Regional Campuses Committee Member:

Consistent with our ongoing regional talent development efforts embodied in Vision 2020, the Big Goal Collaborative and economic development strategies for the region, the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership (RP) was asked by Senate Pro Tem, David Long, to provide input to the Interim Legislative Study Committee, a committee of the General Assembly charged with studying the governance of Indiana University's and Purdue University's regional campuses. In response to this request, three organizations, the Regional Chamber of Northeast Indiana (RC), the Northeast Indiana Regional Workforce Investment Board (RWB) and the RP have collaborated to contract with CHORUS, Inc. - an Indiana-based professional services firm, to conduct a survey of Northeast Indiana employers to better understand the regional talent demands as it relates to higher education institutions in general. This survey has been independently and wholly funded through the collaborative efforts of the RC, RWB and RP.

The purpose of this letter is to formally present the results of the survey input gathered in response to Senator Long's request and will also be used to guide broader, ongoing talent and workforce development initiatives as we strive to build a "demand driven" talent pipeline responsive to the needs of employers in the ten counties of Northeast Indiana. The critical role of IPFW along with other higher education institutions in the region cannot be over-emphasized in preparing 21st century talent to fuel economic growth of the region.

The substance of the survey was to explore and tabulate the types of skills, degrees and soft skill attributes that are in demand by employers of the region. The survey queried business executives and human resource professionals from a broad base of core industries in the region. These respondents were chosen with an understanding that over 90 percent of IPFW students are enrolled from the City of Fort Wayne, Allen County and surrounding regional communities. Similarly, given that all institutions of higher education in the region draw from common student populations, the fact that many regional employers look to these same institutions for future employees and that graduates from these same institutions hold a higher affinity for seeking regional employment, it is vital that we understand their current and projected talent needs.

Finally, in addition to providing direct input to the ILSC, the information gathered through this survey will be made available to all institutions of higher education and workforce development initiatives serving Northeast Indiana.

It is intended that these survey results will be useful in your current and ongoing legislative deliberations of higher education governance and policy matters. Higher education is critical to the long-term success of our state on many levels. In Northeast Indiana, raising educational attainment throughout the region is now a cornerstone of economic development efforts.

Sincerely,

John R. Sampson
Talent Resource Considerations Aligned to Regional Employers

AN EXECUTIVE REPORT FOR THE INTERIM LEGISLATIVE STUDY COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL CAMPUSES
INTRODUCTION

The globalization of Indiana’s economy and culture is changing our state in ways that are unprecedented. Worldwide competition for jobs and new financial realities, combined with dramatic shifts in the way we learn, communicate and interact, are transforming our approach to economic growth, sustainability and quality of life. Institutions of higher education and regional employers throughout Indiana are working to improve how they grow, develop and retain local talent. Without it, Indiana’s prospects of capturing its share of the world market are significantly diminished. Their collaborative efforts are necessary at entirely new levels of interface. In an era in which there is also palpable tension between education, government and business, working through some of these dividing differences is crucial to our state and nation’s future.

The following report highlights the findings from research conducted by CHORUS®, Inc. through interviews and survey instruments over a three-month period. The research details perceptions on the relationships between employers in the northeast region of Indiana and the colleges and universities that provide talent to those organizations. The report displays areas of the findings by broad themes, offers a brief summation of them, and then presents several overarching recommendations. Though based on research conducted in the northeast region of the state, many of the findings are likely applicable to other regions as well.
In the summer of 2013, the Indiana State Senate formed an Interim Legislative Study Committee (ILSC) to review regional education on campuses associated with Indiana University and Purdue University. This study was undertaken in order to guide state legislators in their decisions regarding degree programs and governance at these institutions’ respective regional campuses. Three organizations – Northeast Indiana Workforce Investment Board (RWB), Regional Chamber of Northeast Indiana (RC) and Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership (RP) – contracted with CHORUS®, Inc., an Indiana-based professional services firm, to assist in the research. CHORUS’s charge from these organizations (whose collective mission is to support economic development and overall community health in the northeast region of the state) was to conduct a study to understand how higher education could best address the specific talent needs and workforce readiness of employers in the region.

Though this report and other information gathered in this process will be used by the ILSC to assist in its decision making, Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) will also apply the findings to a long-range strategic planning effort currently under way at that university. The sponsoring organizations (RWB, RC and RP) are also making this report available to all higher education institutions throughout the state, as well as to workforce development organizations that serve northeast Indiana.

