

DATE: November 28, 2016
TO: Active Chapters of Sigma Gamma Epsilon
FROM: Dr. Diane M. Burns
Vice President, Central Province
RE: Site Visit to Indiana University Northwest

I visited the Department of Geosciences at Indiana University Northwest (IUN) on November 18, 2016. I was met by future SGE advisor Dr. Erin Argylian, who gave me a debriefing of the origin of the students' petition, and the role that she would undertake as the advisor to the chapter. We discussed action items to get the chapter up and running by the end of this semester, benefits to the students and department of having a SGE chapter at IUN as well as the ways that SGE benefits from having a new chapter added. Dr. Argylian and the main student petitioner, Katie Gurnicz, orchestrated meetings with the current and future department chairs (Dr. Zoran Kilibarda and Dr. Kris Huysken, respectively) as well as the student petitioners. Even though I met with only three faculty, that was the entire department's faculty members; it is a small but strong program. They have risen from approximately 6 majors in 2004 to 24 majors currently. The university, itself, is not overly large, with a total enrollment of approximately 5,000.

Dr. Argylian and I walked through the building during the course of our meeting, having a chance to discuss program details as well as see what equipment and resources existed in their department. There are spacious and comfortable classrooms, fairly newly renovated stadium seating main classroom with projection room, ample computer labs, wonderful mineral/rock collection that predates all of the current faculty members, thin sectioning lab, and a really nice x ray fluorescence microscope room that is shared and co-purchased with the departments of Biology and Chemistry. Construction has already begun on a new Physical Science Building which is projected to be completed in Fall, 2017. While the Geosciences Department will not move over into the new building, it will greatly benefit from the new and increased space for the Physical Sciences at IUN.

I then met with Dr. Huysken, Department Chair, who proceeded to give me an overview of the department's history, majors and success rates upon graduation. Dr. Huysken pointed out that there is a high level of student research conducted at IUN because all of the faculty are very active in their research endeavors. The conjecture is that they have been steadily increasing in student enrollment as a result. The Department is in the process of developing an honors option to the degree program, and this option would require a research project to be completed. Although money is tight in any school budget, there are on campus research grants and student travel awards for conference attendance that are available to support student research. Dr. Huysken enthusiastically endorsed the students' efforts to establish an SGE chapter at IUN, and she outlined the benefits of having one – recruitment and encouragement of original research being the top two. She pledged to promote and help establish the chapter should we agree to ratify this petition and saw it as a great opportunity to strengthen the research aspects of the faculty and students. I see her and the other two faculty's support as a welcome commitment to the establishment of a student chapter at IUN. Indeed, all of the faculty will be initiated into SGE or have their membership renewed with the installation of a chapter at IUN.

I then met over lunch with the student petitioners for a round table discussion of why they sought to establish a chapter. We discussed individual as well as group benefits of being a member of SGE as well as individual ideas of what interested each student. With each person's interests, a discussion then ensued as to use SGE as a networking tool to help them get accepted into graduate school, what resources SGE might have to help them further their careers and what information I could pass along to perhaps open some doors for them. I am happy to report that each of these discussions met with enthusiastic responses from the students – they are very eager and able to take on the role of being SGE members. I concluded the meeting with the students by tasking the incoming department chair, Dr. Kris Huysten, with re-establishing her membership with SGE and overseeing the election of officers as well as initiation of the inaugural set of students.

The department offers two B.S. degrees in Geology and in Environmental Science, as well as a B.A. degree in Geology. There are two minors that can be pursued in addition to the undergraduate degrees, geology and earth science. The department has 3 faculty members with approximately 24 undergraduates.

The IUN faculty and students are heavily engaged in research activities and has a very well-established academic program. The department has strong ties with the Calumet Gem/Mineral Society, which has provided scholarships to students in the past.