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“Times of Turbulence”

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*The Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) presents here the 2003 Donald Stone Lecture delivered by Dean Astrid E. Merget at the annual meeting of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), in Washington, DC on March 18, 2003.*

*ASPA was established in 1939 in response to major changes in the developing field of public administration. In its 60+ years, ASPA has both influenced and been influenced by the field and profession of public administration, specifically in three areas: professionalism in public administration—both domestically and internationally; public administration education, theory, and research; and advocacy for public administration and public service.*

*The ASPA Endowment, Inc., sponsors the Donald C. Stone Distinguished Guest Lecture at the ASPA National Conference each year. Don Stone (1903-1995) is legendary among public administrators. His remarkable public service career included developing procedures for the Civil Works Administration and planning and implementing the Works Progress Administration. He helped draft the United Nations Charter and his efforts were instrumental in the success of the Marshall Plan in rebuilding Europe after the Second World War. He went on to become the founding dean of the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of International Affairs, as well as one of the founders of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) and a charter member of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA).*

*When the Endowment established the Donald C. Stone Fund shortly after Stone's death, the Board determined to sponsor a special lecture at the ASPA Annual Conference in Stone's honor.*

*Dean Merget is the eighth key public administration figure to be chosen to deliver the prestigious address at ASPA's premier event. Other Stone Lecturers have included Herbert Simon, Nobel Laureate in Economics, Richard King Mellon University Professor of Computer Science and Psychology Carnegie Mellon University and Harlan Cleveland, former ASPA President, former U.S. Ambassador to NATO, and former Dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.*

*Astrid E. Merget was named Dean of the Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs in October of 2000. Prior to her Indiana University appointment, she was Associate Dean at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, and Chair of the Department of Public Administration there. During a leave of absence from Syracuse, she served as Senior Adviser to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in Washington, DC.*

*She has also held academic appointments at the School of Public Policy and Management and College of Business at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio and The George Washington University in Washington, DC.*

*Dean Merget is a Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration and past Chair of its Board of Trustees. She is a member of the Board of Trustees of Mount Holyoke College, a member of the Regional Screening Committee for the Harry S. Truman Foundation, and a member of the U.S. Comptroller General's Research and Education Advisory Panel.*

*She co-chaired the Task Force on Outcomes for the United Way of America. She is a previous president of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration and Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors of The Independent Sector.*

*Dean Merget holds the rank of Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University. She earned her Ph.D. and M.P.A. at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University and her A.B. at Mount Holyoke College*

*—Editor*

This is indeed an astonishing and poignant honor for me to be able to deliver the lecture in honor of Donald Stone. Without a doubt, he was, during his long life, an exemplar in public service and an inspiration for all of us in the profession of public administration. More personally, Don Stone and I shared two academic institutions—although at different times. We both treasured our graduate education at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University that endowed us with a lifelong pursuit of the Athenian Oath. What Maxwell gave us was an ideology in the spirit and words of that Oath and a set of icons in the statues of George Washington in the School’s foyer and of Abraham Lincoln in the courtyard. And we both cheered the much younger but equally spirited School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University. He would have affirmed that School’s motto to “make a world of difference.” There his legacy endures.

What always amazed me was that Don Stone was a visionary: he was not an elder who devoted mind and time to reminiscing about the halcyon days of the New Deal or World War II; instead, he was always contemporary in charting where the field of public administration was going and should go. He galvanized others in confabs and colloquy to exchange views, to debate and deliberate over issues rather than just affirm his own priorities and preferences—although opinions he did have, with tenacity.

Hence, it is a daunting task to aspire to live up to this lecture—even a little bit—entitled after Don Stone’s legacy and legend. But in partaking of that spirit of contemplating the future, several themes have crystallized for me—whether as an educator in critical reflection about my own school and others in the leagues of NASPAA and APPAM, or whether as a sometime-administrator in government, or whether as a citizen of this great, albeit complex, nation. Some three decades ago, another icon of mine, Dwight Waldo, penned a book entitled *Public Administration in a Time of Turbulence*. It does seem to me that public administration is always in a time of turbulence. It is a dynamic field that partakes of all currents of change coursing through our increasingly global nation state. Unlike many academic disciplines—

even those in the social sciences—ours is a porous field imbibing as much in, as detaching from, the field of practice.

