

Senior Year Experience

Charge: Inventory current capstone courses and identify best practices. Is sufficient help and information available regarding job searches or transition to graduate work?

Team: Andy Gavrin, Kathy Johnson, Steve Mannheimer, Sloane Thompson and Ken Wendeln

Current Status: In 2005, 59% of enrolled seniors received bachelor's degrees; individual schools ranged from 42% to 91%. Capstone courses have been the focus on substantial effort and assessment.

In addition to capstone offerings, this group chose to focus on steps that could be taken to help students to graduate and attain their career goals as expeditiously as possible.

Action Item Recommendations:

- Schools continue to examine capstone offerings to determine to what degree they include instruction and assignments pertaining to post-graduation planning, and strategies to achieving post-graduation goals
- Prepare an exit strategy for students, to enhance graduation rates of students with junior and senior credit hour standing

Implementation Strategy:

- ✓ Develop one-credit courses (linked to capstone experiences) that address post-graduation planning
- ✓ Improve advising and career services in the Schools of Liberal Arts and Science and the professional schools
- ✓ Provide specialized training to advising staff and to faculty who teach capstone courses on issues pertaining to seniors
- ✓ Students with junior standing (e.g., post-60 credit hours) should be required to resubmit or revise their academic plan and review it with their major department advisor
- ✓ Transfer students should be specifically targeted for advising and enhanced orientation services
- ✓ Expand internship offerings, and consider developing a systematic co-op program
- ✓ Provide scholarships to students who progress rapidly through programs, and explore development of BS/MS or BA/MA programs

Senior Experience Action Team: Final Report

Participating Members: Andy Gavrin, Kathy Johnson (Chair), Steve Mannheimer, Sloane Thompson, Ken Wendeln

Introduction: The Senior Experience Action Team met during the fall semester in order to review data related to the senior year experience at IUPUI and to analyze and strategically plan action steps that could be taken to improve the success of students approaching graduation, increase graduation rates, and ultimately benefit students' attainment of post-baccalaureate career goals. [IUPUI's 2006 Performance Report](#) (p. 79) highlighted that "...continuing low retention and graduation rates indicate a need for immediate action" and rated IUPUI's efforts in fostering student academic progress and achievement as unacceptable. We immediately recognized that seniors are an extremely heterogeneous group at IUPUI, with some students remaining at "senior status" (defined by the accrual of 96 or more credits) for many semesters before graduating – for this reason we've re-dubbed our action team the "exit experience" team, reflecting that we chose to focus on steps that could be taken to help students to graduate and attain their career goals as expediently as possible.

Part 1: Assessment

I. Relevant Existing Assessment Data Reviewed (reports are linked):

- [Bachelors Degree Recipients as a Percentage of Senior Enrollments](#)
 - Considerable variability exists across schools, ranging from 42% (Continuing Studies) to 91% (Social Work).
 - Across campus in 2005, 59% of enrolled seniors received Bachelors Degrees.
- [Non-passing statistics for upper-level courses](#)
 - This report was circulated to Deans and Department Chairs in Spring, 2005, as a means of identifying "bottleneck courses" that potentially slowed students' progress toward graduation.
 - It is important to note that not all students enrolled in these courses are seniors; considerable variability in DWF rates exists across programs, and this is often related to the relatively small numbers of students enrolled.
- [Inventory of Capstone Courses at IUPUI](#) (funded through a [PRAC grant](#) awarded to members of Faculty Learning Community on the Capstone Experience at IUPUI). This inventory reflects courses offered during the Spring, 2004 semester and subsequently is a conservative estimate of current capstone experiences (e.g., recently-developed courses such as INTL-I400 and I415 are not included).
 - Considerable work has been focused on examining the capstone experience, and capstone instructors have been provided with a summary of this report and feedback on capstone syllabi that were submitted. While these efforts have been

informative, our team recommends that schools continue to examine capstone offerings to determine to what degree they include instruction and assignments pertaining to post-graduation planning, and strategies to achieving post-graduation goals as part of the curriculum. Should these elements be missing from the majority of capstone experiences, we recommend that departments and programs consider developing one-credit courses (linked to capstone experiences) that address post-graduation planning.

