International collaboration provides student teaching opportunity

What started some three years ago as a relationship-building trip to Panama by USI’s provost, the College’s dean and a core team of administrators, has developed into a partnership resulting in a series of firsts. This spring semester was the first time USI sent education majors outside the United States to fulfill part of their student-teaching requirement, the first time the International School of Panama (ISP) in Panama City, Panama, invited student teachers from abroad to work at the school and the first time senior education majors Elizabeth Burnett and Marissa Gray lived and taught outside the U.S.

“This type of collaboration and opportunity is in line with the University’s goals,” said Heidi Gregori-Gahan, assistant provost for International Programs. “This fits into our overall mission to prepare students to live wisely in a diverse and global community.”

ISP is an American-style, English-speaking PreK-12 school that operates on a U.S. school calendar and is in the same time zone as Evansville. Students attending the school are children of diplomats and corporate executives; even the sons of Panama’s president attend. Because the school serves a diverse and affluent population of 1,100 from 30-40 countries, it’s equipped with computers, tablets, interactive Promethean whiteboards as well as a pool, tennis courts, soccer fields and more.

Student teaching at USI employs a 16-week co-teaching model; students are placed in area schools and work with a licensed teacher. The teacher serves as a guide and mentor throughout the experience. They plan together, instruct together, do assessments together; they work as a team. To ensure the same standards were in place at ISP, Joyce Rietman, USI’s director of advanced clinical experiences and co-teaching, provided ISP’s teachers with a condensed version of the co-teacher training USI offers educators in the U.S. when she traveled with Gray and Burnett to Panama this spring.

Had Burnett and Gray completed all their student teaching in the U.S., they would have remained with the same co-teacher for the duration of their student teaching, but since they completed half of the teaching in the U.S. and half in Panama City, Rietman wanted to expand their learning experience and placed them in different grade levels. They spent the first half of their student-teaching semester co-teaching with seasoned educators in Evansville, at Harper and Cynthia Heights, both K-5 schools. Burnett was with kindergartners at Harper and then with fourth graders at ISP, while Gray worked with fourth graders at Cynthia Heights and then in a first grade classroom at ISP.

“I have taught in a school where 98 percent of the students were on Free and Reduced Lunch, and in a school where the fourth graders have nicer things than I do,” said Burnett. “I am able to look at the bigger picture now, and realize that all students need attention, it may just be in different ways.”

Adjusting to teaching is a challenge for all student teachers, but Grey and Burnett had cultural adjustments as well. To help them ease into their new lifestyles in a foreign country, ISP’s principal paired them to live with two of her female faculty.

The relationship between USI and Panama is one the University hopes to grow and establish as a recruitment tool, since one day ISP students will look for a university to attend and remember their American teachers, said Gregori-Gahan. “Both Marissa and Elizabeth are great ambassadors for USI.”

But it’s not just USI and ISP who will gain from the relationship, both Gray and Burnett will bring back expanded perspectives that will influence them for the rest of their lives. “Through this experience I have grown as a person and have learned about the culture. It is very interesting to witness and experience day-to-day life in another country,” said Gray, who will enter the University of San Francisco this fall to pursue a master’s degree in international and multicultural education. “Working with students who have such an array of backgrounds comes with its own challenges; however, I truly feel that I have refined my ability to incorporate multicultural learning into the classroom.”
The University of Southern Indiana is celebrating its 50th anniversary during 2015. Reflecting upon our history, it’s hard to ignore the amazing growth and success achieved during the first 50 years. The maturation of the University—and specifically Pott College—during that time leads me to wonder what the next 50 years will hold. Certainly, the tremendous success thus far has created momentum for us to continue to challenge ourselves to achieve. Over the last several years, the College has made concerted and continued efforts to develop “roadmaps to success.”