As such, I exercise some license of authorship and deviate from the published title of this address. I trust I honor the spirit of the conference's banner, "The Power of Public Service."

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Let me share with you a half-dozen on my sampler of changes and describe how our field has some special assets to embrace those changes even though there are deficits to remedy. My order does not confer any priority on these; they are all important and interrelated.

First, there is the globalization of our political economy, as is so popularly depicted these days and heralded years ago by the Stone lecturer of the year 2000, Harlan Cleveland. The interdependency of our political, economic, and social systems with nations around the world prompts me to rethink what had been an American-centric model of public administration and to reconstruct what we once called international relations. If there was a jolting message in Osborne and Gaebler's celebrated, albeit controversial, work on *Reinventing Government* over a decade ago, it was that some powerful reforms in state and local government did not always originate here. For inspiration on new models of conducting the government's affairs, other nations—in that case New Zealand and Australia—offered potent, penetrating lessons.

Similarly, issues of public policy transcend national boundaries and cultures, as in the case historically of national security and, more recently, of trade, of environmental pollution and protection, of immigration, and of virtually every other policy domain. Indeed, our State Department's ambassadors abroad do not just serve that agency and its role in foreign affairs; they serve *all* the departments of our federal government. Moreover, every agency—whether once considered domestic or not—has some kind of office of international affairs to infuse a more global perspective into its policy formulation, implementation, and operations. The world of practice has gone global—and so have our academic programs. More students from abroad—despite recent constraints from the former INS and now Department

of Homeland Security—seek out American higher education, including public administration, in their zeal to learn about American democracy and capitalism. More of our own students reach out to understand their colleagues from around the world. Dealing with diversity is a corollary. Enduring concerns about equity, fairness, and justice assume new meaning and proportion in a multicultural context.

Fortunately, an asset of our once domestic-centric field in public administration is our multidisciplinary nature. Understanding the phenomenon of globalization and its implications for policy and administration requires the critical scrutiny of a myriad of disciplines—political science, economics, sociology, history, anthropology, geography, and law, to mention a few obvious candidates. Similarly, our intellectual gestalt has liberated itself in recent decades from the vacuous quest to formulate what would be fragile frameworks or to search for an elusive, single paradigm. Now scholars and practitioners like to assert a more pragmatic and, hence, flexible approach to ferreting out what works, what doesn't, and why—with a healthy tolerance for experimentation in how we conduct the public's affairs. More and more academicians and public officials in public administration engage with counterparts abroad that were once the exclusive domain of international relations or foreign affairs.

Another asset is the normative stance of our field. As a field once so enmeshed in the American experience, we celebrated the fundamental tenets of democracy as perhaps the ethos—or if you will, the ideology—of the field. Values like equality, liberty, and justice animated our doing and thinking about public administration and lent purpose to our endeavors. Despite the tensions and strains of September 11 and our precarious stance vis-à-vis Iraq, these values help extend tolerance for and appreciation of diverse cultures in this global village. Revived appreciation for equity as a leitmotif also creates the proclivity to advance rather than recoil from globalizing dynamics in our political economy and its political culture.

As receptive as the field of public administration may be to globalization, there are some deficits. I, for one, question in my own School and those of other institutions just how well we are preparing the next generation of public servants for the global setting of their profession. To be sure, many MPA programs have fields or minors in comparative or

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development administration that are typically elective. These tend to be compartmentalized in a curriculum. And most faculty tend to segregate the curriculum along their own expertise, which is largely domestic, although more and more of them conduct research and consultation outside the United States. More often than not, the core curriculum—whether disguised as generic—remains domestic in content. To be sure, there is a subset of our schools who member APSIA (Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs) and showcase an international and comparative focus.

