Bill Plater receives the 2009 John W. Ryan Award for Distinguished Contributions to International Programs and Studies

William Plater, Director of IUPUI’s Office of International Community Development, a joint project of the IU Center on Philanthropy, the IU Center on Urban Policy and the Environment, and the IUPUI Office of International Affairs, will receive the John W. Ryan Award for Distinguished Contributions to International Programs and Studies, at Indiana University’s Founders Day celebration.

International programs and studies is a field Plater has been tending in one way or another for more than 25 years.

Cultivating international opportunities for students, faculty and the community began when he was named dean of the IU School of Liberal Arts at IUPUI in 1983. It continued when he was named Executive Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Faculties at IUPUI in 1987. In his current post, Plater helps coordinate and develop the international work of the two host centers in cooperation with campus and university offices of international programs while developing new initiatives to promote international civic engagement. The office is helping to build the capacity of the Indianapolis region as a leading world city through the mission of IUPUI.

When he became dean, Plater inherited an international program that consisted of a single study abroad scholarship. As Executive Vice Chancellor, he discovered campus-wide international programming in the Office of International Affairs amounted to a volunteer geography professor with an annual budget of $500.

Today, the remarkable movement toward and development of international programs and studies at IUPUI is recognized nationally, particularly its strategic set of partnerships with Moi University (Moi) in Eldoret, Kenya; Sun Yat Sen (SYSU) in Guangzhou, China; and the Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo (UAEH) in Pachuca, Mexico; it has emerging partnerships with American University in Cairo, Peking University in Beijing, China, and the University of Bologna in Italy. The work of IUPUI’s Center for Service and Learning in international programs is known around the world.

The Institute of International Education (IIE) recently announced IUPUI is the recipient of the Andrew Heiskell Award for International Partnerships. The prestigious Heiskell Awards were established by IIE to recognize and promote outstanding international higher education initiatives among its member colleges and universities.

From the beginning, Plater said, he recognized that the campus should be engaged internationally. That belief was strengthened by his predecessor as Dean of the Faculties, Howard G. Schaller, a man who at one time was the Ford Foundation’s principal program officer for Southeast Asia and associate dean for the Kelley School of Business; in both roles he had developed an extensive network of relations with government and university officials in that region along with other IU officials, including then President John Ryan.
“He took me on a “grand tour” of Southeast Asia and convinced me that IUPUI should have an intentional and deliberate international program,” Plater said.

“International programs have been a tremendous part of everything that’s been done here,” he said.

There is extensive evidence, Plater said, that employers want employees who understand how a company or industry fits in globally, undergirded by direct experience. And service learning courses, internships and study abroad experiences give IUPUI students a set of credentials that demonstrates they possess that experience and have that understanding in ways that grades and transcripts can’t, he added. The current RISE initiative led by Executive Vice Chancellor Uday Sukhatme is a fulfillment of hopes Plater has had for many years. Through the RISE project, all IUPUI undergraduates will have had a study abroad, research, internship or other experiential learning experience before they graduate.

Working with and on behalf of such entities as the School for Public and Environmental Affairs and the Center on Philanthropy have made efforts to grow and strengthen international programs at IUPUI an avocation, Plater said, as he continues working to make the campus a gateway for the exchange of knowledge, experience, and ideas between Indiana and the world. Plater thinks IUPUI is well on its way to being known for educating graduates who are prepared for accepting the responsibilities of global citizenship.

(prepared by Rich Schneider, IU Communications)