

Retention Action Team Executive Summary:

I. Current Status of Retention at IUPUI

- The Six year graduation rate at IUPUI has improved markedly over the last five years however Graduation Rates for the First Time Full-time Cohort remain the lowest among peer institutions.
- Retention problems persist throughout the academic “pipeline”
- Multiple interventions and considerable resources have been directed to improving retention and graduation but these efforts remain largely uncoordinated.

II. Recommendations suggestions:

- Recruit for retention - target students in upper 50% of high school class.
- Develop more effective ways for identifying students who are likely to struggle and use this information to better tailor retention strategies.
- Consider tighter control of course selection for high risk cohorts.
- Develop and implement “strengths-based advising”.
- Focus peer mentors within critical gateway courses on students who are not coming to class or completing assignments.
- Support mandatory programming for all students on probation after the first semester and first year.
- Create “academic progress” scholarships for students who move off of probation.
- Improve intellectual engagement by directing students to “Powerful Pedagogies” such as service learning, undergraduate research and overseas study.
- Streamline readmission and transfer policies.
- Encourage students differed from IUPUI to complete at least 30 hours of credit at Ivy Tech, before attempting to transfer back to IUPUI.
- Provide expanded support for programs which have proven successful at retaining African American and other under represented groups
- Develop specific advising strategies for part-time students.
- Pilot a “discounted senior year” in a program with an “excess” of seniors.
- Create a Financial Planning service for students.
- Undertake a systematic review of the undergraduate curriculum to remove barriers to retention while maintaining high academic standards.

III. Implementation:

- Undertake a campus-wide initiative to address retention issues in a systematic and sustained fashion such as was done for developing the Principles of Undergraduate Learning.
 - i. Prioritize initiatives
 - ii. Coordinate efforts
 - iii. Provide ongoing assessment tied to obtainable goals
- Tie improvement in retention and graduation to our institutional reward structure (resources).

The Charge to Retention Issues Action Team: *Study the leaky student pipeline – identify where the leaks are and try to plug them with ideas. Stipend/reward for students who have very good GPAs in two consecutive semesters, provided they enroll continuously. Provide adequate academic/tutoring help in basic courses. Consider performance of transfer students including intercampus transfers. Might there be a graduation incentive?*

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The team met six times over the fall and spring semesters. In addition, members conducted individual interviews with a variety of constituents across the campus. The team also shared ideas with the Action Team on Aggressive Advising and met jointly with the Council on Retention and Graduation.

The Scope of the Problem:

Few issues have attracted more attention and resources at our institution than retention. Several in-depth surveys of the problems and the ongoing efforts to deal with retention issues can be found including, The 2007 “Price Report¹”; “The Council on Retention and Graduation 2005/2006 Report²”; the Doubling Task Force³; the Foundations of Excellence in the First Year Task Force⁴; as well as the ongoing work of the Enrollment Management Council⁵, University College, and the Gateway Study Group.

- 1.) Preparation and motivation of incoming students for college level work which includes: the academic intensity of the student’s high school curriculum as indicated by the number of math credits successfully completed, and advanced placement courses attempted and completed. Motivational factors are reflected in how students use their time, including attendance patterns, as well as their willingness to complete assignments and devote necessary time to study. In addition, the high percentage of first generation students, students with dependents, and students from under represented groups create additional challenges to retention.¹⁰
- 2.) The campus environment which includes: the ability for students to form meaningful communities; the receptiveness or lack of receptiveness for diverse learners and cultures; access to faculty mentors; and the ability to commit to the institution (as a place from which they are proud to graduate).
- 3.) Structural or institutional issues which include: admission standards, probation, dismissal and readmission policies; grade forgiveness and grade replacement policies; transferability of general education credits and other course work between institutions, schools, and programs; frequency and consistency of course offerings; enforcement of pre-requisites and course sequencing; drop/add policies and access to effective academic advising.
- 4.) Financial issues which would include: lack of financial aid counseling and management, lack of need based aid, and low ratio of grant aid as opposed to loan aid. In addition, there are the persistent issues with the number of hours our students work, the generally lower level of family economic resources available to our students, and the inability of some students to prioritize their economic needs.

Plugging the “Leaky Pipeline:”

The Action Team identified the following areas of the pipeline that seem to have the most conspicuous “leaks” and developed a series of potential “fixes.” Where appropriate we also identified challenges to implementation. Many of these initiatives are underway or soon to be implemented. However, we are aware of no systematic plan for tracking or assessing these “fixes.”