What concerns me is the young city manager in a smaller municipality who may have to broker trade deals, manage immigration, or deal with such unsavory problems as drug trafficking across borders or pollution spilling in from a neighboring country on the border. The challenge for us as academics educating that next generation is to enrich our curriculum and our research with global perspectives. Similarly, for professionals in the field, conferences or sabbaticals and leaves in other countries would help amplify our ability to learn from others while imparting our own experiences—not necessarily as models to imprint on other cultures, but as lessons learned and insights gained with cultural sensitivity and with humility.

A second current of change is technology. The breakthroughs of an information-and-computer age are not only advancing globalization but are also recasting public policy and management. The impact is rapid and continually changing. On the educational side of public administration, most MPA programs have altered many facets of the educational enterprise accordingly. Not only are there courses exclusively devoted to inculcating expertise; but also many courses in, say, finance or budgeting, rely on computers and information systems in their pedagogy.

The assets of the field that usher in the information age are substantial. Computers and statistics have been mainstays of the curriculum for most MPA programs for several decades and have supported the research of many scholars who rely on large databases like the U.S. Census and undertake rigorous quantitative analyses. Similarly, advances are apparent in government, particularly at the federal level, whose own investments in the computer propelled this whole field, especially in the Department of Defense and the military services.

The normative basis of the field also defines a receptive venue. The field's historic preoccupation with rational, objective decisionmaking revered information and analyses as essential tools of policymaking. Offices of evaluation punctuate the federal landscape of agencies and legitimate the importance of basing policy in its formulation and implementation on exacting analysis. Technology not only facilitates that premise but also accelerates and disseminates it. Cost-benefit analyses, queuing theories, operations research, TQM and best practices—these and other modern techniques have especially refined policy in finance and in the delivery of many services like transportation, the deployment of the military, the location and scale of major investments in the infrastructure, and the like.

But where technology portends some very fundamental shifts in how we conduct the public's business, change is slow. For example, agencies still conform in structure and, to some degree, in behavior to the hierarchical, command-and-control models of the past; these tend to insure stability but they also engender rigidity, incrementalism, rule-bound decisions, and other dysfunctions. What technology, with its capacity to span time and space and with its rapidity of transmitting information promises, is the advent of new modes of organizing, decisionmaking, and implementing, with evaluation as its handmaiden. Greater reliance on teams, greater flexibility in organizing for work, greater capacity to coordinate across units and geography—these manifestations of change are slow to materialize against the preponderance of past practice. As an example, during my tenure at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, I was dazzled by new software that permits service providers at the local level to treat people in need as whole people rather than categories of service, as dictated by the way statutes and implementing regulations label them. The new technology would have facilitated “one-stop” shopping for a person in need with greater coordination across the many caseworkers segregated in the silos of their respective agencies. In part because of costs and privacy issues, this new technology is slow to revolutionize how government deals with people. That failure finds its costs in time-consuming and often redundant procedures, in the indignities sustained by clients, and in the inconsistencies across policies with respect to eligibility, certification, and service. This is but one example of just how hard change is even with the prospect of a path-breaking technology.

As educators, our tendency is to compartmentalize courses in computers, information, and their collateral techniques into tool-boxes. Our challenge is to integrate such knowledge and skill into the substance of the field in an attempt to hone creativity in problemsolving and to dispel myths of one best solution for public problems. Integration would enliven the meaningfulness of technology and overcome its marginal status in many curricula.

A third current of change is the imperative for public, private, and nonprofit partnerships. Tackling problems in the public domain requires more than channeling resources through bureaucratic agencies of government. Cleaning the air, water, and earth; revitalizing communities; stimulating economies; making the nation and its communities healthy, safe, and secure—these and virtually all matters in the public domain cannot be secured by government alone. The private and nonprofit sectors are essential in that collaboration.

Although the field of public administration has historically riveted its academic and professional sights on government, there is a long history of reliance on the private sector. Contracting out, especially for major defense and public works investments, dates way back. In recent decades, the theme of privatization—problematic as it may be—has enlarged the realm of potential interaction with both the private and nonprofit sectors. As fiscal constraints dampened the growth in the public workforce, nonprofit agencies became the frequent vehicles for direct service provision with public dollars, enriched by philanthropic support, in many communities for addressing social and cultural needs. The recognition of “third-party” governments is by now universal in this country.

