and Residence Life is to “promote the total development of the student by providing residential communities that are part of a student’s academic success, learning, leadership, growth and diversity” (IUPUI 2004a). Living on campus at IUPUI ensures conveniently located and accessible accommodations. Students have opportunities to make new friends, become involved on campus and in downtown Indianapolis in social and cultural activities, which is designed to enhance their overall college experience.

In 2004, residential learning communities at IUPUI included a traditional first year residence hall, academically oriented theme houses, and general residential housing. All types of housing are supported by a vibrant residence life program, which includes upper class students as resident assistants who are supervised by graduate hall directors. The graduate hall directors are fulltime graduate students pursuing either masters or doctoral level studies while working part-time in housing. The Principles of Undergraduate Learning provides the foundation for the residence life program.

Living Your Freshman Experience (LYFE) is a first year residential learning community located in a 1927 traditional co-ed residence hall housing almost 300 students in single, double and triple rooms. LYFE program is a developmental program consisting of seminars, workshops, events, tutoring, and mentoring designed for first year students. The purpose of the LYFE program is to cultivate a residential community that significantly contributes to the first year students’ overall academic success. LYFE is a joint project between Housing and Residence Life and University College. Several full- and part-time staff members from both departments facilitate this project. First year seminars are taught in the residence hall. Resident assistants and approximately 20 sophomore-mentors live with the freshmen as facilitators of the LYFE program.

The newest housing community is comprised of 23 apartment buildings accommodating 12 to 16 one-, two-, or four-bedroom units housing between 16 and 46 students, which are referred to as “houses.” The housing site is organized into three neighborhoods with seven to eight houses in each neighborhood. A graduate hall director is responsible for a single neighborhood with a staff of four to six resident assistants. There is approximately one resident assistant to 40 residents.

Currently, four of the 23 houses have specific themes. Each of the four theme houses developed an individualized learning community approach including the type of house selected (i.e. one-, two-, or four-bedroom units), the approach toward staffing the house, and the offering of programs and services planned for each house. Each theme house at minimum has a resident assistant, a house council (resident government), and a program budget. These collaborations with academic areas were with International Student Affairs, the Honors Program, the School of Science and the School of Engineering and Technology.

International House, a partnership between Housing and Residence Life and the Office of International Affairs, accommodates 46 international and domestic students who wish to live in a cross-culturally centered learning community. Typically 15 to 20 countries are represented each year. International House residents organize programs on global issues for the campus and community, providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and dialogue about international events and cross-cultural learning opportunities. Residents also participate in the International Club, a student organization that plans events ranging from weekly Friday culture hours to an international banquet each fall.

Each International House resident has a private bedroom within a four-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment. This housing option is available to all students (undergraduate, graduate/professional and researchers). Residents are selected based on their enthusiasm and commitment to the International House mission and purpose.

The Honors House, which is a partnership between Housing and Residence Life and the Honors Program, is open to Honors Program students. Approximately 40 bed spaces are reserved for honors students in two-bedroom units. The staff and residents of Honors House provide academic stimuli, as well as creating excellent opportunities for honors students and faculty to interact. Weekly and monthly honors events include seminars, socials, lectures, tutoring, and mentoring in the house with fellow students and faculty. Students participate in the Honors House Student Council that oversees student activities. An Honors Program office is housed in the Honors House, providing residents with direct contact to the honors staff.

A “Women In Science” House, in collaboration with the School of Science, and a “Purdue” House, in collaboration with the School of Engineering and Technology, were launched in 2005. Each house has an advisory committee of students, faculty, and staff from the school in collaboration with housing and residence life staff. Each house has a resident assistant and a program agenda that combines interests of the school with the housing program creating a very intentional living-learning environment for the resident students. Other houses are under development and over time a majority of the 23 houses are expected to develop partnerships with academic units across the campus with a unique program of staffing, events, services, learning outcomes and community for each house.

The Building Names Project

As an urban metropolitan university embarking on a new era of campus housing one way to synergize community is through recognition of our history. The opening of new campus housing in 2003 provided an opportunity to recognize heroes, community leaders and donors through a specific effort called the “Building Names Project.” Each house is named for a campus hero, community leader, or donor.

