

Richmond colleges aren't standing still

Written by Louise Ronald Staff Writer

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Things are changing on the college scene in Richmond. That was the message delivered Tuesday morning during an event at the Innovation Center.

“Contrary to popular belief, higher education ... is not stagnant,” Ivy Tech Community College’s Richmond chancellor Steve Tincher said at the event sponsored by the **Wayne County Foundation**.

The foundation invited the leaders of the city’s four undergraduate institutions of higher learning, Earlham College, Indiana University East, Ivy Tech and the Purdue University College of Technology at Richmond, to speak to members of the community “because they are all relatively new to their positions,” said foundation executive director Steve Borchers.

About 45 people attended the Network and Knowledge Seminar at the Innovation Center.

Borchers called David Dawson “the dean of the group” because of his two years as president of Earlham. Tincher assumed his role in 2012, the same year Michael Swain became director of the local Purdue program. Kathy Cruz-Uribe is the most recent arrival, joining IU East as its new chancellor in July.

Change was the focus of much of their conversation — change in how classes are taught, the makeup of student bodies, the transfer of credits from one institution to another and more.

Borchers asked about the most exciting changes under way at each campus.

Ivy Tech is in the process of revamping its remediation programs in math, a subject that proves to be a stumbling block for many students.

“We’re developing three math pathways,” Tincher said, a technology path, a quantitative reasoning path and a traditional algebra/calculus-based path. The idea is for students to get the math they need to succeed in their field of study.

Tincher reminded the audience that Manufacturing Matters, a new collaborative effort spearheaded by Ivy Tech Corporate College, will launch on Oct. 21 with certified production technician training. Participants and corporate partners are sought for the program, which pre-screens applicants for hiring and gives companies a chance to find employees who have the skills they need.

Purdue recently has demonstrated “reinvestment in the whole concept of a statewide system,” said Swain. The Richmond campus has added a bachelor’s degree in computer graphics to the programs it offers. More degrees opportunities could be coming soon, he said.

IU East also has plans to add to its offerings with master’s degrees in English and teaching math in “approval stages,” said Cruz-Uribe.

Fundraising for the proposed Student Events and Activities Center is “in final stages,” she said. The building project goes before the statewide board of trustees in mid-October.

Cruz-Urbe expressed excitement about the prospect. The IU East campus has consisted of the same four buildings since 2007. During that time, its enrollment has doubled.

Construction projects are evident everywhere at Earlham, but Dawson stressed the bricks and mortar less than the mindset that made them possible. He said when he first arrived, he sensed an ambivalence about the college's self-image as a top ranking international liberal arts college.

That ambivalence appears to be going away, Dawson said. "The college has embraced what it takes to enact that vision" for the 21st century.

When asked if there were plans for the college to grow, Dawson replied, "Yes and no." He said the first task is to reach full enrollment while maintaining current standards for students. "When we do that," he said, the question of whether or not to grow can be addressed.

But there's no question at IU East, Cruz-Urbe said. The university is ready for continued growth.

All the leaders asked that companies and organizations watch for meaningful learning opportunities for their students through service education or internships.

Cruz-Urbe asked for "understanding from the public of the kind of pressure we're under" as public universities are facing increased accountability for their performance.

Dawson said people involved in higher education often assume that everyone believes in its importance. "I'm not sure that's the case."

But, he said, "education really, really, really matters." Not just in terms of preparing for an occupation, but in terms of coping with the world.

Our era, Dawson said, requires better reflection, more deliberation and an ability to differentiate fact from opinion.

Swain's request from the public was simpler.

"I would beg you please," he said, when listing local colleges "to throw Purdue in there, too."

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