The academic community, in its research and teaching missions, has extended its concept of the nonprofit sector not only as a vital partner in supplying services and goods but also as an enabling advocate in championing democracy throughout a pluralistic society. Many MPA programs feature courses in the nonprofit sector often assembled as a major field of concentration. Paul Light’s chronicle of graduates from major programs documents that graduates have been increasingly gravitating to both the private and nonprofit sectors in pursuit of public service. In a sense, the field of public administration has come to subscribe to the notion that there are

many ways to serve the public. Some in our field, of course, lament this development because government needs to replenish its ranks with the very best talent for the future. Others applaud the professionalization of the nonprofit sector with skilled managers and analysts, while others welcome the infusion of a public understanding into many private ventures, especially in the for-profit consulting firms with governments often their regular clients. As the pursuit of public service finds more dispersed outlets, a number of academic programs have adjusted their curricula—at least incrementally. This further validates that our field is permeable across its academic and professional domains.

There is, however, an imbalance here. Many MPA programs readily embraced the nonprofit sector—perhaps because of the congruence of their normative foundations. The philanthropic community prides itself on “good works,” not unlike the public service mission of government. Many students of the nonprofit sector see its advocacy role as reinforcement for a robust political culture and as an outlet for citizenship. The business schools, for the most part, do not share such a normative alliance, although many of their technical courses are especially germane to the nonprofit sector. Hence, the linkage between public administration and the nonprofit sector is not surprising: there is the noble nexus of values and the practical need for professional training. Where not long ago there was a void in higher education for philanthropy, there is now a locus in public administration among other collateral fields.

In contrast, despite the inclusive nature of our field—a real asset to a dynamic public sector—there remains a deficit of sorts. A focus on the business world is limited to contracting out—or privatization—and to regulation. Often where the private sector creeps into an MPA curriculum, it is under the rubric of regulation to correct for systemic market failures or the irregularities of its individual firms or to orchestrate the macro-economy through fiscal and monetary policy—however haphazardly. Rarely are the powerful partnerships celebrated, as in rejuvenating local communities as has happened in Cleveland or Pittsburgh or Indianapolis—to name a few. There, corporate leaders, philanthropists, and public officials came together to marshal plans for energizing communities and their economies. Indeed, seldom would an MPA student be exposed to the legitimate logic of

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decisionmaking that characterizes a for-profit enterprise. Most faculty do not have a clue either. This is a tremendous disservice to the next generation of public leaders. To resolve major issues in a community or in the nation or around the globe, the interaction of business and government needs to blueprint collaborative enterprises rather than espouse adversarial postures.

The city manager or top local administrator not only needs to feel comfortable with business leaders in the board rooms but also must understand the logic and motives they bring to decisions at the table. Of course, in obvious federal agencies like Treasury and Commerce that understanding needs to permeate their ranks. For too long the nexus between government and business has been contentious and regulatory in nature; both sectors are at fault.

More interaction across business schools and public affairs schools might help, even though, anecdotally, my students over the years have preferred the more consensual, collegial setting of public affairs rather than what they see as the competitive, profit-motivated culture of the former. To be sure, more business schools have become insular with the surge in demand for a bachelor's and/or master's degree in business administration. Still, means of mutual understanding can be found with executives-in-residence, with sabbaticals in corporate settings, and with professional exchanges across the sectors.

A fourth current of change entails a renewed and amplified view of institution-building. As the world transforms, with many countries opting for market-based economies and tilting toward democracy in all their mutations, our expertise in public administration is in demand around the globe. How to develop a tax code and revenue systems; how to budget with public dollars; how to design and develop freely elected legislative and executive branches; how to codify laws and honor the rule of law; how to frame regulations and incentives to protect natural resources; how to discharge agencies to implement public policy with efficiency and effect; how to achieve justice in a civil society—these and other competencies ingrained in public administration are pivotal to many transforming nations.