Over a three-month time frame, CHORUS representatives interviewed and/or surveyed 126 regional business executives, community leaders and human resources professionals. Eighteen participants within this group were interviewed individually, representing 14 organizations identified by representatives of the sponsoring entities. Selection criteria included Regional Chamber or Regional Opportunities Council members and individuals throughout northeast Indiana who would likely have an expressed interest in higher education and workforce development. The interviews focused on gathering the insights and perceptions of these individuals in a number of areas including, but not limited to:

- Their assessment of the business climate of the region
- The role of higher education in impacting the business climate
- The skill and talent pool available to meet the employment needs of the region
- Their anticipated talent needs, both short-term and long-term
- Their strategies for acquiring and retaining talent
- Their relationships with the higher education institutions of the region

Based on findings from initial interviews, two surveys were developed and administered to 1) senior level executives and 2) human resources professionals in the region. The list of 340 senior executives was provided by the three sponsoring organizations, drawing from their collective databases. Each executive received a personal invitation to participate and a link to the online survey. Of the 340 invited, 71 provided feedback for a response rate of 21%.

The human resources professionals surveyed were members of Northeast Indiana Human Resources Association (NIHRA). The HR professionals survey was sent to NIHRA’s 455 active members with a general link (a requirement of NIHRA for purposes of database confidentiality). NIHRA members who wished to participate in the study provided their contact information for confirmation purposes and to ensure data integrity. Thirty-eight HR professionals elected to participate, for a response rate of 8%.

Both surveys focused primarily on respondents’ perceptions surrounding the six topic areas utilized during the interview phase (previously noted above). The questions were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. A substantial number of the questions were open-ended and were not intended to arrive at hard statistical data. Rather, the results were analyzed with the intent to identify foundational issues and overarching trends in the region and to provide further depth and breadth to the interviews conducted. It is important to note there was significant and meaningful alignment in the senior executives’ and HR professionals’ survey results that substantiated the qualitative interview findings.
As previously mentioned, **71 senior leaders from businesses and not-for-profits** responded to the first survey. Over half (52%) were chief executive officers and another 23% were presidents. The full distribution is shown in Figure 1.

Collectively, the group represented a broad range of industries and services in the northeast region (see Figure 2). Twenty-one percent worked in banking and finance or services (the two largest industries represented in the sampling), followed by manufacturing which totaled 13%. Seven percent consisted of economic development organizations and health care/life sciences entities. Six percent were classified as construction. The spread of businesses and services represented was quite broad, as was the goal.

The sizes of the organizations these leaders represented were also well distributed. As seen in Figure 3, more than half (52%) were from firms of 1-50 employees with the rest evenly distributed among organizations of larger sizes. Seventeen percent were from companies of 501+ employees.

**Thirty-eight human resources professionals** responded to the HR-focused survey. Nearly all held the title of director, manager, or specialist as noted in Figure 4.

Manufacturing was the segment most represented with 34% of the respondents. Thirteen percent were from health care/life sciences and 11% from government and services, with the rest distributed throughout a number of industries (see Figure 5).

Larger organizations of 501+ employees were best represented among those responding with 37% of the participants. Organizations with 151-300 employees were next with 26% of the respondents and the remainder were evenly distributed across small to midsize companies (see Figure 6).

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* Total percentages are < or > 100% due to rounding.
The findings from both the interviews and the surveys were analyzed by the CHORUS research team. What follows are the dominant topic areas identified by the participants as critical to businesses and organizations in northeast Indiana and to the colleges and universities located there. The topic areas are not prioritized in any way. Truly, the most pressing issues will vary from business to business, or from college to university. However, the research findings revealed that all participating stakeholders in this study experience one or more of these challenges as they work toward ensuring a talented workforce for northeast Indiana.

The northeast region of Indiana has some very specific technical skill set needs resulting from the area’s concentration of advanced manufacturing, the health care industry, and businesses supporting those industries. At the same time, the research shows that there is an equal or even greater demand for individuals with business-related skills such as accounting, finance and marketing that could be applied in any number of industries. In all of these areas, the need for information technology expertise is all but a given.

