

Council on Retention and Graduation Minutes
November 21, 2006
UC 2110
Presiding: Gayle Williams

Present: Melissa Biddinger, Cathy Buyarski, Michele Hansen, Susan Kahn, Nancy Lamm, Megan Palmer, Gary Pike, Rebecca Porter, Bret Shambaugh, Elizabeth Spears, Mark Urtel, Michelle Verduzco, Suzanne Vick, Richard Ward, Jeff Watt, Gayle Williams, Marianne Wokeck, and Robert Yost

Regrets: Renee Akins, Alison Bell, Scott Evenbeck, Mary Fisher, Susanmarie Harrington, Kathy Johnson, Andrew Klein, Anastasia Morrone, Kenneth Rennels, Ingrid Ritchie, and Karen Whitney

Special Guest: Derek Price

1. Williams opened the meeting with a welcome to council members. She explained that Scott Evenbeck was delayed on his return flight from Texas and was disappointed that he could not attend the meeting. Introductions were made.
2. Other Business: Megan Palmer discussed the retention study she is working on with OPD. The goal is to interview 25 students who returned and 25 who did not. It has been difficult contacting the students who did not return. The study has been focused on issues that we can control.
3. Derek Price gave his presentation, "Student Retention at IUPUI: A Preliminary Report." He distributed three handouts: a PowerPoint summary, charts, and a preliminary report (this is not to be distributed or cited). Price used PowerPoint slides to review his preliminary report. His study is investigating retention and to see if financial aid for students is a significant factor. For this study, Price has been following a cohort of students with available financial aid information in addition to the usual demographic data.

Price explained that while walking around campus he saw things on the walls and bulletin boards that show we are trying to do something about retention. Since our retention numbers are not improving, the question is, what can we do to budge those numbers? Price hopes this study will find out what we can do. While studying retention at IUPUI, Price examined academic factors as well as financial aid issues. It is important to look at a combination of those two things.

On the whole, IUPUI is losing students. By the fall semester of the third year about half of the students did not return to IUPUI or any Indiana University campus. Price reminded everyone that this study follows a cohort of the same group of students. Williams noted that the perception is that students come to IUPUI to transfer to another campus, but this does not appear to be the case. Price noted that a high estimate is about two or three percent of our students do that.

Hansen made a correction on the slide “Who Is in the Sample?” The number 2,482 should be 2,383. This figure includes full-time and part-time students. She believes 84 percent of those students are full-time. Price explained that he can make adjustments for full-time or part-time students, or both. The cohort in this study is not an example of the entire campus. Hansen noted that the term “credit hours” means semester credit hours. Price stated that the grade C or better does not include a C–.

The question was asked if we can tell if a scholarship is merit-based or an institutional gift aid. Price explained that cannot be determined from the available data. On his handout with the Excel charts (“Fall 2003 Cohort Enrollment”), the third page shows about 11 percent of total dollars also applies to staff/institutional gift aid.

Price said themed learning communities had about 100 students in this cohort. Block scheduling had a lot more students. Racial and ethnicity factors showed no significant differences except among those students receiving financial aid, etc. Price said this study shows that a student with a high cumulative GPA does not necessarily mean he or she will return. The theory that students with high GPAs stay in school does not hold true in this study. Higher GPAs did not seem to be a factor for students when deciding to leave school.

On the Gateway Course Analysis, Price said that he reviewed the handout briefly before the meeting. He said Math 001 students are failing at an increasing rate. The Summer Academy Bridge Program increases retention, but not a lot of students participated. Students who were involved in the first-year seminar were more likely to return. About two thirds of the students in the cohort participated in the first-year seminar. According to Price’s model, changing the overall SAT scores for incoming students will not increase retention. However, financial aid does make a difference. When students receive more financial aid, they return; when students receive less financial aid, they leave school. Price believes we need to study why there is less money for students.

Watt expressed concern about Math 001. This course is more of a remedial-level course. The average student does not take this course compared to ten years ago. Are students who take Math 001 today at a higher risk of failing? Price replied that he has no course-specific data. The question was asked if there is research being done to show if students involved in Greek organizations, foundations, or lived on campus are at lower risk. Price did not know.

Price gave five factors that we know make a difference: demographics, academic preparation, participation in special programs (such as Summer Bridge or first-year seminar), number of high DFW courses attempted, and the proportion of total financial aid in the form of grants and scholarships. Price explained that under certain conditions there are additional factors that can make a difference. Of the students receiving financial aid, those from a family with a lower income are less likely to return. African Americans are less likely to return, especially if they are receiving financial aid. A change in total

grant aid also makes a difference—more aid means the student is more likely to come back. Clearly, increasing grant aid in the third year will increase retention.

Price discussed the models he will use in the next steps of the study. The question was asked if students who are exposed to a class in their actual major are more likely to return. Price said he did not know if this could be shown with our data since 75 percent of the students in the cohort are University College students.

The unmet need of students was shockingly high according to Price. He explained that grant aid really does matter. If grant aid is increased in the first and second years, retention can be increased. He also suggested limiting access to high DFW courses to students in the first term. The suggestion was made that these courses have high DFW rates because everyone takes them, so there is an increased likelihood for more failures. The question was asked if we can override the high DFW factor by putting more students in learning communities. Another suggestion was made that high DFW courses may be difficult for students because of the way the courses are structured. Placement tests for certain courses, including English W130, have been changed since the cohort being studied entered school.

The question was asked why our unmet financial need is shockingly high. Price replied that the State of Indiana has one of the best student grant aid programs in the country. If tuition is covered for many students, what is the problem? Price does not believe this is a state issue; rather, it is a factor of high cost of attendance. When looking at students who borrow money, the total amount of aid is about \$5,000 in a combination of Pell Grants, scholarships, and other aid. The cost of attending IUPUI is very high; tuition is a small portion of the overall cost of attending school at this campus. For example, the cost of living in Terre Haute when compared to Indianapolis is much less. Everything costs less there. The question was asked how we compare to other campuses across Indiana. Price does not believe comparing costs by institutions in this state will give us a clear picture. The State of Indiana should be able to do this type of analysis. They need to create variables for all campuses. There should be a model for higher aid to meet higher costs; instead, aid stays flat while costs skyrocket. This is not a great model. This is a problem for many states. It is not just a tuition issue, but housing, etc. Price hopes this report gives everyone a sense of how the study is progressing.

A question was asked about courses with high DFW rates. Do we need to look at how these high DFW courses are constructed, or is the problem with the students who are taking them? If we do not allow students to take high DFW courses their first term, they may fall so far behind that they can't catch up. Price stated that an example may be found of a study done in California. Students taking a course similar to Math 001 were put in a "Summer Jam" program and then they retook placement tests. The study found that the extra summer instruction prepared students to take a higher level course in the fall. The problem may be in how we transition students to take these high DFW courses. If we admit students, then we need to find a way to help them succeed.

Price said he believes IUPUI is doing a lot of good things. Despite our efforts, a low retention rate is an ugly blemish. We need to think about how we can budge those numbers. He will continue with his study and work on a report with additional information that can be shared more broadly.

4. Adjourned.

Submitted by:
Anita Snyder
University College

Handouts

Updated Council Roster

Gateway Course Analysis

“Student Retention at IUPUI: A Preliminary Report” (Price’s PowerPoint presentation summary)

“Fall 2003 Cohort Enrollment” (Price’s Excel charts)

“The Effects of Financial Aid on Student Retention at IUPUI” (Price’s preliminary report, should not be distributed or cited)