

From the Desk of the Chancellor – October 2

From a blog I read recently (Urbanophile):

"In an unpredictable world, the only safe bet is a talent base that can adapt. With the . . . Medical Center, we concentrated health care talent in a district that has grown . . . with an array of world-class facilities. We've done the same . . . with energy and engineering talent. The next step is to take that strategy and generalize it to focus on being the global capital of applied STEM (Science/Technology/Engineering/Math) talent. We need to mobilize the city around a common purpose of building this human infrastructure. We need to embed it into our education, tourism, cultural and economic development strategies."

Are we talking about Indianapolis here? Sure sounds like it, doesn't it? No, the give-away was energy. That blog was about Houston. My point? We are in global competition with cities around the world with aspirations very similar to ours. That was the starting point for last week's Strategic Planning Retreat. What makes us uniquely us? What gives us a special edge over other urban universities and cities?

We need a distinctive IUPUI vision for the future, so distinctive you cannot substitute the name of any other university in Indiana or elsewhere and have the vision make sense, resonate naturally, and exist without sounding forced, exaggerated, or worst of all, uninspired. When we claim to be the urban research, academic health and life sciences campus for Indiana, we are laying claim to something indisputable. Because we assert that distinction, we gave faculty the freedom to build on that strength with cross-disciplinary collaborations. Now we have people in math working with people in medicine on modeling blood flow. We have biologists working with pediatricians on urban health issues affecting children. We will have a Ph.D. in health communication -- one of very few anywhere. With no state funds, we just launched the nation's first School of Philanthropy (with multidisciplinary faculty members like Richard Gunderman, Professor of Radiology, Pediatrics, Medical Education, Philosophy, Liberal Arts, and Philanthropy). And we just celebrated the naming of our new Fairbanks School of Public Health.

Whatever our vision for the future, it has to be distinctive or in a competitive world we disappear. The only way to be successful is to be bold, to take risks, to have the courage to say, "What would make us great in 25 years -- not good, great?" We have to aspire to that. That's the challenge. And we have to focus on things we can change or influence. There will be things we cannot sway, like the national economy. The decades-long decline in state support will not suddenly reverse itself. We have never allowed ourselves to whine that without state money we can't do anything. We've always been hard-working, clever, and resourceful. We are in our second \$1 billion fundraising campaign. We were told in 1996 that we couldn't raise \$300 million. No one thought that we would have a named School of Law, until Robert McKinney stepped up. We took a gamble that our community would support an institution they value, a university that makes a measurable, durable impact. And they did. We owe it to them to be bold in our aspirations for the future.

Comments? Write_chancellor@iupui.edu.