1.) Students with poor performance in their first and second semesters are retained poorly: Thus, only 50% of FFTF students at IUPUI who had a first semester GPA below a 2.0 re-enrolled for a second semester.² the one year retention rate is much lower for IUPUI students who received below a 2.0 GPA for their first year (27%)⁶:

Retention Actions and suggestions for plugging the leak in first and second semesters:

- Recruit for retention: **For example**, although retention to graduation is poor for all cohorts of students it is twice as high (50%) among students in the 25-49 percentile of their high school class as it is for those in the bottom half of their class (24%).⁶ *However, it is critical that in any review of IUPUI admission standards, care must be given to maintaining our commitment to the diversity goals of IUPUI. Thus, we must continue working to provide alternatives for deferred students. (Ivy Tech)*
- Develop more effective strategies for identifying entering students who are likely to struggle and use this information to better tailor retention strategies. **For example**, instead of simply using conditional and regular admits we could construct “ability or advising groups” based on high school or first semester performance, factors which seems to be a better predictor of college success than admit status.¹¹
- Expand summer Bridge and other remediation efforts, such as the summer math camp, to include more of the high risk cohort. *However, there is a need to create more flexibility in scheduling such programs to accommodate students who must work in the summer. It must be recognized that these intensive programs can be costly to students even if tuition is reduced or free. Providing sufficient financial support to these students (who may not yet be eligible for financial aid before fall, is critical to insure a successful program. The campus should consider providing free housing to these students.*
- Continue to expand and refine Themed Learning Communities which have proven effective in increasing student performance and retention to the second semester.¹⁰ **For example**, look for better ways to quickly engage entering students in the academic enterprise (undergraduate research, freshmen seminars and topics courses)
- Consider tighter curricular control for high risk cohorts. **For example**, follow the recommendations of the Price report and avoid scheduling high risk students in more than two “gateway courses” their first semester. *However, this recommendation will require a serious reconfiguration of the curriculum and possibly degree check-sheets. Almost all majors are*

currently structured so that students have to take gateway courses in their first year.

- Make more effective use of peer mentors. **For example**, Assign peer mentors within critical gateway courses to students who are not coming to class or completing assignments. Extensive studies in the Department of Psychology have indicated that student success is directly correlated with attendance and completing weekly homework assignments. Using mentors to engage such high risk students could be a more effective means of increasing retention than making mentors generally available.
- Develop more effective “early warning” mechanisms, especially for gateway courses and use these in conjunction with administrative withdrawal. **For example**, utilize PeopleSoft (SIS) to notify students they are failing a class rather than using the paper notification system presently in use. *However, this will require reconfiguration of some gateway course to include earlier assessments of student performance.*
- Create alternative format courses which start later in the semester so students can drop and add without harming their GPA or financial aid. **For example**, develop courses which can be presented in one to three hour modules and which start at various times throughout the semester.
- Develop a mechanism for dismissing students who will not achieve a pre-specified minimal GPA (e.g. < 1.0) their first semester. *However, to be successful we must work with financial aid to see that such students are not awarded aid for a second semester.*
- Develop strengths-based advising modules that can be used in a variety of settings for students in all academic categories—from probation/reinstatement status to honors-level. A strengths-based approach focuses on students’ natural strengths and talents. **For example**, advisors can utilize strengths-based models in learning communities, bridge programs, and advising sessions. The strengths-based advising approach helps students gain confidence and develop goals that fit their natural academic and social talents. For those reasons, a strengths-based approach to advising may be particularly helpful for exploratory and first-generation students and for those who are on academic probation or were not admitted to a competitive academic program.
- Require second semester students who are on academic probation to participate in one of several academic support programs. **For example**, require such students to participate in Students Taking Academic Responsibility (STAR) mentoring sessions and strengths-based advising. *However, fewer than 10% of students on probation take advantage of STAR or Strengths-Based-Advising so increasing participation will require additional resources.*

2.) Students are not returning for a second year at an acceptable rate. The overall one year retention rate has remained near 61% for the last five years (based on the 2005 report⁶) the one year retention rate (five year average) at IUB is 76%. A proportion of this attrition is likely a carry over of the effect of poor performance which characterized poor retention to the second semester. However, the National Survey of Student Engagement as well as interviews with students who did not return for a second semester indicates that many students leave because they do not feel a connection to the institution or they have an unsatisfactory experience with student life.

