

## MAP PROVIDES VIEW OF PREJUDICE

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Valparaiso University's Community Research and Service Center has updated its [online map](#) showing where expressions of hatred toward racial, religious or ethnic groups have taken place in Northwest Indiana and Chicago's neighboring southern suburbs since 1990. The interactive map developed by Valparaiso faculty and students provides details about more than 260 bias-motivated incidents that have taken place in the region. Visitors can read news stories about each incident and review a variety of graphs showing the frequency of different types of incidents, the perpetrators' targets and the severity of the incidents. Dr. Larry Baas, professor of political science and CRSC director, said presenting information about expressions of hate in an easily understandable manner is intended to encourage actions that promote a greater acceptance of diversity. "We know that there are incidents of racial, ethnic or other types of intolerance happening in our communities on a regular basis," Dr. Baas said. "Getting this information out there to the public helps start conversations about intolerance, how people have been harmed, whether or not progress is being made and what to do about this problem." Valparaiso students working in the CRSC have spent several years tracking bias-motivated incidents in the region. The Web site they developed was unveiled last fall at the Race Relations Council of Northwest Indiana summit "No Place to Hate," and this month's update includes research that uncovered additional bias-motivated incidents. Dr. Baas said cross burnings, scrawled racial epithets on houses and other incidents of hate appear to be happening more regularly in Northwest Indiana. Since a spike upwards in 2001, there have been approximately twice as many bias-motivated incidents reported annually as in the early 1990s. While a handful of incidents targeting Muslims have taken place following 9/11, those only explain a small portion of the surge. "The rising number of bias-motivated incidents seems to have more to do with the spread of ethnic groups across the region," Dr. Baas said. "Our communities are becoming more diverse, and you can see on the map how more and more incidents have been taking place in Porter County during the past few years." While incidents were rare in the early 1990s in Porter County, the annual number of reported incidents has risen considerably and now is approximately equal to the number of incidents reported in more populous Lake County. Valparaiso's researchers also have found:

- Race is by far the most frequent motivator and target in bias-related incidents, with 74 percent of reported incidents involving race and followed by religion-motivated incidents at 8 percent;
- The most frequent type of incidents involved bias-motivated physical or verbal harassment (55 percent of incidents), followed by bias-motivated vandalism (28.2 percent) and swastika graffiti (6.1 percent);
- The level of severity of individual bias-motivated incidents appears to be on an overall downhill trend. The mapping project began after a series of cross burnings and other incidents involving intolerance took place in the late 1990s. "There were people who said these types of incidents involving harassment and intolerance happened all the time, while others said they were just juvenile pranks that happened on rare occasions," Dr. Baas said. "At the time, we didn't have solid evidence to support either viewpoint." Approximately 25 Valparaiso students have helped collect data on bias-motivated incidents over the past several years, scouring newspaper reports for dozens of different terms. While some

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incidents may never be reported, the survey of newspaper reports provides a broad overview of the number and different types of incidents taking place in Lake and Porter counties and communities immediately bordering the counties. About the Community Research and Service Center Valparaiso University's Community Research and Service Center provides research assistance and other services to government and not-for-profit organizations in Northwest Indiana. Research is conducted by undergraduate students under the supervision of faculty to gain practical experience in applied research and familiarity with government, non-profit and other organizations. The CRSC has been cited by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change as a model for how universities can organize and establish partnerships to impact the surrounding community, and it has done work for the city of Valparaiso, Hoosier Environmental Council, Portage Parks and Recreation Department, Hilltop Neighborhood House, Porter County Juvenile Detention Center, Family and Youth Services Bureau of Porter County and numerous other organizations.

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