II. Linked Assessment Reports and Charts Created by Ken Wendeln (Action Team Member):

A. The [IUPUI Undergraduate Retention and Enrollment Summary for Fall 2005/06](#) provides a detailed summary by class year of IUPUI undergraduate graduation and retention from Fall 2005 to Fall 2006, as well as the source of enrollments for fall 2006. For benchmarking purposes, the same summary report has been created for Bloomington: [IU Bloomington Undergraduate Retention and Enrollment Summary for Fall 2005/06](#). The following points are highlighted:

- With 9750 students in the junior and senior ‘pipeline’ to graduation, IUPUI has 63% more seniors than juniors. In contrast, Bloomington has 18% more seniors than juniors.
- Only 41% of IUPUI fall seniors graduated in the same academic year (compared to 68% in Bloomington), resulting in a much higher proportion of senior status ‘returnees’ as compared to Bloomington.
- IUPUI accepts more junior- (20% of class) and senior-status (14% of class) transfer students than Bloomington (6% of juniors, 2% of seniors). For IUPUI there are comparable proportions of transfer students from within vs. outside of the IU system. Transfer students from other IU campuses include both students who have stopped out and those who have not stopped out.
- IUPUI’s undergraduate fall-to-fall retention rate is nearly 10 percentage points lower (84% for seniors, 80% for juniors) when compared to Bloomington on the same basis (92% for seniors, 93% for juniors).

In summary, graduation rates and their potential for improvement are a function of *velocity* (how quickly students progress through their junior and senior years), *retention* (impact of stop-outs and persistence from year to year) and *efficiency* (credit hours taken versus needed/used for graduation). IUPUI’s junior and senior ‘pipeline’ presents challenges and opportunities for improvement, given that IUPUI serves higher proportions of non-degree seeking students, internal IU and external transfer students, returning part-time seniors, and working students than are typical on more residential campuses.

B. The charts included in the [IUPUI Junior & Senior Retention & Pipeline to Graduation at IUPUI](#) show: the overall progression from credit hours to degrees conferred for IUPUI, the average annual credit hours taken by IUPUI juniors and seniors by school; the ‘pipeline’ of

juniors and seniors vs. retention by IUPUI school, and lastly the degrees conferred by IUPUI schools. We highlight the following points:

- In FY05-06, the average undergraduate student seeking a Bachelors degree took a total of 25.1 credit hours during the fall, spring, and summer semesters. At this rate, the average student would require a minimum of 5 years to meet the undergraduate credit hour requirements for graduation. For each Bachelors degree conferred there were actually 6.2 students (2.8 freshmen/sophomores and 3.4 junior/seniors) in the degree-seeking 'pipeline'.
- For degree-seeking juniors and seniors, the average load is slightly higher at 25.4 credit hours per student. However, this varies significantly across schools (21.9 for SCS to 31.2 for MED+AH) and within programs as a function of whether students are junior vs. senior status. For Bloomington juniors and seniors, the average load is 29.1 credit hours for the spring and fall semesters (30.1 for those attending full time).
- For full-time students the Bloomington tuition rate is set on a flat-fee semester basis (for 12 to 17 credit hours), encouraging students to complete in 4 years. At IUPUI, the tuition is set on a per credit hour basis for all students, full- and part-time.
- The average reported IUPUI junior/senior retention rate in FY05-06 was 84%, varying between 95% and 76% by school. In comparison (including graduates as retained), Bloomington's junior/senior retention was 91%.
- In addition to the wide variation in reported junior/senior school retention rates, there is also a wide variation in the junior/senior 'pipeline' by school (ranging from the 'ideal' 2 juniors + seniors to 4.5) as shown in the 'pipeline' bubble chart. Schools (BUS, EDUC, and EGTC) on the 'calculated' retention/velocity line and in the 'green' show a reasonable match between retention and # of juniors/seniors in the pipeline. Those in the other areas require further school analysis as it would appear that there are significant transfers of junior/senior students among schools prior to receiving their degrees. UCOL (which does not issue degrees) enrolls a relatively small percentage (~10%) of juniors and seniors; these students must transfer to other degree-granting schools prior to their graduation.
- The 'degree' bubble chart substitutes the number of degrees conferred by school for the number of juniors/seniors registered in each school as shown in the 'pipeline' chart.