Retention Actions and suggestions for plugging the leak in retention to the second year:

- Create mandatory programming for all students on Probation after the first year; **For Example**, expand Strengths Based Advising and/or STAR to the second year. *However, increasing utilization of these programs will require additional resources.*
- Create scholarships for improvement. **For example**, these awards could be tied to either improved GPA performance in the second term or between first and second year. (Such a program is in development for 2007-08).
- Address issues of connection by enhancing support for programs that link students to “Powerful Pedagogies” such as service learning, undergraduate research, and study abroad. **For example**, The Diversity Scholars Research Program at IUPUI has maintained better than 90% retention of their first year cohort. Other programs which have demonstrated an ability to retain students through effective engagement include: the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP), the Multidisciplinary Undergraduate Research Institute (MURI), the Norm Brown Scholars Program, the Nina Mason Pulliam Scholars Program, Athletics, and the Service Learning Program.
- Involve faculty in partnership with Campus and Community Life to enhance the academic components in Student Housing because retention of students in residence is no higher than for students living off campus. **For example**, the Campus Center and the future Multi-Cultural Center should be used to make up for the lack of meeting rooms in Housing to offer special versions of gateway courses or first year experience courses that can be used to build community among campus residents.
- Create more opportunities for work on campus. **For example**, create additional programs such as the “Life and Health Science Internship Program” (School of Medicine and School of Science) to encourage students to return for a second year.
- Streamline readmission and transfer policies particularly for students in good standing who have been away for more than a semester. **For example**, review the policies that require students who have been out for two semesters to reapply for admission.

3.) Transfer students who enter the university as freshmen (fewer than 30 hours) are also retained poorly compared to IUB and to Transfers who come with more than 30 hours. Thus, only 63% of our new (freshmen) transfer students returned for their second year (compared to 82% for IUB.)⁶ Students who transfer as juniors or seniors are retained at much higher rates⁶. IVY TECH State College is currently the largest source of new transfer students to IUPUI (330 students in 2005.)⁵ and these students have the lowest one year GPA at IUPUI of any transfer group and are retained at a lower rate than the average transfer student (61% vs. 63%) However, transfer students from Ivy Tech who come to IUPUI after completing their freshman year have the highest one year retention rates at IUPUI⁵ (72%) compared to those coming from other institutions in the state.

Retention Actions and suggestions for plugging the transfer student leak:

- Develop special programs for freshmen transfers. **For example**, Require Orientation for all transfer students or at least for students with 30 or fewer transfer hours and create special “First Year Seminars” for freshman (second semester) transfers. Although students with experience at other institutions may have acquired some of the basic knowledge usually covered in the freshmen seminars they are new to the University and have missed the chance to gain a perspective on their institution and to form connections with their peers.
- Continue to coordinate with IVY TECH State College to facilitate deferrals and transfers. **For Example**, offer joint learning communities with Ivy Tech; support expansion of joint advising positions; create better mechanisms for tracking students across the two institutions; and continue to work on well articulated curricula between the IVY TECH and IUPUI programs.
- Continue to work with IVY TECH State College to prepare students for success at IUPUI. **For example**, develop policies which encourage students differed from IUPUI to complete at least 30 hours of credit at Ivy Tech, before attempting to transfer back to IUPUI because it has been shown that such students are more likely to be retained at IUPUI⁵.

4.) African American Students are retained at markedly lower rates than other students; The one year retention rate (five year average) of African American students at IUPUI was 58% as of 2005, but there was also a marked decline in retention from 62% in 2003 to 53% in 2005.² Moreover, a greater percentage of African American students are on probation after both their first (47% vs. 30%) and second semesters, and a great proportion of our IVY TECH transfers are African American students.¹² The six year graduation rate of the 2000 cohort of African American Students was 21% (compared to 29% for Caucasians and Asian Americans) This is up 4% from the 1999 cohort, but still well below the 59% of the IUB cohort of African American Students.⁶

Retention Actions and suggestions for plugging the leak in retaining African American Students:

- Provide expanded support for programs which have proven successful at retaining African American and other under represented groups such as Norm Brown Scholars Program, Nina Mason Pulliam Scholars Program, the Student Support Services, McNair Program, and The Diversity Scholars Research Program. *However, in addition to funding for students in these programs it is critical that adequate support staff be sustained as well.*
- Continue to develop a more supportive campus environment. For example, in addition to the creation of a “Multi-Cultural Center,” the appointment of a Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the institution of required training in cultural awareness and sensitivity, and the continued recruitment and retention of more faculty and staff of color, provide additional support for expanded curricula in diversity studies, and expanded support for the outreach and mentoring efforts of the Black Student Union, African American Brotherhood, African American Sisterhood and other groups.
- Work with Community Groups, Indianapolis Public Schools, The School of Education, IUPUI’s Office of Admissions and Enrollment to double African American Enrollments at IUPUI. **For example**, in addition to recruiting from Marion and Lake County, work with Ivy Tech, which has a higher enrollment of African American students to insure more effective transition of transfer of these students to IUPUI
- Expand “Preschool-16 programming.” **For example**, cooperate with IPS to foster the success of Crispus Attucks as an “early college,” thereby allowing Indianapolis be a “grow your own” environment in terms of increasing diversity and success among our students.

5.) Students who attend part-time are maintained at a markedly lower rate than are full-time students. Thus the three year retention rate of part-time freshmen was only 28% compared to 41% of full-time freshmen (1994 and 1992 cohorts respectively). This discrepancy persists across all grade levels, thus only 65% of seniors enrolled part-time had graduated 4 years later (compared to 87.5% of seniors enrolled full-time.) Fortunately, the trend at IUPUI has been toward fewer students attending part-time, the percent dropping from 17% of total freshmen to 13% between the 2003 and 2005 cohorts. Nevertheless, these values are much higher than those at IUB and represent a sizeable number of students in the IUPUI pipeline. Part-time students have received little attention but it may be reasonable to conclude that they are more likely to be working full-time and less likely to be able to fully commit to their education. They may also be more likely to have family responsibilities and will not be eligible for full financial aid benefits.

Retention Actions and suggestions for plugging the leak among our part-time students:

- Conduct targeted studies of this cohort to determine factors that impede persistence and degree completion.
- Develop specific advising strategies for part-time students. **For example**, work to develop an extended curricular plan with clear benchmarks and goals and a timeline to completion.
- Review our institutional policy which may discourage degree completion. **For example**, reconsider our institutional policy of discouraging associate degrees because such benchmarks may be important in retaining part-time students and encouraging degree completion.
- Retain a portion of grant and scholarship funds for part-time students.

6.) Seniors in some degree programs are less likely to graduate than are students in other programs. In a 2003 analysis of graduation rates among IUPUI Seniors⁹ the authors noted that the overall rate of graduation of seniors (4 year) was 87.5% thus demonstrating that the “pipeline” continues to leak, even after students have entered their degree programs and completed most of the requirements. The study notes considerable variation between programs in senior graduation rates (from 100% to 75%) Although differing degrees of selectivity and other factors complicate the analysis of such data, it is reasonable to look for curricular barriers (course scheduling, senior capstones, as well as financial aid and other resource issues) in explaining such “failure to launch.”

Retention Actions and suggestions for plugging the leak in students progressing through their senior year:

- Encourage programs with lower senior graduation rates to review their curricula for barriers to graduation and develop advising tools to assist students in transitioning to graduation. **For example**, are capstone courses or other critical courses offered frequently and at convenient times?
- Encourage programs to routinely review files and contact “stopped out” seniors to determine if any assistance or motivation can be provided to encourage completion.
- Pilot the proposed “discounted senior year” in a program with relatively low senior graduation rates or high numbers of students who have reached their financial aid cap.
- Work with General Studies to explore possibility of recruiting more “stopped out” seniors to that degree program. **For example**, could the hours in residency requirement be modified or could degree requirements be adjusted?)

Institutional Actions and Implementation Strategy:

In addition to the specific and targeted action items identified above the Team recognized that there are systemic factors behind many of the retention problems at IUPUI that will require a more generalized and sustained institutional approach to resolve. Similarly, successful implementation of many of the strategies described above will require support and direction from the campus Administration.

