

# Redistricting the PASSHE System Communities

By Stanley Chepaitis

My name is Stanley Chepaitis. I have lived in Indiana, PA since 1992, when I joined the faculty of music at IUP. At that time, IUP was thriving and the State System of Higher Education was thriving. It was clear that IUP offered much to Indiana county in terms of employment opportunity and quality of life. IUP, Like almost all of the 14 Universities in the system, is situated in a small town. The University attracts a community of highly educated people that, though not monolithic in its viewpoints or affiliations, is clearly distinct from its surroundings. So it was a surprise to me, when I heard our former state representative say that he did not bother to campaign much in the Borough of Indiana, because that was not where his voters were. In looking at the PA house district map for Indiana County, district 62 encloses the borough of Indiana and much of the county further south. Just to the north is district 66, which also includes Jefferson County. Of particular interest to me is a small piece of district 66 which juts further south than the rest, right up to the border of Indiana. This is Rayne Township. Due to lower housing prices and availability of land, Rayne Township is a popular area for University faculty, staff, and administrators to live. It is reasonable to assume that a substantial portion of the nearly three thousand residents of this area have some affiliation with the University community. Why, then, was it cut out of district 62, while the more rural townships to its East and West remained in District 62? I would add that while the 2011 maps do seem to respect township borders, these borders were established in the 1800's and bear little relevance to demographic patterns of the present. I doubt very much that new hires to IUP realize that when they buy a house five miles away in Rayne Township, they are moving into a state house district which does not include Indiana or IUP. Why does this matter? Since 2011, the state system has been in steep decline. Governor Corbett made substantial cuts to the system's funding. When the next governor attempted to restore funding, the legislature blocked that effort. Now the state system is on the verge of collapse with faculty retrenchments and whole universities being merged. Locally, I am not aware of much support or advocacy for the system from our state representatives. They seem very concerned that the RGGI will cause the loss of a few hundred jobs in coal but not terribly concerned about the dire effects for Indiana County of a collapsing State University System. I am asking that you please look very carefully at all the communities which host the Universities of the PASSHE system. I believe you will find that they were districted to dilute the voice of the educated communities that universities attract. Reversing these gerrymanders will probably not change the statewide calculus in a tangible way, but it will allow these communities of interest more of a voice in their local government. It will encourage state representatives to be more mindful of that voice. It may just help save the State system of Higher Education, if that is still possible Thank you