In summary, while these charts attempt to summarize and to provide comparative analyses within IUPUI (and across the Indianapolis and Bloomington campuses), they ultimately raise more questions. Perhaps these will lead to further analyses, insights, and actions by schools and programs that can demonstrate improvements in junior and senior student retention, the

quality and velocity of the student pipeline to graduation, as well as the efficiency of the student course work – all of which should culminate in an improved graduation rate for IUPUI seniors.

III. Additional Assessment Data Recommended:

The team recognized that it is very difficult to discern from the reports cited above whether seniors persist for many semesters because they, a) need *particular* courses to graduate that are difficult to schedule or enroll in (reflecting either scheduling difficulties or the absence of prerequisite skills or courses), or b) whether students accrue *many extra credits* due to transferring across schools, receiving insufficient advising, or needing to establish residency following an external transfer. To understand this issue better the team recommends the following:

- Generate histograms reflecting the number of credit hours earned at graduation by students (across schools, and across the past 5 years).

If more than 10% of students within a particular school are found to regularly have earned more than 128 credits, two additional analyses may be undertaken:

- Analysis of graduating student transcripts (across schools, and across the past 5 years) to determine whether students are graduating with significantly more credits than the approximately 124 required, and if so – what post-124 credit courses tend to be taken (this could be gleaned through audits of courses taken during last 2 semester by students graduating with more than 128 credits)
- Analysis of students transferring to IUPUI with 60 credits or more (Do these students receive sufficient orientation services? Are they being advised adequately? Is advising linked to time-to-graduation for these students? Are graduation plans [e.g., semester by semester academic plans] discussed and outlined during orientation advising sessions and/or follow up advising sessions?)

In addition, the team recognized the importance of career counseling and internship opportunities for seniors' attainment of career goals. We recommend the gathering of data related to two specific questions:

- Does the hiring of career specialists within schools facilitate post-graduation planning and achievement of individual students' goals (e.g., securing full-time professional job, graduate school acceptance)?
- Does student engagement in co-op or internship experiences provide an incentive for students to graduate? (what is the rate of graduation for students taking part in these experiences vs. those in matched groups that do not?)

Part 2: Strategy Formulation and Suggestions for Implementation

Throughout the past decade, intense efforts have been focused on improving the retention of beginning students at IUPUI through multi-faceted programming administered through University College and other academic units, as well as the Division of Student Life and Diversity. Our action team strongly recommends that *the campus prepare an "exit strategy" for*

seniors that is as comprehensive in scope as current gateway initiatives for beginning students. The challenge to implementing such programming is there currently is no campus-wide administrative unit that could readily coordinate implementation and assessment activities. Although it seems possible that University College could expand to provide administrative oversight for implementing and evaluating exit strategies for seniors in the future, in the absence of such centralization, activities would need to be administered within schools or departments and monitored in a distributed fashion.

Our specific strategies can be classified into three overlapping areas: 1) Advising, Career Counseling, and Post-Graduation Planning; 2) Expansion of Co-op and Internship opportunities, and 3) Creation of Incentives for Graduating.