In 2008, to help guide progress, Pott College embarked on an ambitious five-year strategic plan, the first ever in the history of the College, which provided the framework for the continued success the College enjoys today. Then, in 2011, the University’s restructuring resulted in the addition of two departments, Teacher Education and Kinesiology and Sport. Shortly thereafter, Pott College officially became the Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education. The addition of two outstanding departments and the extensive accomplishments from the first strategic plan provided guidance in developing the College’s second strategic plan (2015-2020). This new plan, unveiled this spring, will continue to move the College to new levels of success. Within it you will find the new vision, mission, goals and strategies developed by and for Pott College. We are excited about our newest “roadmap to success.”

Four key strategic goals emerged from this process, each with aggressive strategies and metrics to assist the Pott College in reaching new levels of excellence. A summary of the vision, mission and goals is below. To read more about this plan, I encourage you to visit our website at USI.edu/science.

Vision
The Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education strives to be a leader in quality undergraduate education and experiences, including professional development and community partnerships.

Mission
The mission of the Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education is to provide students with a rigorous and diverse undergraduate education by developing analytical, problem-solving and communication skills that prepare students for careers and postgraduate pursuits. We promote student and faculty interactions in state-of-the-art facilities and provide opportunities for students to participate in undergraduate research, scientific discovery and hands-on learning experiences.

Goals
1) The Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education will attract academically strong students;
2) The Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education will enhance student learning and engagement;
3) The Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education will increase the number of graduates while maintaining academic excellence;
4) The Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education will support innovation in teaching, research and service.

Scott A. Gordon, Dean
Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education

Hudson appointed chair of mathematics department

Dr. Rick Hudson, assistant professor of mathematics, has been named chair of the Mathematics Department. He is a 2002 USI graduate with a bachelor’s degree in mathematics teaching, and the recipient of the President’s Medal. He holds a master’s degree in mathematics from the University of Louisville and a doctorate in mathematics education from Indiana University. Hudson became a member of USI’s faculty in 2009. He is widely published in academic journals and has authored several book chapters and is a frequent presenter at national conferences.

New master’s degree approved

The University of Southern Indiana’s Board of Trustees approved a new graduate degree program: Master of Science in Sport Management. With this degree, students will be well-positioned for employment in a number of sport and recreation careers in an increasingly competitive job market. According to the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, jobs in sport management are projected to increase by 32.5 percent in Indiana by the year 2020. Jobs include meeting and convention planners, recreational sports administrators, sport officials, sports agents, sports media, sport marketing managers, sport sales managers and general managers.

With a master’s in sport management, students will gain an understanding of the industry structure and culture, strong business skills and hands-on experience necessary to become a successful and competent sport and recreation professional.

The University anticipates approval of the degree program by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education this summer and could begin offering the program as soon as fall 2015.
Engineering team set to make splash with solar-powered boat

A team of USI’s engineering students will be the first to represent the University in Solar Splash, an intercollegiate solar-powered boat competition that attracts teams from around the world.

Four of the six team members were in search of a senior project when they saw a poster advertising the regatta and decided to make it their project. Despite having no experience designing or building anything solar powered, the team members were drawn to the competition for that very reason. “It was my intention to choose a topic that was unfamiliar to me,” said Chad Wargel, team captain and senior engineering major with electrical emphasis. “Choosing a topic that doesn’t require research or an original thought may end with a favorable grade but what a waste of an opportunity to learn something new and become a better engineer.”

Solar Splash combines the fun of competition with education as it tests solar-powered boats for speed (300-meter sprint), maneuverability (slalom) and endurance (two-hour timed heat). In addition to the on-water events, each team submits a technical design report and a poster presentation.

Starting with an 18 x 3 ½ foot hull (donated by another college’s solar splash team and delivered to the campus by Dr. Zane Mitchell, professor of engineering), a $2,500 Endeavor! grant and $4,000 from department funds, the team went to work, each taking on a different aspect of the project.

“Through the engineering program at USI, I’ve learned that when I have a large challenge in front of me to break it apart and learn how to work through each section until I can tie everything together,” said Jacob Kaiser, senior engineering major with electrical emphasis, who was in charge of the solar design as well as mounting, power storage and wiring. I researched the different major components and figured out how they worked in the entire system.”

