

“Strategic Planning and Innovation:  
International Education and Research at Indiana University”

U.S. China Business Cooperation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conference

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

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UPCC Auditorium

IUPUI

Indianapolis, Indiana

April 15, 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

On behalf of Indiana University, it is my great pleasure to welcome the many distinguished guests participating in this exciting conference. I would like to add a special welcome to Chinese Consul General in Chicago Mr. Huang Ping, Zhejiang University President Yang Wei, Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard, and Columbus Mayor Fred Armstrong, who will be presenting later today.

I am also particularly pleased that so many colleagues from Zhejiang University could join us today. It was a little over a year ago that I led an IU delegation to the beautiful city of Hangzhou where we participated in a research symposium at Zhejiang University's Science Park, a very impressive facility.

I am proud to say that IU and Zhejiang University have had collaborative agreements dating back over 25 years, our longest agreements with any university in China.

This conference offers an unparalleled opportunity to extend that important partnership and to build upon the already strong relationship that exists between China and the state of Indiana.

## 2. INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Indiana University has been laying the foundation for international research and education for many decades. Much of this foundation can be traced back to IU's legendary 11<sup>th</sup> president and first university chancellor Herman B Wells, whose deep appreciation for the global community led him to initiate IU's concerted efforts to become an international force in higher education.

Now Indiana University offers over 70 world languages— perhaps the largest number in the United States— and is home to nine prestigious, federally-funded Title VI Area Studies Centers, which focus on international studies in different regions of the globe, and these include seven National Resource Centers, again the equal largest number, I believe, in the United States. Over 2,000 IUB students studied abroad last year— a 22% increase over the previous year— and we are currently home to over 6,000 international students, nearly 15% of whom are from China.

Many decades ago, IU recognized the vital importance of global research and education not only for the individual but for society as well. An understanding of other cultures prepares students for the social, political, and economic changes that are taking place in the world around them. Likewise, a partnership among researchers around the world allows university faculty greater opportunity to answer increasingly complex questions about trade, energy, access to water resources, information technology, population movement, and many other areas that cross national and disciplinary boundaries.

That understanding, engagement, and partnership with the world beyond our doorstep has become a practical necessity.

### 3. ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Of course, engaging with that broader world is made more complicated by the considerable economic uncertainty we are currently facing. There is no better time for us to consider the challenges of international entrepreneurship than this very moment.

For some, times like these translate into scaled-back operations, but such is not the case for higher education, which we might consider a counter-cyclical industry. In other words, when times get hard, more people turn to higher education to strengthen their skills and improve their competitiveness in the workforce.

The global nature of this economic downturn reinforces the vital importance of global literacy for students around the world.

#### 3.1 IU'S INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN

To say that Indiana University has been preparing for this moment for decades may be overstating the case.

To say that we have developed a systematic and strategic approach to international partnerships that leverages strengths and maximizes resources certainly is not.

With the involvement of many individuals, departments, and schools from across the university, IU, through the Office of the Vice President for International Affairs, has developed a four-part approach to international education that includes global faculty research, global educational opportunities, institutional partnerships, and other

institutional outreach efforts.<sup>1</sup> These four elements form the basis of Indiana University's new international strategic plan, which I approved last year.

The global economic uncertainty we are currently facing pushes us towards even more strategic and innovative thinking in global education and research, maximizing our collective resources.

### 3.2 VIRTUAL CENTER FOR STRATEGIC LANGUAGES

Take, for instance, the notion of a virtual center for strategic languages. Such a center would draw upon two great strengths at Indiana University: our outstanding language instruction and our expertise in high-speed and high-performance computer networks.

Rather than investing in a bricks and mortar center with a partner university halfway around the world, we can transmit language instruction to a virtual center via existing computer networks, and our students can receive instruction in one of the few languages Indiana University faculty do not teach.

### 3.3 PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Utilizing existing resources more efficiently and effectively is just one avenue towards international educational innovation.

Another is philanthropic support, which serves as a pillar of American higher education, providing support even at times when state and federal funds are more restricted. At Indiana University, we are most fortunate and most grateful for our great benefactor, the late Ed Hutton, whose gifts to IU have enabled thousands of students the life-changing

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<sup>1</sup> Indiana University established the Office of the Vice President for International Affairs in 2007, transforming what had been a dean-level position to a vice presidential-level position in accordance with the university's increased focus on strengthening its international educational and research partnerships.

experience of studying abroad. Just the other day, an IU alumnus described how standing amid the ruins of the Acropolis made the works of Plato come alive for him.

He also mentioned interviewing applicants for a microloan program in Ecuador and travelling to Honduras with the Timmy Foundation, a charitable medical organization.

This is the breadth, depth, and power of international education.

### 3.4 INNOVATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

That we are all here today suggests the power of innovative international research and the transformation of the research environment in both China and the United States.

This conference includes scholars from China and the U.S. in a common, extended research initiative. This kind of interaction was never seriously a possibility ten to twenty years ago and is still uncommon.

This conference involves scholars from across disciplines, a rarity in Chinese and U.S. institutions due to specialization. We are fortunate at Indiana University that barriers between disciplines, schools, and campuses are low, and we take seriously multi-disciplinary research and teaching. Our faculty's approach toward China, in particular, involves the entire university and reflects a commitment to support internal cooperation across disciplines and schools.

Finally, this cross-sector conference brings together distinguished scholars, industry leaders, and policymakers from both China and the U.S., to learn interactively from one another. It promises great opportunities for further collaboration whether we are looking at the legal and political environment surrounding international trade and investment, trade policy and innovation, or regional business models.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Again, on behalf of Indiana University, let me welcome you and wish you all the best for a successful conference.