

BEDFORD DIVERSITY COUNCIL



SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES

2017-2018

A partnership between MSCH-R428:
Public Relations, Planning and Research &
Lawrence North Community Schools





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Acknowledgements

This project was completed as a collaboration between the students in MSCH-R428: Public Relations, Planning, & Research & Lawrence North Community Schools as part of the 2017-2018 Indiana University Sustaining Hoosier Communities (IUSHC) initiative. IUSHC is a program within the IU Center for Rural Engagement (CRE).

This report represents original student work and recommendations proposed by the students in MSCH-R428: Public Relations, Planning, & Research for Lawrence North Community Schools. The contents of this report represent the views of the students in MSCH-R428: Public Relations, Planning, & Research and do not reflect those of IUSHC, CRE, Indiana University, or Lawrence County.

IU Faculty

Minjeong Kang, Media School
kang60@indiana.edu

Community Partner

Shawna Girgis
sgirgis@bedford.iu.us



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About Sustaining Hoosier Communities

Indiana University Sustaining Hoosier Communities is an initiative that partners with a local community within south central Indiana to explore, understand, and resolve challenges and projects identified by the community. Based on a tested model for university/community engagement that has been successfully implemented by over 25 universities and their community partners, Sustaining Hoosier Communities is a yearlong collaboration between Indiana University and a single community partner.

Indiana University's faculty who opt in to Sustaining Hoosier Communities match their courses to the projects based on their areas of research, expertise, and teaching. Each course uses a cross-disciplinary approach to explore and solve sustainability issues identified by the community partner through project-based research. Faculty and community stakeholders agree before classes begin on a scope of work and deliverables for each class, and project liaisons are identified by the community and the university to coordinate this unified effort.

Sustaining Hoosier Communities is just one example of many types of community engagement Indiana University plans to pursue as part of the Center for Rural Engagement. By harnessing the research, expertise, energy, and service of Indiana University's faculty, staff, and students, Indiana University and our local partners work collaboratively to improve the health, prosperity, and vitality of southcentral Indiana.

To learn more about IU Sustaining Hoosier Communities, visit www.shc.indiana.edu.

To learn more about the IU Center for Rural Engagement, visit www.rural.indiana.edu.

Sustaining Hoosier Communities Project Process





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About the Course

MSCH-R428: Public Relations, Planning, and Research is a research-based course in which students conduct a comprehensive situation analysis and a public analysis via primary and secondary research methods to diagnose underlying issues or problems that need communication intervention. The scope of work as agreed upon by the Mayor of Bedford, Shawna Girgis, and the Lawrence North Community School Corporation was to investigate the attitudes and desires of Bedford community members towards starting a conversation on the issue of cultural and racial diversity in the predominantly white Bedford community. Students distributed an anonymous online survey that received 1,200 responses and conducted 15 in-depth interviews with local leaders to understand how the community of Bedford can create a more welcoming environment for its residents and those visiting Lawrence County. Lawrence North Community Schools cosponsored this initiative and were instrumental in gaining a high level of parent, student, and teacher participation for the online surveys. The course's final project focused on providing the community with a detailed report analyzing the online surveys and interviews as well as additional resources on how Bedford leaders can help their community foster greater appreciation and sensitivity for Lawrence County residents and visitors from all walks of life.



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About Diversity & the City of Bedford

Although the City of Bedford embraces its tight-knit, faith-based community, it has experienced past media coverage surrounding racially controversial incidents that spurred some concerns about how Bedford would be perceived as insular and unwelcoming. In addition to appearing exclusive to outsiders, these negative perceptions could affect how Bedford could attract more businesses and residents to keep this small community vitalized. The Mayor of Bedford, Shawna Girgis, has emphasized the importance of racial and cultural awareness and has been working to foster a greater sense of diversity and inclusivity throughout Lawrence County.

Mayor Girgis connected students in MSCH-R428: Public Relations, Planning, and Research to the Lawrence North Community School Corporation to investigate how Bedford students, parents, and educators perceived their town as an inclusive and welcoming community; how religious, predominantly Christian members and leaders thought about the importance of racial sensitivity in the community and their willingness to participate future efforts to improve the community's racial sensitivity; how business and community leaders viewed the racial sensitivity of the community and the importance of incorporating inclusivity within their businesses and community values; and how other communities around the nation were addressing issues of racial and cultural diversity.



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The Project: Connecting Course & Community

The Mayor of Bedford, Shawna Girgis, and students in MSCH-R428: Public Relations, Planning, and Research worked closely to gain a better understanding of the perception of racial and cultural diversity among Bedford residents in order to learn how to create a more welcoming environment for both residents and visitors to Lawrence County. Through in-depth conversations and interviews with local leaders, students investigated the causes of the negative perception of Bedford and evaluated the openness to change among Bedford residents and businesses. Students sought to understand the impact of diversity and determine how Bedford can work to improve the level of racial sensitivity, to understand how diversity affects the people of Bedford, and to take steps to promote a better reputation and foster a greater inclusivity throughout Lawrence County.

Students distributed four anonymous, online surveys to Bedford faith leaders and students, parents, and educators within the Lawrence North Community School Corporation that garnered 1,200 responses. Students also conducted 15 in-depth interviews with community leaders to learn more about Bedford's attitudes and values towards racial and cultural sensitivity. In addition to implementing primary research methods, students also engaged in comprehensive secondary research to guide possible solutions and initiatives on how Bedford residents can instill a more inclusive environment for its residents and visitors.

From the findings of the four online surveys and the 15 interviews, students produced five detailed reports on Bedford's views towards diversity and recommendations that the Bedford community can initiate in order to embrace racial and cultural diversity throughout Lawrence County. Currently, Mayor Girgis is in the process of establishing a Diversity Council to discuss ways to address the lack of racial and cultural diversity in Bedford and how to create a more welcoming community.



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Student Outcomes

- Produced five detailed reports with specific recommendations to Mayor Shawna Girgis to initiate diversity awareness campaigns within Bedford
- Presented five oral presentations to Mayor Girgis and other City of Bedford representatives
- Distributed four online, anonymous surveys to Bedford faith leaders and students, parents, and educators within the Lawrence North Community School Corporation that garnered 1,200 responses
- Analyzed the findings of these surveys to provide comprehensive recommendations on how Bedford residents can address and embrace cultural and racial diversity
- Conducted 15 in-depth interviews with Bedford community leaders on issues of diversity
- Provided suggestions for the initiation of Bedford's Diversity Council

Community Partner Outcomes

- Received five reports with detailed findings from the online surveys regarding Bedford community members' attitudes, willingness, and values of racial sensitivity
- Gained a better understanding of internal and external perceptions of Bedford and Lawrence County communities' acceptance of individuals from diverse backgrounds
- Received several recommendations for diversity awareness campaigns and initiatives for the Bedford school system and local businesses
- Initiation of a Diversity Council led by Mayor Girgis to discuss how Bedford residents can address the lack of racial and cultural diversity in the community



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