The purpose of the project is to build a sense of community between the resident student, the university, and the Indianapolis community. The naming of the buildings recognizes the space and place that the university currently occupies. This approach to

naming is intended to cultivate the students' sense of belonging and to increase their awareness that becoming a member of the IUPUI family entails something larger than themselves. The new housing project included many major naming opportunities, including three residential neighborhood communities, 23 residential houses, a new residential street, a community park, and a parking deck. The goal of this project is to:

- Reclaim the history and culture of the space and place that IUPUI currently occupies;
- Acknowledge the heroes who have in many cases worked their entire professional lives in and around IUPUI to make the university the best urban university and;
- Recognize major donors.

Recognizing the heroes of IUPUI is important in that although IUPUI in its current organization is only 35 years old, parts of the campus have been in active operation for more than 100 years. Recognizing the individuals who have monumentally contributed to the evolution of what currently comprises the IUPUI campus forms the criteria of the "IUPUI Heroes." The "IUPUI Heroes" are individuals who but for their outstanding achievement and extraordinary dedication IUPUI would not be one of the best urban universities today.

Reclaiming the history and culture of the space and place currently known as IUPUI is an attempt to consider, to the greatest extent possible, people and activities in the past that occurred on the property IUPUI presently occupies. Recognizing the culture and history of the space allows the students who live on campus to realize they are a part of a living legacy. This is also an effort to recognize that students living on campus have joined a greater narrative of former residents who lived in the same place.

Every major project at a university is helped by donations from interested individuals and groups. Private giving allows a project to do more and go farther in achieving IUPUI's goal. In the case of the campus housing program, funds provided by private donors would help fund a "Resident Scholar Scholarship Program" to financially assist students to live on campus. Housing naming opportunities have been set at the \$250,000 level of giving.

The Building Names Project provides an approach to placing names with a brief description of the individuals' contributions on buildings and other spaces, which contributes to creating a vibrant and successful student community. Recognizing our history, culture, heroes and philanthropy is a critical part of building community one building at a time. For example, the text of the building plaques for three of the 21 individuals honored are listed below (A complete listing of biographies is available at www.diversity.iupui.edu):

Blackburn House

Cleo W. Blackburn (1909-1978) was educated at the Butler University School of Religion and Fisk University. Returning to Indianapolis, he became the director of Flanner House, at West and St. Clair streets. Flanner House primarily supported the African-American community providing education, job training and homes to needy families and making an immeasurable impact on the local community. Under his leadership social services provided to African-Americans improved dramatically in Indianapolis. He received several honorary doctorates and was an influential leader for many organizations. Blackburn was superintendent of Flanner House from 1936 until 1975.

Blackford House

Isaac N. Blackford (1786-1859) was one of Indiana's first Supreme Court justices. He moved to Salem, Ind., in 1812, and was county clerk. He moved to Indianapolis five years later when he was appointed to the Indiana Supreme Court. In 1824, he upheld the controversial convictions of four Indianapolis men who were convicted of the murders of 10 Native Americans in what was known as the Fall Creek Massacre. They became the first European Americans in Indiana to be executed for killing Native Americans. Blackford had significant landholdings including what is now a large swath of IUPUI along West Street.

Boaz House

Patricia A. Boaz (1922-1993) was an associate professor of chemistry who began her career at IUPUI in 1967. Her contributions to the chemistry department and the School of Science were numerous and pioneering. Through funding from the National Science Foundation, she created and developed the School of Science Learning Center, which established the use of visual media, computers and other technologies in science teaching. She had a special interest in helping older non-traditional students succeed. Her office door was always open to students who wanted advice or counseling. Her passion for teaching enriched the lives of many students.

Conclusions

IUPUI is an urban and metropolitan university that continues to improve and realize its mission as one of the greatest urban metropolitan universities in the United States. Combining a metropolitan mission with campus housing has provided an opportunity to create structured learning experiences designed to enhance student retention and graduation. A new housing community, which opened in 2003, has allowed IUPUI to advance the metropolitan mission in new and exciting ways. With new housing, IUPUI was able to develop a freshmen year residential program, theme housing, and recognize past campus heroes, community leaders, and donors.

Thousands of students will remember and recall with fondness their college experience including the hall or house where they lived while a resident student. By recognizing past heroes, community leaders and donors in this manner it is expected to provide a

richer college experience for the resident students as they gain a sense that in becoming a part of the IUPUI family, they are part of something larger and more important than themselves. Whether they know it or not, they are preparing themselves to lead and enrich our communities throughout the state and beyond.

Words are powerful, and in naming these houses after outstanding educators, entrepreneurs, journalists, scientists, community leaders, social workers, artists, musicians, athletes, lawyers, nurses and doctors, this is one more way the university inspires IUPUI students today to prepare themselves for their own outstanding lives in the future.

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