

# *Experiential learning helps*

It's no secret that Indianapolis is becoming a world-class convention hub. The huge JW Marriott hotel downtown is visual testament to the city's draw, not to mention droves of sports fans and tourists that will be streaming into the Circle City during the 2012 Super Bowl.

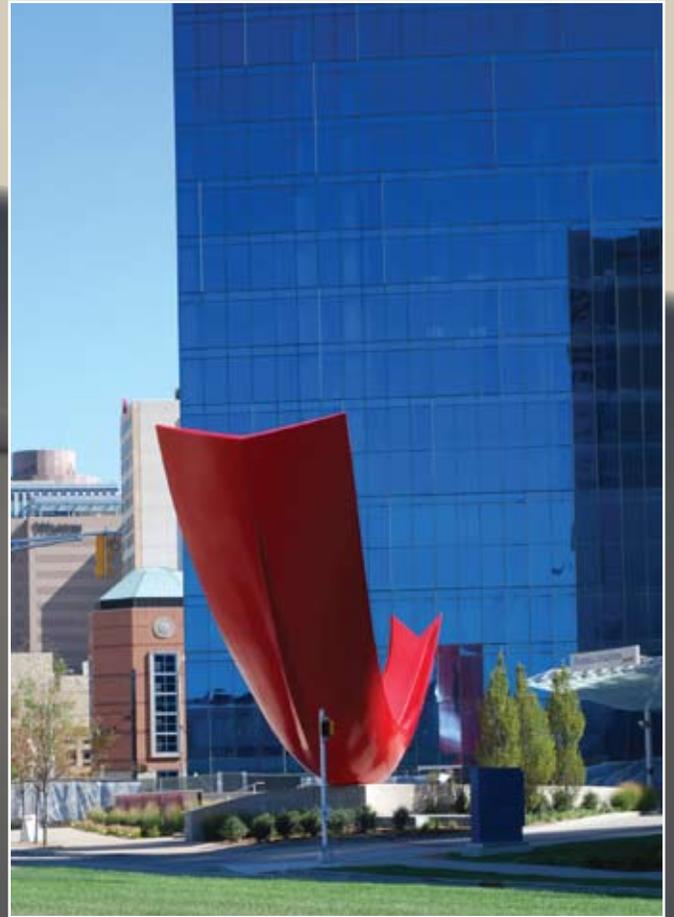
To prepare for the February JW Marriott opening, more than 750 jobs must be filled — a formidable task, but one tourism, conventions and event management (TCEM) faculty member saw as an opportunity to help students by engaging them to help local industry.

Brian Krohn, TCEM assistant professor, first got the idea when he was taking his master's training at Purdue. "Corporate executives came in and talked about issues they were facing," says Krohn. "Then we broke into groups and hammered out ideas to help them address these issues."

At the time, one hotel was dealing with diversity and harassment policy issues. Krohn's group looked at how employees viewed the policy. They designed a way for the manager to see things from the other perspective.

"The tool we came up with served as a communications intermediary, and provided that all-important shield of anonymity," he says.

Later, as an instructor, Krohn believed this process would work for undergrads, as well. "I believed it would be an excellent experience for students to take actual workplace issues and fashion workable solutions they could offer a manager," he says.



# Students help their community

He began forging partnerships with external businesses to try out this mutually beneficial proposal.

“We recently worked with a restaurant that was suffering due to friction between the managers and employees,” says Krohn. “What we discovered was there were only two managers available for a large number of employees, and they felt it was nearly impos-

sible to get any face time. Our group developed and presented an idea for a structured communication policy which allows employees to voice individual and group concerns in a non-combative way.”

Krohn also has worked with Cory Chambers, Director of Sales and Marketing for the Indianapolis JW Marriott. Chambers became involved as a result of his membership on the TCEM advisory board. When Krohn approached him for a strategic partnership, Chambers welcomed the help.

“We’re dealing with a large number of openings. It’s not just about finding people to fill a job, it’s also about finding talent that can be used further into the company,” Chambers says.

Chambers was interested in looking more deeply than mere recruiting: he also wanted to fulfill and match the company’s mission and values for success down the road.

And he very much liked the idea of reaching out to the local community through interaction with the school. “They get some real-world experience, but in return, we get relationships. A lot of them are ambassadors for our industry to IUPUI,” Chambers continues. “It also gives us the ability to stay current with what’s being taught.”

Case-study methods linked to classroom teaching is a traditional academic approach, but ‘the field’ is where the academics meet reality. Krohn says you can only learn so much in a classroom, but pointedly adds businesses often get so caught up in the ‘here and now,’ they don’t step back to consider how some new approach may affect organizational strategy.

“Our strategic partnership benefits us both,” Krohn says. “It is clearly a win-win situation.”

— *Lynnell Nixon-Knight*