The field is replete with expertise in such foundations that are the cornerstones in building the institutions that govern a civil society. That expertise has evolved with this country's rule of law and Constitution that are distinctively American and captured so well in the voices of the Federalist

Papers. Do our institutional prescriptions fit other cultures, with their own distinct values and history? Probably not. Our years of experience with development administration disclose that we cannot simply transpose our institutional frameworks on other cultures.

Notwithstanding unfolding events, we have been humbled by those efforts and have become respectful and appreciative of other nation states. The assets that we do have are a transparent chronicle of what has worked for us, and what has not, and what has had to be adapted as times change. Those are the prerequisite for an honest discourse or dialectic with other countries, as they embark on transforming their own political and economic systems. Our two hundred-plus years of a turbulent history should lend a wisdom that disavows didactic prescriptions for our global partners.

Probably a deficit (that is paradoxically an asset) is that we are all pioneers in this global village. What is transforming in the former Soviet block and in China and elsewhere is, indeed, just as experimental as what the founding fathers attempted with the Constitutional Convention and the new republic. The current times require a different frame of mind from the one public administrators conventionally assume and revere. Instead of rational bromides, trial-and-error strategies are appropriate. Instead of a nationalistic-centric platform, sensitivity to diversity is imperative. Instead of an imperialistic imprimatur, a sense of integrity, legitimacy, and authenticity should honor the pluralism of cultures.

Educators similarly need to eschew simple textbook answers and tolerate experimentation. Our students with exposure to case studies and with a self-awareness of our distinctive cultural heritage relative to others need their instructors to convey the uncertainties and unpredictabilities of our world, whether grounded at the grassroots or at the globe.

A fifth current of change is the challenge to manage complexity and change. With an accelerated pace of change and with boundaries blurring across sectors and countries, leaders in the public domain can no longer rely on the neat command-and-control template of bureaucracy. Flexibility and adaptability are requisite attributes for the next generation of public leaders to not only organize and manage but also—and more importantly—to lead. Sometimes I, as an academic, think we do our students a disservice in our efforts to proffer simple theories and logic as we attempt to make sense of a

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chaotic world. To be sure, there is some intellectual and practical necessity to search for patterns, trends, as well as anomalies. But the construct of the rational person is just that—a construct. The situations that will confront our students as leaders in the public arena, will often be unpredictable and vexing. Hence, honing their skills in problemsolving is the sine qua non of their professional education.

In this regard we have a treasury of experience documented in a more robust research record and a renewed appreciation for case studies. Most schools have reinvented their pedagogy to rely on teams and clients that lend more reality to learning, as do internships. Many have complemented our academic ranks with executives-in-residence or professors of practice—drawing on the insights that practitioners can thoughtfully and critically impart. These enlivening elements can help our students grasp the importance of judgment.

What has concerned me for years when the quantitative revolution took root in the 'sixties was that, for a long time, we conveyed rational choice and objectivity in decisionmaking as the preferred model or end state, rather than as a tool to help reduce uncertainty in making what are judgments. Alice Rivlin spoke so thoughtfully and lucidly about this in her seminal book, *Systematic Thinking for Social Action*. Then, in the era of policy analysis as preeminent in its promise, when our graduates *did* enter government and savored the realpolitik of decisionmaking, many became cynical and felt mismatched in the messy, turbulent, and uncertain world of politics and administration. As educators of the next generation or as mentors to professional public administrators, we have an obligation to help heighten the skills of judgment, when values and evidence collide, as the quintessential talents for managing complexity and change.

A sixth current of change, which may put me at the risk of contradicting myself, is the importance of policy predicated on research, while asserting a healthy respect for its political milieu. With the advance of knowledge and with the maturation of scholarship in our field, diagnosing—let alone solving—problems in the public domain depends on rigorous research. To be sure, policies do ultimately turn on political judgment. But as the body of research accumulates on physical, social, and economic

problems, policymakers are exacting higher standards for the predicates of policy.