To gain competitive insights, the team studied the technical design reports of the past five winners published on Solar Splash’s website. They redesigned the boat’s cockpit, moving it forward so the boat would be more balanced, sourced solar and engine parts and materials, built the outboard propulsion unit and put in lots of hours outside of their busy course loads to design a competitive craft. They did it in the span of one semester, whereas most competing teams work on their boats for a year. “We did it in half the time with half the money,” said Wargel, who authored the technical report and presentation.

This year 17 or more teams will compete for the title of World Champion Solar Powered, but the thought of more experienced competition doesn’t deter USI’s team. “I’ve always had a competitive personality, so getting the chance to learn about uses for alternative energy and how a solar system works seemed interesting,” said Kaiser.

The result of their boat’s abilities is yet to be seen, as the competition is in mid-June, but the project has delivered some win-wins for the future engineers by employing their mechanical and electrical knowledge as well as strengthening soft skills critical in their future careers: communication, time management, budgeting, sourcing materials and project management, to name a few.

While this will be the first time for USI students to enter the competition, the 2015 team doesn’t plan on it ending with them. “Hopefully the data we collect will help other USI teams in future competitions,” said Wargel.

“The Solar Splash competition presents an authentic engineering design experience. The students are required to work within a team to develop and implement an alternative energy solution with multi-disciplinary concerns. This improves the students’ electrical and mechanical problem solving proficiency, and also strengthens their communication and teamwork skills.”

Paul Kuban, professor of engineering
Peer mentoring board poised as powerful retention tool

An invigorated Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education Student Advisory Board is becoming a strong voice for students in the College—and quite possibly, a powerful retention tool. The board, established four years ago, has expanded its activities in the last year.

The student advisory board consists of three to four students from each department in the College, and generally ranges in number from 21 to 28 sophomores to seniors. Dr. Glenna Bower, assistant dean of the Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education, and faculty advisor for the board, said the students’ goals are to help acclimate new students to the University, give voice to student concerns, and encourage involvement and professional development.

In fall 2014, the board sponsored its first Brain Drain Zombie 5K Run, intended to become an annual event. The students hope the race will become a fundraiser for professional development for the College’s student organizations.

A major part of the board’s work in the past year has been the creation of a mentoring program for students in freshman seminar courses. Members of the board are assigned to mentor freshmen in UNIV 101, the course that introduces freshmen to the University. This year, 18 Pott College freshmen were recruited and agreed to participate in the mentoring program which is funded by a Major as Home grant from the Provost’s Office. The students meet for weekly lunches, discuss how to maximize their USI experience and participate in social and recreational activities. “With the mentoring program, we’re taking the UNIV 101 experience a step further,” Bower said. “It is definitely a retention initiative.”

Several of the freshmen in the mentoring program will be the first residents of on-campus housing that will serve as a living learning community exclusively for Pott College students, opening in fall 2015. The College’s advisory board was asked to name the complex, and came up with the moniker PC3 to represent Pott College Community Complex.

The board assists with New Student Orientation, leading lab tours and answering questions from incoming USI students and has held two receptions for international students to help them acclimate and get involved in College activities. Students also can come to the board to ask for changes they’d like to see in the College, such as a recent recommendation for expanded lab hours.

USI lead institution in major math science grant

The University of Southern Indiana has received a $641,000 grant from the Indiana Department of Education’s Math Science Partnership (MSP) for Creating Algebra Teaching Communities for Hoosiers (CATCH), a collaboration between higher education institutions and public school districts across the state.

USI is the lead institution on the CATCH grant, with partners including Purdue University, Indiana State University, University of Indianapolis and four Indiana school districts: Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation, Community Schools of Frankfort, South Vermillion Community School Corporation and Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township.