When business executives were asked what technical competencies were currently needed to position their companies for success, they listed information technology skills, communication, computer skills, and accounting/finance as their top responses. Engineering and analytical skills closely followed these responses. The HR professionals’ list was slightly different, but still emphasized information technology/computer skills, which was ranked first. Skills related to quality assurance, continuous improvement, software languages, manufacturing, and mathematics all followed closely behind.

Additionally, HR professionals were asked to rate how they believed colleges and universities in the northeast region were doing in preparing students in a broad range of professional disciplines. The areas receiving the highest marks were in engineering, computer/information technology, and business-related fields (administration, management, accounting and finance). Life sciences skills and some skill sets related to advanced manufacturing were considerably further behind.

Health care is an area of great concern, in part because of the region’s schools’ inability to meet overwhelming demand. In interviews, health care executives in particular say that it is highly unlikely they can hire the volume of medical professionals they will need over the next 10-20 years. This includes general physicians, specialists, nurses, and therapists. Higher education can simply not produce enough to meet their needs, even though regional schools can educate RNs, LPNs, and, now, even pharmacists. Recruiting adequate numbers of healthcare professionals is then incumbent on successfully recruiting people from other areas of the state or beyond, with the inherent risk that retaining them in the region will be difficult.

In their survey, HR professionals were asked in which fields regional colleges and universities were doing the best job of preparing graduates. Respondents identified engineering and information technology as the top two, with health care next in line. The combination of the survey and interview findings would lead to the conclusion that, while the resources providing the healthcare technical skills are doing an adequate job, the quantity of graduates with these skills is inadequate.

**Technical skill needs of the region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical skill needs of the region</th>
<th>Soft skill needs of the region</th>
<th>Experiences that supplement formal classroom instruction</th>
<th>Interface between the institution and employers for purposes of facilitating the hiring process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional impact on talent acquisition and retention</td>
<td>Greater business and higher education collaboration</td>
<td>Local access to intellectual capital housed at the regional campus</td>
<td>Advanced degree accessibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key Takeaways**

- Number of skilled health care professionals cannot keep pace with demand.
- Information technology, engineering, accounting/finance are among the greatest regional skill needs.
Conversations conducted early in the research process with executive leaders led to several survey questions designed to specifically query “soft skills.” Business leaders expressed concern about the capabilities of students or recent grads to perform effectively in areas such as communication, critical thinking, work ethic, and teamwork. Although the chasm between the observed skills and expectations appears greater in students joining the workforce soon after high school or with little additional education or training after that, the problem is no less critical in those who are “fresh out” of college (up to three years removed from higher education).

When asked to identify which skills or behaviors recent graduates often lack that would help them be more successful in the workplace, executives and HR professionals identified and ranked highest commitment, communication, work ethic, humility (willingness to learn), critical thinking, teamwork, and problem solving as most needed, as reflected in Figures 7 and 8 below. The list is similar when executives and HR professionals were asked which soft skills among employees would contribute to the success of their organizations. Character/Integrity was first among both groups. Work ethic, accountability, critical thinking/problem solving, communication, and initiative were all high on the list.

It should be noted, though, that businesses do not lay the responsibility for closing these gaps solely at the feet of higher education. It was strongly emphasized that a collaborative effort is needed. Refreshingly, a number of executives championed the efforts of colleges and universities that bring a liberal arts philosophy to a student’s educational experience. If candidates are close to equal in a particular area of technical expertise, employers overwhelmingly prefer the candidates with strong people and team skills. They noted that they did not expect higher education to deliver them a finished product, but rather to deliver young professionals who are a “work in progress” with a capacity that the employer can grow.

**SOFT SKILLS NOTED BY SENIOR EXECUTIVES**

(Percent reflects the frequency each skill was identified by the respondents)

![Figure 7](image)

**SOFT SKILLS NOTED BY HR PROFESSIONALS**

(Percent reflects the frequency each skill was identified by the respondents)

![Figure 8](image)

* ( ) denotes number of individual responses with frequency < 9%.
** n values are < the total number of participant respondents due to non-responses for particular questions.
*** ( ) denotes number of individual responses with frequency < 13%.
Because of the charge of regional campuses to, in part, address the specific needs of the businesses and organizations in the region, the research naturally explored how higher education and business could work together to better prepare potential employees. One very clear need for improvement and expansion is in the area of professional internships or cooperative educational programs (see Figure 9). When HR professionals were asked whether their companies participated in internships or cooperatives, 57% said they had. But interview results would suggest the interest in utilizing students in these capacities appears to be much higher than that figure.