- **The Action Team recommends that the IUPUI embark on a thorough review of its undergraduate curriculum to determine if we can more effectively engage students and remove barriers to retention while maintaining high academic standards.**

Rationale: The Price Report noted the connection between high failure rates in gateway courses and poor retention of first year students. Much effort has been directed toward reducing the failure rates in these courses both on a course by course basis and through the concerted effort of the Gateway Group. However, failure rates remain high in several key gateway courses suggesting that a systematic review of our expectations may be overdue. Indeed, the last systematic review of the undergraduate general education curriculum at IUPUI occurred in 1995-96 when the Schools of Science and Liberal Arts developed “the Principled Curriculum¹³” In the intervening 12 years the nature of the IUPUI has changed dramatically, both in terms of its student demographics and in the opportunities and programs available (Bepko Scholars, Twenty-first Century Scholars, The Center for Service and Learning, The Center for Research and Learning, The Center for Teaching and Learning, University College, Campus Housing, etc.) There is a perception that the current curriculum is maintained as much to support the generation of credit hour income as it is to support student learning, student retention and persistence to graduation. The campus created a University-wide curriculum committee last year. We recommend that this committee be charged with initiating a thorough review of our general education curriculum. This effort should focus on examining mechanisms for interjecting greater flexibility in the curriculum while maintaining accreditation standards. Furthermore, the committee must be free to suggest new models, that include such “powerful pedagogies” as interdisciplinary learning, hands-on experience, service learning, undergraduate research, internships and other forms of “experiential learning” which recognize the changing landscape of higher education.¹⁴ Indeed there is a national dialogue on revisiting college curricula as evidenced in the work of Richard Light¹⁵ and Derek Bok¹⁶ which suggests that the curriculum on college campuses needs to be revisited for general education and in other academic areas if we are to remain global leaders in higher education. More to the point, the connection between our curriculum and poor retention is evidenced in the continued high failure rate in several key Gateway Courses; the possibility of alternatives to these courses has not been adequately addressed.

- **The Action Team recommends that IUPUI commit resources to develop a center to provide students and their families with help in planning and managing their finances with an emphasis on loan and debt management.**

Rationale: Currently, students enter college with little advice on planning and managing their resource to meet the challenges of obtaining a higher education. There is clear evidence that our retention rates are adversely affected by the number of hours students work off campus.¹⁰ It is also well known that first generation students and families are more likely to avoid accruing debt for education and that the choice of working OR going to college is seldom considered. Furthermore, graduation rates are likely to be adversely affected by students who “prematurely” reach their debt limits. Retention is likely to be improved if individualized financial plans can be developed which maximize the students’ ability to focus on their education. Several models exist for such counseling centers, most notably the program recently developed at the University of North Texas¹⁷ which used a modest increase in student fees to support its center. The number of undergraduates in the nation with credit cards (76%) who carry a balance forward each month is helping to create a “debt-ridden generation.” This growing problem “is exacerbated by students’ lack of adequate financial literacy skills—they do not know how to determine their own credit worthiness either through establishing quality credit or by improving their credit reports and scores; they cannot create basic spending and saving plans; and they cannot unravel the myriad of lending scams to which they may be subjected.”^[18] This national story is very likely reflected in the money management habits of IUPUI students. Informational workshops offered by a money management center could provide ongoing support for students and their families who struggle with financial literacy issues.

- **The Action Team recommends that the University develop a systematic and integrated approach for prioritizing, organizing, implementing and assessing our efforts to address retention with the end goal of producing a “Retention Action Plan” which sets obtainable goals, plans of action, and a time-table for regular progress reports and assessment for the entire University.**

Rationale: We recognize that implementation of every intervention is impossible in an environment where resources are limited. Strategic planning will be required to determine which interventions are feasible and how funding can be identified to support these interventions. Moreover, some interventions will require changes in the campus culture. The Action Team inventoried ongoing efforts directed at retention and found these too numerous to list. However, these efforts remain defuse, and aside from some minimal oversight from the Enrollment Management Council, the Council on Retention and Graduation, and yearly Retention Initiatives Reports compiled by the schools, there is little direction or coordination given to retention efforts. The team concluded that any attempt to effectively resolve IUPUI’s retention problems will require a more centralized approach tied to obtainable, assessable goals, and a well articulated campus-wide plan that recognizes the complex nature of the problems by breaking them down into manageable elements. The team identified models for such campus-wide retention efforts which included an internal process such as that used by IUPUI to create, implement and assess the Principles of Undergraduate

Learning¹³, and an external, professional consultant approach such as that used by Arizona State University to create and implement an institutional “Strategic Retention Master Plan: 2005-2011”¹⁹.

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