Each higher education institution will partner with one school district to enrich teachers’ knowledge and skills, with the ultimate goal of improving students’ knowledge, skills and dispositions toward algebra. The grant focuses on teachers of students in sixth through ninth grade and will require teachers to participate in more than 250 hours of professional development, including three summer institutes. USI faculty for the CATCH grant are Dr. Doris Mohr, associate professor of mathematics and Dr. Rick Hudson, chair of the Mathematics Department.

“This is a unique opportunity for Rick and me to work collaboratively with three other universities in Indiana on a project targeting high-need school systems,” Mohr said. “These particular schools were chosen because of their lower-than-average pass rates on the Algebra I end-of-course assessment. The more students who successfully engage in learning Algebra I, the more students there will be who go on to be successful in Algebra II and higher-level math courses. This in turn leads to more choices at high school graduation.”

Hudson said, “We know that algebra functions as a gatekeeper to the study of advanced mathematics courses at both the high school and collegiate levels. By ensuring that more students have access to high-quality teaching of algebra, we hope more students will be prepared to pursue careers that require students to reason quantitatively, such as many of the STEM fields.”

USI received an additional $27,000 MSP sub-award as part of an EVSC-ISTEM Grant Leadership Team that included Mohr, Hudson and Dr. Jeff Thomas, professor of education, along with representatives of Butler University and the EVSC. This second grant will allow partner institutions to work with K-8 teachers and students in the EVSC to explore mathematics content knowledge by using science and engineering applications.

The MSP program encourages collaboration between institutions of higher education, local school corporations, and elementary and secondary schools to develop learning activities and increase the subject matter knowledge of mathematics and science educators in Hoosier classrooms. The grants are federally funded.
The University’s seismographer records quake in Nepal

The USI Geology Department seismograph registered the devastating earthquake in Nepal on April 25. The 7.8-magnitude quake struck an area between Kathmandu and Pokhara, killing 7,500-plus people and injuring more than 14,500. Tremors and aftershocks from the earthquake caused deaths as far away as China and India and set off an avalanche on Mt. Everest, killing climbers and their guides.

The seismometer is located in a subterranean vault behind the USI Foundation office on Clarke Lane. It’s been at USI for more than 12 years and is part of the Advanced National Seismic System (ANSS). The instrument is maintained by and data are streamed through the St. Louis University Earthquake Center.

“The instrument—actually three—measures ground motions in three directions: vertically, east-west and north-south. They are more sensitive than what we can feel, hence it records earthquake events that are not felt locally,” said Dr. Paul Doss, professor of geology.

Student’s summer research could change lives

Adam Ferrari, junior chemistry major and the recipient of a $5,000 Eli Lilly and Company Undergraduate Research Fellowship, will spend 10, 40-hour weeks this summer working with Dr. Edmir Wade, associate professor of chemistry, to develop and synthesize a water-soluble molecular cage.

The molecular cage, drafted and engineered by Wade based on research work he conducted as a graduate student, is significant because it has the potential to be used in multiple beneficial capacities. For instance, it could be used in the field of medicine to transport certain active ingredients to specific sites within the body (making it a delivery system), or it could be employed to retrieve something harmful from within the body, such as heavy metals. The exact capacity in which the molecular cage can and will be used is still unknown, because once the cage is built it has to be rigorously tested to determine how it, as a molecular structure, reacts within the body.

“That’s something that is way in the future. What we are doing this summer is building the cage so we can determine what can be done with it,” Wade said.

Not only are they building the molecular cage, but they also are constructing the pieces of which the cage is made. Ferrari described the work he and Wade will conduct this summer as analogous to manufacturing (synthesizing) and assembling a jigsaw puzzle. “We have to get the pieces to match the picture we have on paper,” Ferrari said. “There will be lots of trial and error, as the pieces will only fit a certain way.” Synthesizing the “puzzle pieces” to develop the cage requires sourcing and purchasing molecular components from commercial chemical companies.

Ferrari has worked closely with Wade for the past two and a half years on a number of research projects and credits Wade with igniting his interest in research. “I hated research in high school, but once I started working with Dr. Wade I found joy and passion for what we were doing,” he said. During that time, their mentor-mentee relationship became one of real friendship, and they often help each other with personal projects during off-campus hours.

