

# Summer Field Trip to Indy

It's a sunny summer Wednesday morning, field-trip-to-Indy day for CAP first-year students who are up early, eating donuts and piling into three university vans for the trip with Prof. Scott Truex.

The mission: Meet alumni and answer the question "What does a planner do?"

**9 a.m.** we arrive at the Julia A.

Carson Transit Center to meet alumnae Lauren Day and Ellen Forthofer who tell us about the ten-year effort leading up to the adoption of a tax to fund the city's first bus-rapid-transit project. The IndyGo project will improve routes and speed up transportation options. How big of a deal is it? It's a game changer for low-income families.

Day and Forthofer are excited about the project and about a new initiative they've spearheaded this year to provide a low-cost fruits and vegetable market at the transit center during the summer, an idea that grew out of Forthofer's college experience working with a food provider in Tennessee.



Figure 1: Alumnae Lauren Day and Ellen Forthofer work for IndyGo.

"It's really exciting to be able to feed your passion and do good things for people and also stir up passion in others, too," she says, pointing out how other transit workers are now excited about the market and eager to help her sustain it.

"You can take what you're learning now and apply it in so many ways," says Lauren Day. "Don't worry about being pigeonholed or knowing exactly what you want to do now. There are so many opportunities."

**10 a.m.** we take a short walk north to The Platform where the College of Architecture and Planning shares space with ... .. in a building adjoining City Market. A farmer's market is set up in the street, and the plaza is filled with people soaking up the glorious weather and some quiet guitar music.



Figure 2: Development plan provided by Holladay Properties.

Inside The Platform, alumnus Derek Naber shares how he's pivoted throughout his career to take advantage of opportunities that come and go with the changing economy or arise through networking or even through college internships. He says planners work for consultants, developers, non-profits, state agencies, transit agencies, GIS firms, universities and other employers.

"Be nice to this guy," he jokes, pointing to Truex. "He knows a lot of people, and he connected me with the guy who's my mentor, Adam Thies."

It was Thies who provided Naber with his second job after college, and a project at that second job that led him to his current position as a developer with Holladay Properties. That project is developing the 150-acre site that used to be the Central State mental hospital campus west of Indianapolis. It's almost akin to building a new city, Naber says, and includes a school, senior housing development, and a mix of single-family homes and apartments.

"Ball State taught me to tell stories in drawings," he says. Now, pivoting again, he's found that financial analysis is important to his work, so he's gone back to school part time to earn an MBA.

"This is a program that's teaching you to be a problem solver," Truex says.

**11 a.m.** finds us listening to Lauren Petersen who spent a year teaching English in Poland on a Fulbright scholarship after finishing her planning degree. Today she's involved in planning for Indianapolis's tech future.

"Lean into your Ball State network, meet people, get to know your professors," Lauren Petersen says. "Your network is your net worth. Don't turn down opportunities."

**By noon,** we've headed to the noisy, bustling City Market for lunch. Later we will tease students who settled for Subway, then feel bad when we realize they didn't understand what was available inside.

**1 p.m.** belongs to David Leazenby who runs his own development company. He is well versed in Indianapolis trends and city planning and uses these skills to find sites and acquire land. Others flesh out the financial aspects of the deals, and Leazenby works with architects, planners, and landscape architects who design the projects. High-end housing, condos and townhomes with rooftop terraces, are his signature projects.

He says the cultural trail has changed the development game in Indianapolis: "There's nothing else like it in the country."

What's the cultural trail? It's eight miles of wide trails for bicyclists and pedestrians connecting six cultural districts throughout the city. Special landscaping and art installations are sprinkled throughout the trail which runs alongside city streets but is separated from traffic. Businesses have cited the trail as the deciding factor in where they locate.



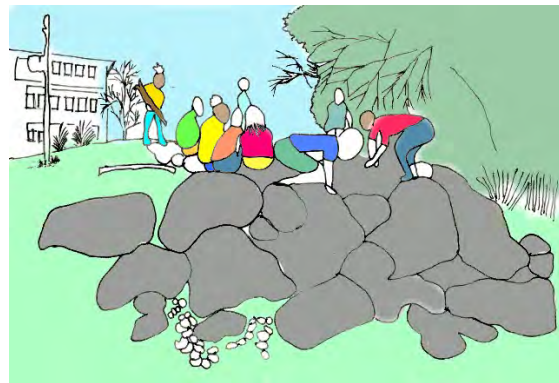
Figure 3: Cultural Trail sketch by Simran Bhinder, MURP, '18.



Figure 4: David Leazenby.

**1:30 p.m.** begins the Katies hour. We hear from Katie Wertz, a senior associate at Greenstreets (another alumni-owned company), and Katie Bannon, project manager of Indianapolis' HOME Investment Partnership Program which provides affordable housing.

"A Girl Scout always leaves a place better than she found it," says Bannon who renovates properties on the side.



Figures 5 & 6: Senior housing and children's playscape at Englewood. Sketches by Simran Bhinder, MURP '18.

**2:30 p.m.** Abigail Overton from Englewood Community Development Corporation and Joe Smoker of Near East Area Renewal. What is community development? These two alumni share how they work to stabilize neighborhoods, encourage investment, and improve the quality of life in less advantaged neighborhoods in Indianapolis.



*Figure 7: Alumnus Joe Smoker.*

Overton interned in Englewood when the community was beginning the process of applying to be part of the city’s Great Places 2020 initiative for creative placemaking. Now she is the Great Places coordinator, charged with making sure the program moves forward. Film festivals, concerts, gardens, play spaces, affordable housing, walkability, and even a rooftop hockey deck are among the amenities and initiatives.

Smoker, known as “that guy who bikes everywhere” because he used to bike 16 miles a day from downtown Indianapolis to his first job in Avon, is committed to keeping the near eastside affordable even as improvements are made. “The folks who lived there in the worst of times should have the opportunity to live there in the best of times,” he says.

**3:30 p.m.** We’re back on the streets of Indianapolis where Prof. Truex talks about his college days when he had to hunt to find a single restaurant downtown (today he guesses there are 300!) and shows us where Milhaus (yep, another alumni-owned development company) has built high-end apartments on Market Street.

**6 p.m.** We’re back in Muncie. Homework time!



*Figure 8: It was a long day, but we met interesting people and learned that planners do many different jobs!*