Executives and HR professionals noted that new employees often lack the practical experience that allows them to apply their education more broadly and more quickly. Business leaders who were interviewed encouraged a significant increase in communication and collaboration between employers and higher education institutions that would lead to more internships and cooperative education experience. The benefits may seem obvious, but they were confirmed by the CEO-level executives and HR professionals alike:

- Internship experience produces a better-rounded and deeply equipped employee. Not only do internships give students experience in their chosen discipline, these experiences force them to hone many of the soft skills previously noted.
- Internships and cooperatives allow employers to “test drive” potential new hires.
- These experiences allow students to discover and try out areas of interest and giftedness so they can assess their career fit.

Depending on the size of the organization, internships may or may not have a formal structure in the ways they identify potential interns, interact with colleges and universities to build intern pipelines, or assign and track the responsibilities of the interns. While executives and HR professionals wish higher education institutions were more proactive in seeking out internship opportunities with businesses and organizations, they again stop short of placing the responsibility solely at the colleges’ doorsteps. They find some of the colleges open and helpful when approached, and many businesses have strong, ongoing relationships with the schools.

**Key Takeaways**

- Interest in providing internships and cooperative experiences for college students is high.
- Organizations need higher education’s help in structuring internship opportunities and programs.

![Figure 9](https://example.com/figure9.png)

**INTERNSHIP/COOPERATIVE PROGRAM BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS**

(Percentages reflect the frequency respondents chose the reasons and motivations listed below)

- Future success — We firmly believe hands-on experience combined with classroom instruction equals a superior employee. 
  - Senior Executives: 64%
  - HR Professionals: 85%
- Internships/cooperatives allow us to “test drive” future employees.
  - Senior Executives: 71%
  - HR Professionals: 62%
- Internships/cooperatives help us recruit future employees.
  - Senior Executives: 64%
  - HR Professionals: 39%
- Corporate citizenship — Feel an obligation to help colleges and universities provide students with opportunities for professional growth.
  - Senior Executives: 41%
  - HR Professionals: 62%
- Having our employees engage with interns adds to the richness of our existing workforce’s experience.
  - Senior Executives: 29%
  - HR Professionals: 39%
- We host/hire interns for cost effective labor during peak periods.
  - Senior Executives: 30%
  - HR Professionals: 8%
- We need interns to fill employee gaps due to vacations in the summer.
  - Senior Executives: 11%
  - HR Professionals: 8%
- We do not host/employ interns or cooperatives.
  - Senior Executives: 13%
  - HR Professionals: 4%
For an internship or cooperative system to take off, however, it was emphasized numerous times by those leaders interviewed that it will likely require higher education applying its expertise and experience to build these relationships. No small factor behind this is the size and capacity of many of the companies in the region. Small to midsize companies often lack the HR personnel and general resources necessary to administer and support internship or cooperative programs. Many would appear more ready to host students in these roles if higher education would help them identify potential students, structure the programs, and maintain a structure for interface, and then provide the companies with tools to help sustain the programs. Sixty-five percent of HR professionals – typically the people within an organization charged, in part, with administering internships and cooperatives – said that they would have some interest in consulting on internship design or administration.

Surprisingly, business executives and HR professionals saw very little limit to the types of internships that might be created, as depicted in Figure 10. While areas such as engineering are well known for creating internship experiences, business leaders believe interns could be applied in a broad range of majors and disciplines. They concede, though, that they would need help building a sustainable internship structure and help in identifying meaningful and productive work experiences that would benefit both the employer and interns alike.

### TYPES OF INTERNSHIPS/COOPERATIVES

(Percentages reflect the frequency of respondents’ identification of anticipated functional areas)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Senior Executives</th>
<th>HR Professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounting/Finance</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications/Public Relations</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Systems</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing/Advertising</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Assistant</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and Development</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Types are listed alphabetically to show comparison of value each participant group placed on functional areas.