After the project is completed, Wade and Ferrari will travel to Indianapolis to present their findings to Eli Lilly and Company at a symposium. Additionally, Wade wants Ferrari to work toward publishing the project in the Journal of Undergraduate Chemistry Research. Beyond presenting and possibly publishing the research project, the opportunity to conduct research with Wade puts Ferrari on a path to pursue a career in research or medicine—the two avenues he’s most interested in.

Ferrari also was awarded a $1,000 Barnett Research Award to be used for research materials.
Science, Engineering, and Education Research Grant Awards

Several faculty in the Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education have been awarded research funding. The Science, Engineering, and Education Research Grant Award that is given to non-tenured faculty so they can pursue either new research, continue research in progress or complete a project.

Dr. Kim Delaney
Assistant Professor of Biology
Raising the Dead: Resurrecting Ancient Protein Ancestors

Dr. Andrew Jason Hill
Assistant Professor of Engineering
Experimental Determination of Equilibration Area with Numerical Modeling

Dr. Austin Anderson
Assistant Professor of Kinesiology and Sport
Improving LGBT Health by Understanding and Transforming Community Recreation Participation Opportunities

Dr. Ronald Diersing
Associate Professor of Engineering and
Dr. Andrew Jason Hill
Assistant Professor of Engineering
Retention of Freshman and Sophomore Engineering Students Through Peer Mentoring and Tutoring

Dr. Vella Goebel
Associate Professor of Education and
Gina Berridge
Associate Professor of Education
A Pilot Program of Year-Long Internships for Elementary Education Majors in their Last Year of Course Work

Innovation Implementation and Research Awards

The Innovation Implementation and Research Award recipients are the first to receive funding from a source established last fall. This was designed to encourage faculty to propose ingenious ideas to stimulate enrollment and ensure undergraduate success. The research and teacher-based strategies faculty propose help position the College on the national education frontier as a progressive and forward-thinking institution.
Faculty goes to Washington to educate policymakers

We don’t think of scientists stumping Capitol Hill on issues of public policy, but that’s the mission of USI’s Dr. Paul Doss, professor of geology, as the new chair-elect of the Geological Society of America’s (GSA) Geology Public Policy Committee.

The committee meets in Washington, D.C. every spring to educate legislators and advocate for support of science and its application in policy making. But is it a scientist’s responsibility to educate policymakers? “In my ideal world, I’d like to think that it’s not my responsibility,” Doss said. “Our elected representatives can’t be expected to know everything, and yet these folks have enormous responsibilities. Given that, we should inform them on how we perceive our information, knowledge, data—our “stuff.”

In March, Doss and other committee members met with the staff of Congress members representing their districts to talk about the overall importance of geoscientific data to society and life. But more specifically, they wanted to discuss The Secret Science Reform Act, a bill then on the House floor.

The Secret Science Reform Act contains language explicitly banning the Environmental Protection Agency from using any science that is irreproducible to generate public policy. On the surface, that sounds reasonable, but Doss explained it would render most scientific data, especially in the earth sciences, unusable in terms of informing policy. “Many geological events are by definition irreproducible,” he said.

The earth is not a test tube or a petri dish. It operates on its own time scale; it is impossible in many cases to control all the variables in the real world. But because they’re not reproducible does not make it invalid science. It is still absolutely valid science.

For example, Doss’s students collect water quality data from homeowners’ wells—that data is irreproducible because of privacy-related issues. “A lot of hydrogeological data is collected this way,” he said, pointing out that much health-related data also is collected anonymously, and thus irreproducible.

“The bill is clearly designed to reduce the ability of EPA to regulate. If successful, it will be a blow to regulation of health and the environment,” Doss said. While he was in Washington, the Obama administration threatened to veto the bill if it passed the Senate.

“As the discipline’s society that represents 25,000 members, first and foremost we are dedicated to the sound use of science in development of public policy,” Doss said. “That bill as represented is in opposition to one of the fundamental missions of the GSA.”

