

Letter from the President



IIT—Distinctive Education

A strength of the United States system of higher education is the richness of its broad selection of colleges and universities. There is a “good” choice of university for every student wishing to advance her or his education; the challenge is finding the right fit. It is in the best interest of each private university to build on its unique characteristics and publicize its distinctive offerings. We want to find those students whose interests align with the distinctiveness of our university—creating a synergistic relationship for the benefit of the university and the student.

The name of IIT gives it away, but our vision statement emphasizes our niche: “...*focus on professional and technology-oriented education...*” We are not the best choice for all students, but we are a great choice for those students who wish to be educated in these areas. IIT belongs to the Association of Independent Technological Universities (AITU), a group of 22 schools running the gamut from MIT and Caltech to Rose-Hulman and Harvey Mudd, and connected by an emphasis on a technology-relevant curriculum. Such universities have been criticized for being “too narrow” and not providing a “well-rounded” education, opinions never supported by fact. The pendulum is shifting now, and schools like IIT are gaining more positive attention because of the need to educate more technology-savvy young adults. Studies such as *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* (National Academy of Sciences, 2005) and opinion pieces such as Thomas Friedman’s editorial in *The New York Times* (January 11, 2009) emphasize the need for the U.S. to produce more graduates in technology fields. The need to increase IIT graduates of all our areas of study, not just engineering, is clear.

The input to our strategic planning from students, faculty, staff, and members of our Board of Trustees resonates on one particular chord: make the IIT educational experience distinctive even among other schools that also emphasize technology in education. While some areas of our current curriculum are distinctive, our goal is to create distinctiveness as a university. We believe our niche involves experience and education both outside the classroom as well as inside it—in interdisciplinary team projects, entrepreneurship activities, leadership training, communication skills, international awareness, and service to the community. Note that I am not just referring to undergraduate education; innovation in graduate education is also needed. IIT has long been recognized as very strong in its depth of education. Now we must augment this depth with training in experiential learning—the out-of-classroom experiences. By doing so, we will be an innovator in education.

IIT has been a major innovator with its Interprofessional Projects (IPRO) program courses, which were initiated in 1995. As far as I can tell, we are one of the very few research universities to adopt interdisciplinary project courses across the university as a *requirement* for *all* undergraduates. The challenge now, as emphasized by input to our strategic planning process, is to further develop the IPRO education experience, to improve it, and to expand its reach to connect our undergraduate students with our wonderful professional programs. We have a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on our strengths in technology and the professions to do something very special in education.

The university’s strategic plan will be unveiled in May 2009. An important part of that plan is to expand IIT’s distinctive education. We welcome your insight and suggestions.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John L. Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John L. Anderson
President