** n values are < the total number of participant respondents due to non-responses for particular questions.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Interest in internships covers a broad range of industries.
- Higher education needs to be more proactive in connecting potential interns with employers.
Closely related to the need for more avenues to internships and cooperatives is the desire for more interface between universities and organizations to improve the hiring process (see Figure 11). In initial interviews, potential employers were unsatisfied with the interaction they currently experience with most colleges and universities. Some said that area high schools currently do a better job than most colleges and universities of engaging with them, identifying their needs, and matching those needs to potential candidates. Only 17% of executives and 13% of HR professionals said they are in regular contact with regional colleges and universities in regard to job placement, while 13% and 26%, respectively, said they have somewhat regular contact. A larger number – 33% of executives and 30% of HR professionals – said they have contact with colleges about job candidates, but that typically they have to initiate that conversation with the schools themselves.

### Regional impact on talent acquisition and retention

Regional businesses see the obvious benefit of hiring individuals who have already demonstrated a desire to keep their roots firmly planted where they now live. This perspective was specifically expressed in a number of the interviews. In many cases, individuals could have the opportunity for employment while they are attending college. This gives a strategic advantage to higher education institutions with a physical presence in the region over their main campus counterparts.

Geography and climate, while often a hindrance to recruiting employees from outside the region, are seen as distinct advantages to regional companies when the potential employee grew up and/or attended college in the area. The odds of retaining employees for the long-term are significantly greater if they are accustomed to the region and have put down roots. Therefore, building stronger bridges between higher education and regional businesses that can lead to employment opportunities proves to be much more cost-effective in both the short and long-term.

Executives and HR professionals noted that if regional colleges and universities would work more closely with employers to establish internship and cooperative opportunities, one of the additional benefits is that this would build a pipeline for eventually hiring more students upon graduation. If higher education institutions are more proactive in establishing and maintaining those relationships, especially with small or midsize companies where HR resources are typically more limited, employers would be more inclined to hire their students and, eventually, their graduates.

**Key Takeaways**

- Schools with a regional footprint are attractive to employers:
  - Aiding in continuity of employment while being educated.
  - Increasing retention by supplying employees accustomed to regional geography and climate.
- Colleges and universities that proactively contact employers will increase the likelihood that their students will be hired.
Without question, the specific technical skill needs of the northeast region of Indiana could be met most efficiently by higher education entities located in this area of the state. Interviews with executives and HR professionals and their survey data affirm this belief. Twenty-two percent of the executives surveyed said they would have considerable interest in partnering with colleges and universities to share research. Two-thirds expressed some-to-considerable interest in this. Sixty-five percent of HR professionals did the same.

There should be ample opportunity to, at the least, explore these options. For example, the concentration of orthopedic implant and other advanced manufacturing companies in northeast Indiana creates natural opportunities to educate the next generation of life science research and development talent in this field. Unfortunately, little of the R&D related to orthopedics occurs in any of the regional colleges or universities, though business leaders see this as a great example of how a more symbiotic relationship between schools and industry would benefit both.

If higher education institutions in the region can develop deeper relationships within specific thriving regional business segments, the door could open to craft educational curricula that would place those higher education graduates among the leading candidates for some of the region’s most lucrative jobs. Further, R & D opportunities that foster partnerships between businesses and higher education institutions will likely attract additional talent to area colleges and universities, in terms of both students and faculty. In an era where higher education is struggling for additional funding, this seems a natural path to obtain potential research dollars.

CEOs and other top executives were asked, “What services or support could you use from the colleges and universities in your region that you are not currently getting?” The top two answers given were research & data analysis and business development. Other answers included new talent, interns, technical expertise, problem solving and more open lines of communication. In other words, businesses are open and desirous to talk to colleges and universities about building and deepening relationships that lead to a talented workforce that produces new technologies and opportunities.

Much of the initial research with executives and HR professionals led to the conclusion that improving one point of contact or relationship between higher education institutions and regional business could open the door for additional opportunities between them. For example, nurturing relationships that lead to either R&D or regional talent acquisition could also present opportunities for university and college faculty to deploy their intellectual capital in working and consulting with regional organizations. Some of these relationships exist, but they appear to be few and far between, and certainly do not represent anything close to matching the interest of either the colleges to provide that expertise or businesses to tap into it.

Fifty-seven percent of executives either agreed or strongly agreed that, once they were contacted by regional businesses, the colleges and universities seemed willing to work with those businesses to build mutually beneficial relationships. Eighty-seven percent of HR professionals concurred with them. When asked if there were services or support that businesses could obtain from universities rather than paid consultants, 59% of executives and 77% of HR professionals believed higher education could fulfill some of those needs.