Doss, who previously served as chair for the GSA from 1999 to 2000, views his work on the committee as one of his most significant roles in life. “I feel it is the most important thing other than being a dad and a husband I can do, because we desperately need sound science in our local, regional, national and international policy.”

Summer program empowers next generation of female scientists

For the past five years, USI’s Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education has partnered with the Southwest Indiana STEM Resource Center (Swi-STEM) to recruit young women into the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Girls Only (GO) STEM! Summer Camp Program is for high-school girls and is led by USI’s female faculty and mentored by female undergraduates majoring in STEM disciplines.

Allison Grabert, director of the Swi-STEM Resource Center, recognizes the importance of a solid support system in getting girls excited about and invested in STEM disciplines. “We know when we get them around like-minded girls – who have the same passion and the same career trajectory – we can get them into a cohort where they’re not an outsider,” Grabert said.

To strengthen the bond between the girls and the undergraduates, participants stay in the residence halls at USI becoming familiar with...
GoSTEM! summer science program continued…

the campus. The connection is important to the undergraduates as well, who often recognize themselves in the younger girls, Grabert said. Many of the undergraduates participate as mentors year after year and often even after they’ve graduated, they return to volunteer or lead programs. “They have a buy-in in this program,” she said. “Many of them stay in contact with the girls they’ve made connections with at the camps. They know the struggles the girls are dealing with. It’s really a symbiotic relationship.”

Grabert and her team also have actively recruited girls in minorities by partnering with the Thea Bowman Leadership Academy in Gary, Indiana, and the Rickover Naval Academy in Chicago, Illinois, by offering free camp admittance. “Getting minorities involved has been near and dear to us,” she said. “They are an often overlooked subset of students that we think is an untapped source.”

The participants travel to Holiday World and Splashin’ Safari in Santa Claus, Indiana where the entire amusement park becomes a learning lab. Groups are divided into four study tracks: chemistry/nutrition, biology, engineering/physics and geospatial technologies. While the main focus of the activities depends on the track the girls are in, everyone engages in all the activities. Some of those activities in the past have been: determining the caloric count of the park’s French fries, reverse engineering by building slow coasters, measuring cardiovascular reactions to rides, and using data vests and probes to track velocity and acceleration of rides.

Dr. Kelly Sparks, assistant professor of education, is bringing something new to the table this year: geospatial technology. Teams will be introduced to the geographic information system (GIS) to survey and analyze spatial and geographical data, as well as geocaching and orienteering activities.

The program has made a national impact, as word now reaches beyond the Tri-state, with camp applications coming in as far away as Texas. Grabert said the reach is a testimony to the strength of the program. “It’s really a way for us to push USI into the forefront and get people talking about it. It serves as a great networking opportunity for USI for college admittance and internships across the country. We bring the kids here, show the campus off and let them get to know our faculty, our facilities and our students; then it feels like home to them.”

Vaccines: an answer to combating infectious disease

Dr. William Schaffner, an expert in bacterial and viral diseases and a professor of medicine and preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, presented a lecture on combating infectious diseases and how the effective use of vaccines can achieve a healthier population. In the fourth Dr. Marlene V. Shaw Annual Biology Lecture, Schaffner presented a talk, titled “Emerging Infectious Diseases: A Global Challenge,” that provided an overview of infectious-disease outbreaks and how they are transmitted. Among the diseases discussed were measles, thought to be eradicated in the U.S. in 2000, and emerging diseases, such as Ebola, chikungunya and MERS.

Of all the diseases Schaffner discussed, he said physicians most fear influenza because human, swine and bird flu viruses are constantly recombining and mutating so that our body’s immune system doesn’t recognize them and therefore can’t combat them. Choosing the right virus strains to manufacture a new seasonal influenza vaccine is a challenge. Even after vaccine manufacturing has begun, new virus strains may emerge. “If you’ve seen one flu season,” he said, “then you’ve seen one flu season.”

