

Building a Culture of Student Success

By Nasser H. Paydar

In 2006-07, Indiana University East decided to address historically low retention rates among its degree-seeking students. The campus embarked on an aggressive plan to improve those rates despite a declining state appropriation. The key elements of the model are described below.

Retention Initiatives

Data collection and campus-wide discussions. Data collected from a student satisfaction survey specifically designed to identify retention risk factors was supplemented by annual National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data and used to set budget priorities and structure campus-wide discussions regarding retention and persistence strategies.

Admission standards and student support. In collaboration with its local community college, IU East dropped all of its associate degrees and remedial courses and raised its admission standards. A four-week, no fee, summer bridge program was designed to support skill development for students, and student academic services on campus were improved in order to provide ongoing support throughout the academic year.

Admission-based scholarships. A four-year, admission-based, no application, scholarship program was created. Students must maintain full-time status, meet academic criteria and make progress toward graduation to retain these scholarships.

New student orientation. This program is mandatory and designed to engage the student with the campus and its faculty and staff, while also emphasizing critical factors for student success. Every student leaves orientation with their schedule of classes for the fall and ways of connecting with the university community and their peers via social media and targeted campus communication.

First-year seminar. A mandatory two-credit seminar was introduced for all freshmen. It continues the work of the new student orientation by introducing students to the college culture and academic success strategies.

Early-alert system. Mandatory instructor reporting of student attendance and academic difficulties in selected courses typically taken by freshmen has resulted in identifying problems early enough to implement successful interventions. Professional academic coaches in the newly created University College assist first-year students with issues that present obstacles to student success.

Academic advising. All new students commit to a degree by the time they have completed 24 credit hours so that they become familiar with their academic school early and a seamless transition is established between school-based professional advisors and faculty advisors.

Student activities. Student engagement in campus life has been improved by the addition of co-curricular activities, intercollegiate activities and a student government.

Three-year degrees and online programs. Accelerated programming helps some students graduate even earlier than the standard four years, and access to state-of-the-art technology has made possible the development and delivery of high quality online courses and programs and allowed for flexible and creative scheduling.

Strategic off-campus programs. Arrangements with partners like hospitals and community colleges have allowed the strategic location of off-campus programs and courses that increase access and improve flexibility for students.

Responsibility-centered management. RCM provides incentives for the academic schools to increase their productivity. Under RCM, all state appropriation and tuition revenues go to the schools, and the schools pay for the academic support services they agree are essential for the success of their students. This budgeting model places special emphasis on retention and graduation as schools retain all surplus revenue.

Results

All of these elements rely on dedicated leadership, faculty support and campus-wide participation and have led to a cultural shift at IU East that is focused on student success. The results of these efforts are evident:

- Enrollment has grown almost 70 percent since Fall 2007, regardless of a substantial cut in state appropriation in 2009.
- Fall to spring retention of freshmen has climbed from the lowest among all eight IU campuses to second only to the Bloomington flagship campus.
- The number of students graduating has increased substantially.

All of this has happened while both the cost per FTE student and the cost per bachelor's degree recipient have declined. **P**

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