**Key Takeaways**

- There is a wide range of collaborative opportunities between higher education and regional employers.
- Regional businesses are interested in sharing research opportunities with higher education.
Higher education’s intellectual capital could complement the consulting services that companies typically seek from outside entities. Faculty members could employ their expertise to advise on a myriad of issues. During interviews, executives and HR professionals noted that they have leveraged or could leverage the international contacts and experiences of some faculty members to tap into broader international networks or communities. The long-term effects of these partnerships could be far-reaching. Not only would there be goodwill created between these benefiting organizations and colleges/universities, but these connections would, again, serve as excellent pipelines from employers to job candidates. These same opportunities might also present students with new internship and cooperative possibilities as a result of the instructors matching the needs of employers with good candidates.

Such relationships should also engender intellectual “cross-pollination,” which often occurs when industry and higher education collaborate. There are opportunities for technology transfer, greater awareness of marketplace conditions, and the exchange of best practices across the two entities.

**Advanced degree accessibility**

The top executives interviewed during this research seemed to understand the challenges in offering advanced degrees at regional campuses (master’s or doctoral degrees), primarily due to economies of scale and those campuses’ unique relationships to their parent universities, which might offer those advanced degrees. But they would welcome some considerations that would balance the regional availability of graduate degree classes or some creative thinking on how some of those degrees might be more readily accessible to regional students.

Although the benefits to businesses of more advanced degrees might not be as obvious as many other aspects of businesses’ relationships with regional campuses, there would still be some advantages. For example, in areas such as advanced manufacturing, a greater availability of graduate degrees would allow employers and employees more options to pursue mutually beneficial endeavors while balancing the needs of both. Additionally, a philosophy that “a rising tide lifts all ships” would apply inasmuch as the presence of such degrees would benefit the college or university offering them, the organizations associated with the individuals pursuing the degree, and the companies hiring those individuals for their knowledge and expertise.

Executives noted that the expertise of some existing faculty members might allow for a percentage of graduate work to be pursued locally, with the remainder to be taken either through distance learning or by traveling to the main campuses. In terms of doctoral degree work, the opportunity may be greatest with applied doctorates as opposed to research-based ones.

While not completely contingent on this factor, business leaders believe that offering advanced degree opportunities is aligned with the mission of regional campuses if those advanced degrees reflect the needs of the region.

**Key Takeaways**
- Intellectual capital at the region’s colleges and universities is a relatively untapped resource.
- Consultation by faculty members is likely to improve overall relationships with employers and will likely create opportunities for students as well.

**Key Takeaways**
- Creative paths to advanced degrees need further exploration.
- Advanced degree availability would benefit all parties: colleges and universities, employers, and employees.
## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

| Technical skill needs of the region | Colleges and universities must communicate and collaborate (and do so nimbly) to address the technical needs of the region. While some technical areas are universal, each region should, to some degree, reflect the demands of the area. |
| Soft skills needs of the region | As critical as technical competence is to capturing jobs in the global market, business leaders still want and demand talented individuals who can solve problems, think critically, work in teams, and effectively communicate with internal and external customers. The need for well-rounded individuals is no less important than in the past and, it could be argued, is even more relevant in a diverse, global environment. |
| Experiences that supplement formal classroom instruction | The opportunities for internships and cooperative educational experiences for higher education students can and should increase. There is ample interest and enthusiasm for this in the business community. Creating these opportunities, however, will take intentional efforts on the part of both higher education and the business community. They will not be successful if each waits for the other to do the heavy lifting. |
| Interface between the institution and employers for purposes of facilitating the hiring process | Higher education and the business entities should increase the frequency and level of their interaction so they can create greater opportunity to link potential employees to employers. It would appear that this higher level of interaction will be more incumbent on colleges and universities than on employers, especially as it relates to small to midsize companies that lack the resources to identify and recruit regional talent and support structured programming. |
| Regional impact on talent acquisition and retention | Simply stated, colleges and universities should take advantage of regional industry and vice versa. The relationships need to be bi-directional. Each can benefit from the other’s expertise and talent in a number of ways, primarily through determining the specific needs of the region, sharing research and best practices, and helping develop regional talent. |
| Greater business and higher education collaboration | In general, higher education and business would benefit from a higher degree of communication and collaboration. In the northeast region of Indiana, very little of the research and development tied to the burgeoning advanced manufacturing base originates at any of the colleges or universities in the region. Beyond research, there are likely many touch points between the two entities that would greatly benefit both and certainly create opportunity for economic and academic growth. |
| Local access to intellectual capital housed at the regional campus | The expertise of regional faculties is a resource that appears to be underutilized by the business community, but would be embraced with some enthusiasm. However beneficial these might be, building consulting relationships that complement the services that businesses typically seek from professional consultants will be challenging. Who would own the responsibility for nurturing these relationships is very unclear. |
| Advanced degree accessibility | Greater accessibility to master’s or doctoral degrees through a regional campus would benefit all of the regional partners: the higher education institution, employers, and employees. From interviews and surveys, it would appear that these degrees (particularly the doctoral degrees) would be most practical when they are applied and not research-based degrees. Establishing clear communication and expectations from the sponsoring institutions (namely Indiana University and Purdue University) appears to be an important first step. |
Executives and HR professionals noted that if regional colleges and universities could work more closely with employers to establish internship and cooperative opportunities, one of the additional benefits is that this would build a pipeline for eventually hiring more students upon graduation. If higher education institutions are more proactive in establishing and maintaining those relationships, especially with small or midsize companies where HR resources are typically more limited, employers would be more inclined to hire their students and, eventually, their graduates.