In addition to microbes being able to change genetically and emerge as new and different, there are several other factors contributing to the increase in infectious diseases—a burgeoning world population, people living close to animals and global travel. As a result, Schaffner said infectious diseases may often have an international origin, but they can come home. Therefore, it’s the responsibility of agencies such as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to bring awareness and education of how diseases spread and can be prevented, and it’s up to each of us to do what we can to end the spread of infectious diseases.

During his career at Vanderbilt, Schaffner has served in many roles including chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases and chairman of the Department of Preventive Medicine. He is immediate past president of the National Foundation for Infectious Disease, is its liaison representative to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, and co-principal investigator of the CDC’s Emerging Infections Program Steering Committee.

Schaffner is the recipient of numerous honors including awards for service and leadership from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, American Public Health Association, CDC, American College of Physicians and the World Health Organization.

A USI Foundation endowment underwrites the Dr. Marlene V. Shaw Annual Biology Lecture, which was founded with the purpose of bringing scholars and experts to campus to address the interfaces of biology with disciplines such as chemistry, agriculture, business, ethics, law and medicine.
Despite it being a man’s world, NBA right fit for feminine force

Though Michelle Harrell ’12 isn’t shooting game-winning three-pointers, dunking on LeBron or making melodramatic, foul-calling flops, she handles plenty of pressure working in the business side of professional sports.

A one-time softball and soccer player, as well as team captain, Harrell, a sport management graduate who is (as of March 2015) the ticket logistics coordinator for Pacers Sports & Entertainment, said the pressure to produce is something she’s used to. “I am someone who enjoys some sense of pressure or urgency to achieve,” she said. “It helps me stay motivated.”

In the field of sales, that is a bonus. Three years into her career, one dominated by men, Harrell could easily win rookie of the year award, given the effort and energy she devotes to her work. Her first year with the Pacers she exceeded sales goal, bringing in 105 percent revenue. “I handled the pressure pretty much how I handle any pressure in life,” she said. “I just get down to business. I know what has to be accomplished, and I do everything in my power to accomplish the goal.”

Getting down to business is what has allowed Harrell to advance so quickly, moving from an internship at WNBA Indiana Fever to consumer sales executive with the Fever before entering the high-pressure world of NBA ticket sales for the Pacers. “It helped that everyone in the office had a really good sense of humor,” she said, noting on stressful days the staff broke up the day by playing games.

As a ticket sales executive, Harrell fielded 80-plus calls daily to establish new business for the franchise by cold-calling former season ticket holders and single game buyers. If she wasn’t on the phone, she was following up with emails. When she wasn’t at her desk, she was showing the Pacer’s home court to community members, making her sales pitches face-to-face.

Harrell stayed in that position for a year and a half, being mentored by a supervisor who noticed she enjoyed the logistics side of ticketing and excelled at it. “It was a no-brainer for me to just make the shift to logistics full time,” she said.

Today, Harrell immerses herself in logistics and analytics that not only make ticket sales and delivery easier for the customer, but streamline the process for the sales reps. “We had been processing orders using handwritten carbon copies until about two months ago,” she said. Taking ticketing into the 21st century, she established digital forms that make it easier and faster to process orders. She also trouble shoots any mobile ticketing issues.

Harrell, who at one time planned on a career in medicine, said she’s happy with the path her career has taken. “I honestly had no idea what all went into the business of sports when I was still in college. I am still pretty young, but am extremely happy with where I am.”
2015 Calendar of Events

May 27–July 25  Mount Vernon Library summer reading program (library contact Anne Cottrell at 812-838-3286)

June 7–11  GoSTEM Camp

June 20  Girl Scout STEM-tastic Event, Holiday World, Santa Claus, Indiana

July 6–10  Middle School STEM Innovation Camp

July 13–17  EMC² (Engineering and Manufacturing Creativity Camp)

October 24  Evansville Area Early Childhood Conference (EAECA)

October 31  Brain Drain Zombie 5k