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THE ADVISORY BOARD: A Department Chair’s Best Friend

The North Central campus of Purdue University serves a regional audience in Northwest Indiana. One of its primary tasks has been to become a force in its larger community, since the area boasts numerous competing institutions. In 2011, the Department of English and Modern Languages decided to form its first Advisory Board, whose strong intention from the beginning was to connect more fully with the nearby communities of Michigan City, La Porte, and Valparaiso. Because of careful selection of its board members, the Board was a success from the start. This presentation is meant to share PNC’s experience with other Department Chairs: what has worked; what hasn’t—and what the exact rewards might be.

The Advisory Board for our department was formed with three objectives:

To form community partnerships.

To provide area opportunities for our students through internships and jobs.

To find new ways to serve the larger community.

Thus the selection of the board members became the initial key. It was necessary to pinpoint seven individuals whose positions would span both the public and private sectors. The next task was to provide a format that would foster creative thought. We were very happy to find that this creativity came quickly and that it led to remarkable achievement. The results thus far include, to cite just three:

\*The establishment, in partnership with the Michigan City Public Library, of a yearly Summer Poetry Slam Camp that targets underserved children.

\*The creation, in partnership with the Rittenhouse Assisted Living Community, of an Oral and Visual History of area veterans.

\*The development of a “Careers” course in the major that is propelled by Internships established through the Advisory Board.

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Even though things came together quickly for us, there have been false starts and bumps along the way. This presentation will detail those experiences as well. The outcome here should be a healthy discussion. We are interested not only in pointing some directions, but in interacting with those who already have functioning boards and who have other ideas to bring to the table.