When and where possible, increase the autonomy of regional campuses to benefit the region in which they function.

- Granting greater autonomy to regional campuses to address the specific needs of the region would appear reasonable and advantageous to both of the institutions and the students receiving diplomas carrying the name of either prestigious university.
- Regional campuses should be able to react quickly and more nimbly to the needs of the area. By giving the regional campuses more autonomy and flexibility to plan the future of their academic programs, the parent universities will ultimately nurture a stronger, more vital, and more collaborative partnership with the regional institution.
- In particular, initiatives that help small to midsize firms connect with the resources at colleges and universities are needed.

Address the technical needs of a region while recognizing the importance of producing well-rounded individuals.

- Producing technically talented and competent graduates and producing well-rounded students should not be viewed as mutually exclusive.
- Employers clearly recognize that they need both in the talent available to them.
- Regional campuses have always played an important role in producing the complete student, and the emphasis on their mission should not shift so much as to turn them away from this important role.
- Collaboration at multiple levels needs to be emphasized to ensure that best practices are continually exchanged. This will ultimately improve the student experience and elevate their contribution.

Link students to work opportunities earlier in their educational experience.

- Regional business partners are very interested and willing to engage students in work experiences early in their academic careers. These relationships could exist in many forms: part-time employment, internships, or cooperative work experiences.
- Everyone would seem to benefit from these early links. Students can clarify their career interests and redirect their paths with less investment in time and money. Higher education institutions build more and deeper relationships with potential employers (which may, in turn, engage the university for any number of additional resources and services). Early on, employers gain the opportunity to identify the best and brightest a university has to offer, “test drive” them as employees, and plot a path for their future full-time employment.

Promote further engagement between employers and higher education.

- A cultural shift toward greater cooperation and collaboration between regional higher education and the business community is absolutely essential in our state. Global economic realities all but dictate it.
- Through policy, procedures and funding, the State of Indiana should work to discover avenues that more easily connect higher education resources to regional businesses.
- Colleges, universities, employers, and workforce development support organizations should work together to determine additional degree programs that will benefit the region.
- In particular, initiatives that help small to midsize firms connect with the resources at colleges and universities are needed.
CLOSING REMARKS

Interviews and surveys with regional leaders and HR professionals point toward a need and desire for increased partnership with both higher education and regional employers. But both may find it difficult to clear the hurdle of determining how they build and sustain productive relationships. One of the conclusions from this study is that employers and higher education institutions should both turn to many of the reliable third-party resources available to them in the region.

The associations and organizations charged with economic development, workforce preparedness, and overall growth in the region are logical and capable partners for linking higher education to entities that employ their graduates. Not only can they bring their considerable expertise to bear on the challenges these two entities struggle to address, but they will also work as a reliable advocate for both. With the primary charge of looking after regional interests, these organizations can help higher education and business find common and productive ground that will greatly benefit their collective future.

WHO CONDUCTED THE STUDY?

This study was conducted by CHORUS®, Inc., a management consulting firm working with businesses and not-for-profit organizations, including schools, communities, and associations throughout the United States. CHORUS specializes in linking human capital to strategic goals, equipping leadership to create and sustain a competitive advantage.