



NEWS RELEASE

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USI Presidential Task Force on Workforce and Economic Development report released

The University of Southern Indiana 2007 Presidential Task Force on Workforce and Economic Development report examines the University's leadership and responsiveness in regional economic development and recommends academic and training programs that will meet the future workforce and economic development needs of Southwestern Indiana.

Appointed by USI President H. Ray Hoops in October 2006, the Task Force used existing and new sources of data, polled employers and regional leaders, and compared their findings with those of governmental agencies that measure economic development and employment patterns. A summary of their findings follows.

USI's economic impact

USI's construction projects, business acquisitions, and spending by students, employees, and visitors boost the regional economy, with direct spending of nearly \$150 million annually and a total employment impact of nearly 2,600 jobs. The total economic impact on business activity is estimated to be just over \$218 million.

USI employees make important contributions to the region through volunteerism. In a survey of employees, in which 324 responded, there were 32,652 volunteer hours reported annually. Calculated at the national volunteer wage of \$18.77 per hour, the annual monetary value of USI volunteer activity is \$612,878.

There is an increasing expectation for USI to be a significant driver of economic and workforce development in the region. The USI Center for Applied Research and Economic Development has responded to more than 80 requests for assistance from business and other agencies since its inception in 2006.

Responsive to needs

USI has made measurable progress in implementing the recommendations of the first Presidential Task Force in 2000, continuing development of co-op and internship opportunities; increasing noncredit and workforce training offerings; developing Connect with Southern Indiana, a regional leadership program; and offering alternate delivery of programs through distance education, which has grown by 180 percent since the first report.

Of the 13 suggested academic programs in the 2000 report, only one has yet to be implemented – physical therapy assistant, currently in the

academic plan for future implementation. The Bachelor of Science in Engineering program is exceeding projected enrollments and employer demand is high.

Anticipating future needs

Employers asked for a string of academic programs that closely parallel USI's planned new programs through 2011, including specialties within the baccalaureate engineering program; a four-year major in criminal justice/law enforcement; and more graduate-level studies in sales management, communications, maintenance management, clinical nursing, and other health-related programs.

Healthcare professionals expressed a need for development of a health informatics program and continued graduation of registered nurses. Employers also expressed an interest in undergraduate programs in business economics, a blended business/engineering degree, manufacturing technology, environmental sciences, and degrees in logistics/transportation.

Overall, there is a desire for USI to push STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education; develop an entrepreneurial culture in the region; and continue the strong emphasis on the core curriculum, which emphasizes communication skills, critical thinking, leadership, and collaboration.

Impact of alumni

Graduates report success in the workplace, believe their education at USI has been critical to their career accomplishments, and say they would choose USI again for their undergraduate preparation. Twenty-five percent of alumni surveyed have a graduate degree or are pursuing one. Another 30 percent indicate they plan to enter graduate school.

Recent economic growth literature has given attention to the notion of a Creative Class, consisting of individuals whose occupations place a great demand on their creative abilities. Occupations using computers, mathematics, architecture, engineering, arts, entertainment, sports, and management are found in categories of the Creative Class. The alumni survey revealed that a significant proportion of USI graduates are joining the ranks of the Creative Class in the region and enhancing the region's high-end growth potential.

A regional effort

Community Advisory Panel members represented communities in Daviess, Dubois, Gibson, Perry, Pike, Posey, Spencer, Vanderburgh, and Warrick counties in Indiana and southern Illinois and western Kentucky.

The complete report is available on the USI Web site at www.usi.edu.