The assets of the field are enormous. Not only is our wealth in our multidisciplinary talent but it also inheres in our distinctive style of research. Some decades ago we often drew invidious comparisons of our field to other disciplines that had all the hallmarks of scholarly prowess—theory or theories to order phenomena, categories for framing problems, accumulated findings to test hypotheses and continual refinements to concepts, and the like. Indeed, our tools of analysis and measurement have invested cardinal notions like accountability with concrete meaning, as we are better able to calibrate performance, outcomes, and impacts of policy—as implemented, then evaluated, and eventually, informing formulation.

As we have matured, our research has come to matter not only to other scholars but also to policymakers. In this permeable field across the academy and the professional sectors, dialogues help us discover what are the truly worthwhile issues and problems to study. Instead of the proverbial identity crisis of discipline vs. profession that plagued our field for so long, my sense is that our scholars have coined their distinctive currency, as mounting purposeful research. By now as we have educated many generations of professionals and conveyed to them the salience of research as a predicate of policy—not necessarily a determinant—the debates become—hopefully—more informed and less confused. They will always be messy at some level, as well they should be, as our officials and citizens struggle to forge consensus out of conflict. Too often, we as educators and often as administrators denigrate the untidy state of politics in our predilection for rational decisionmaking. Simply put: Politics is the lifeblood of democracy. Debate, discourse, deliberation—as antecedents to choice—are talents that we as educators need to foster in our students, that we as professionals need to respect, and that we as citizens need to cherish. Politics is not neat. It is confrontational, emotional, belligerent, and self-centered at its worst; politics is reasonable, detached, civil, and public-spirited, at its best.

I trust we have heeded the admonition of some 30 years ago, intoned by Alice Rivlin, the Elliott Richardson speaker of this conference. Research and analysis will not displace politics—rather, research and analysis can and should reduce the range of uncertainty that invades decisionmaking.

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Finally, why all these exhortations? In the field of public administration, what Don Stone implicitly taught us was that public administration has an ethos—or more precisely an ideology—that invests our efforts as academics, as professionals, and as citizens with an ennobling purpose. Very simply: that is to nurture democratic governance and civic engagement. Political disruptions here and abroad are passionate reminders of how precious yet fragile, often ephemeral, democracy is in our singular paradox—the constancy of turbulent times. Why bother to confront globalization; or why bother to embrace and harness technology; or why bother to forge partnerships across the sectors; or why bother to invest in institution-building; or why struggle with complexity and change; or why bother to ground policy on research with a respect for politics? *Why?* The simple answer is that we, as public administrators, *do* have a purpose: to preserve democracy and our citizenship as the nation and the world reverberate to turbulent times. Our purpose is “not to leave the city less beautiful,” but rather to let our legacy be a city more beautiful—just as the Athenian Oath entreated our field of public administration and as it became the covenant that Don Stone and I shared with many of you and others in the pursuit of public service.

Thank you for this honor today. Godspeed to our men and women in the armed services. And thank Don Stone for his legacy.

## **The Athenian Oath**

*[This oath was taken by the young men of ancient Athens when they reached the age of 17.]*

We will never bring disgrace on this our City by an act of dishonesty or cowardice.

We will fight for the ideals and Sacred Things of the City both alone and with many.

We will revere and obey the City's laws, and will do our best to incite a like reverence and respect in those above us who are prone to annul them or set them at naught.

We will strive increasingly to quicken the public's sense of civic duty.

Thus in all these ways we will transmit this City, not only not less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.

**The Indiana University**  
**School of Public and Environmental Affairs**

Celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2002, the IU School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) is the largest school of public affairs in the United States. SPEA was founded on the premise that society's complex problems demand comprehensive solutions. The School's curriculum and research are distinguished by a vigorous interdisciplinary approach to education and problem-solving. In the most recent *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of graduate and professional programs at American and international schools, SPEA Bloomington consistently ranks in the top two or three programs.

SPEA has over 19,000 alumni and currently enrolls approximately 3,500 graduate and undergraduate students statewide at Indiana University campuses.

**Making A World of Difference.**