1. Advising, Career Counseling, and Post-Graduation Planning: In contrast to services available for beginning students, there are relatively few services currently targeted for seniors. **We recommend more consistent advising and career services be deployed across the Schools of Liberal Arts and Science and the professional schools.** In terms of implementation, the locus of administrative control for such services could either be campus-wide or school specific – but this needs to be made very explicit to academic units. We also make the following recommendations related to advising or career counseling:

- Many students are encouraged (by their advisors or Learning Community instructors) to create 4-year or 5-year graduation plans when they are first enrolled at IUPUI. **We recommend that when students attain junior status (e.g., post-60 credit hours), they be required to resubmit or revise their plan and review it with their assigned advisor in their major department.**
- We recommend that schools enrolling high proportions of undergraduates (particularly Business, Education, Engineering/Technology, Liberal Arts, Nursing, PE/Tourism, and Science) **provide specialized training to advising staff and to faculty who teach capstone courses on issues pertaining to seniors.** Some schools may find it desirable and perhaps even necessary to hire professional advisors or career specialists to work with seniors.
- **Transfer students should be specifically targeted for advising and enhanced orientation services,** and decisions about transfer credit should be made expediently in order to best counsel transfer students on course selection.
- **Course bulletins and curricular requirements should be revised as infrequently as possible** in order to simplify advising procedures, particularly for seniors.
- **Career counseling should be incorporated more fully within capstone curricula or complementary required career development course(s) or programs should be offered concurrently.**

2. Expansion of Internship Opportunities: As an urban comprehensive campus with a commitment to civic engagement and community partnerships, IUPUI is ideally situated to

rapidly develop and expand its Internship opportunities for upper-level undergraduate students. Marketing the availability of such opportunities to prospective students (and parents) would be an effective recruitment tool, and would also enhance the experiences of seniors as they prepare to enter the workforce. We recommend the following:

- IUPUI should expand its internship offerings through partnerships developed through the IUPUI Solution Center and through the Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement. We are pleased that there has been a recent full-time hire in the IUPUI Solution Center charged with assisting the Director in working with the community to expand opportunities for students. Additional professional staff may need to be hired within the schools to recruit and counsel participating students and to assist faculty who are overseeing internships in which students are earning academic credit.
- Following expansion of its internship offerings, we recommend that IUPUI consider developing a systematic program of Co-op opportunities (in accord with recommendations offered by the IUPUI Co-op Action Plan Team).

3. Incentives for Timely Graduation: In general, members of our team believed that the provision of incentives for timely completion of degrees should be piloted, and if successful – rapidly implemented. **Scholarships might be created that are available to students who have progressed rapidly** through their programs, and schools might **explore the development of combined BS/MS or BA/MA programs** that target students who are motivated to earn both a baccalaureate and masters degree within 6 years. In order to accommodate these goals, academic programs may need to enhance the flexibility/frequency of course offerings. In addition:

- Encourage (or require) all students with junior or senior standing to participate in an internship or other relevant experiential learning activity, such as research, that relates to their post-graduate goals.
- Academic departments and schools are strongly encouraged to support students earning academic credit for internship experiences whenever possible, so that credit towards the major or elective credit can be earned and hasten progress towards graduation.
- The price of credit hours might be reduced during the senior year for students who have attained senior status within 4 years of study.
- Students should routinely be provided with membership in the Alumni Association once they reach senior status (i.e., 96 credit hours), for a period of two years, or until they graduate – whichever comes first. This membership would facilitate networking opportunities with potential employers.

Part 3: Suggestions for Outcomes Assessment

Specific evaluation plans would need to be based on the particular strategies implemented. Nevertheless, certain key performance indicators are clear:

- Time to complete degree (measured in semesters)

- Number of credit hours completed at time of graduation
- Percentage of students who successfully enter the job market or graduate school within 6 months of graduating
- Senior “exit survey” data collected within academic units should reflect higher levels of satisfaction with various dimensions of the IUPUI experience (orientation, advising, classroom instruction, student life, internship experiences, assistance with graduation planning, career counseling, etc.