

HLC Quality Initiative – *Project Engage*

1. Title and Description

In 2008, George Kuh and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) published a seminal book, *High Impact Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. They found that high-impact practices truly make a difference in higher education. “The effects of engagement in multiple high-impact practices, both across and within different groups of students, provide strong evidence for the need to ensure that all students encounter several high impact experiences during college.” As a regional campus, with commuter based students, with varied college preparation, student persistence in the first year has been a major challenge and focus. One of our primary retention initiatives has been to engage first year students in the high impact practice of learning communities. We have chosen a project that allows the campus to build and expand on this work. This campus proposal, *Project Engage*, reexamines and realigns an already existing high impact practice on campus– the **Freshman Learning Community (FLC)** program and introduces a new one, a **Summer Bridge** program. Both of these projects will be key retention and degree completion initiatives on campus.

2. Explain how initiative is relevant, significant

This initiative will address the state of Indiana’s goal for increased degree completion. The foundation of the Indiana Commission for Higher Education’s strategic plan, *Reaching Higher, Achieving More*, calls for increased college completion. Currently, just 3 in 10 students who enroll at an Indiana four-year campus graduate on time and only half finish within six years. On the IU Kokomo campus, 12.3% of students graduate in four years and 27.5% graduate in six years. IU Kokomo has no dorms so 100% of our students are commuters, many of whom commute up to 1.5 hours each way to college.

As we know, the transition to college is difficult for many students. They often lack an understanding of college expectations and systems and struggle to develop relationships that integrate them into the college community. These struggles create a barrier to persistence and completion. The IU Kokomo Freshman Learning Community Program was designed to address these college transition challenges. It began in 2006 as a year-long, interdisciplinary, team-taught program that engaged students with the same faculty and students throughout their entire

first year of college. The students earned 12 credit hours in total spread out over the two semesters. Being together in classes for a full academic year gave students a sense of community, gave them quality faculty interactions, and gave them resources to help them succeed (advisors, librarians, financial aid personnel, etc.). Fall-to-fall retention rates increased, over the years, from a beginning rate 48% to a high of about 63%. Our students enjoyed that establishment of a community of learners, working together for the entire first year, with the same faculty, all of whom were committed to student success.

Unfortunately, in the past couple of years, the retention rates have remained static in this FLC program. While the persistence rates are comparable to other IU regional campuses; if we are to increase degree completion rates, we need to discover what strategies will help us improve.

There are many theories about why persistence rates have stalled. Our student demographics have changed significantly. In 2006, 13.8% of first time students were traditional age, today, 93.3% are 18-22 years of age; in 2006, 85.6% attended full time, today, 90.7% attend full time. In addition, many come to campus with college credits in hand earned in dual credit programs in their high schools and already have taken some of the entry level communication courses in the FLC. Thus, they opt out of the program. Revising the program so that all students can be involved will be a first step. Finally we have seen a significant turnover in our faculty ranks because of retirements. The key to our success in increasing our retention rates will come with a thorough analysis of the program, incorporating changes in the way that it is offered to accommodate students with dual credit, and development of the new faculty who are now teaching in the program. *Project Engage* will encompass a program review, a redesign of the FLC program, faculty development efforts and assessment of the impact of the program.

In addition to realigning the existing FLC Program with the current student population, we will develop a *Bridge* or *Cougar Connection* program. The *Bridge* program is another high impact practice designed to provide a summer transition experience to students who want or need additional time. IU Kokomo has a diverse student population made up of first generation students, adult students, low income students, community college transfers, and veterans. In fall 2013, 41.4 % of students were first generation students, 23.6% were 21st Century Scholars (an Indiana program that provides tuition for low income students), and 3.2% were veterans. Each of these groups faces unique college acclimation challenges. A summer bridge program allows for

individualized mentoring to address each student's needs. We hypothesize that having a head start on college will increase persistence rates and eventually college completion rates.

3. Explain alignment with mission and strategic priorities

The mission of Indiana University Kokomo is “to enhance the educational and professional attainment of the residents of North Central Indiana by providing a wide range of bachelor's degrees, and a limited number of master's and associate degrees. Indiana University Kokomo is further dedicated to enhancing research, creative work, and other scholarly activity, promoting diversity, and strengthening the economic and cultural vitality of the region and the state through a variety of partnerships and programs.”

Both of the proposed initiatives fit well with the mission of IU Kokomo. As a regional campus, serving 12 counties, the goal is to strengthen the region through talent development. We must continue to increase both the college going rate and the college completion rate. Unfortunately, the number of people, aged 26 and up, who have college degrees in the campus service region is well below the state and national averages of 33% and 38% respectively. Currently, 24% of the population in our service region hold college degrees, with some counties significantly below that average.

4. Explain impact on Institution and academic core

As a result of revising our existing Freshman Learning Community Program, we will create first year courses that improve retention, student success, and college completion for the new student population that we are serving. In addition, we will better integrate efforts of faculty and staff as they work to transition students successfully to our campus. A successful program will also create a community of faculty members who work together to help first-year students succeed. Currently, we have picked a team to participate in the IU system- wide initiative on high impact practices and this team will begin work in summer 2014. Their work will nicely complement these projects. The impact of our project should be increased retention of first year students and increased degree completion rates. Our goal is to exceed the 63% fall-to-fall retention rate of the past and to continue to improve that rate by 2% each year.

5. Describe Goals and Purposes

The overall goals for both of these programs are to:

- Help first year students successfully transition to college
- Provide students with a coherent general education experience within a learning community
- Create a sense of community and engagement among the students, faculty and staff participants in the programs

For faculty, the programs also aim to create a system that:

- Is sustainable in regards to academic interests, training, and assessment
- Promotes faculty community, engagement, and development

For the institution, the goals are to:

- Begin a program of extensive, active and regular assessment of our learning communities
- Improve student retention from fall to fall:
 - Fall 2013 to Spring 2014 retention for our various programs is shown in the table below. As you can see, we have decent fall to spring retention:

Incoming Cohort	Enrolled at IU Kokomo in Fall 2013	Enrolled at IU Kokomo in Spring 2014	% Retained at IU Kokomo
Other Programs			
AHLT	79	59	74.7%
PAHM	9	7	77.8%
BUS	100	83	83.0%
EDUC	59	49	83.1%
HSS			
CJ	43	35	81.4%
HUM	59	53	89.8%
PSY	39	33	84.6%
SHPS	26	19	73.1%
NURS	188	155	82.5%
SCI			
General Studies	8	4	50.0%
SMI	79	65	82.3%
UDIV	129	103	79.8%
In coming Cohort	818	665	81.3%

Freshman Cohort	508	418	82.3%
Transfer Cohort	310	247	79.7%

- Fall to fall retention data for three years for our various majors is shown in table below. Some majors are doing fine but our overall goal is a 74% fall to fall retention rate.

Total Cohort	Fall 2012-Fall 2013		Fall 2011 to Fall 2012		Fall 2010 – Fall 2011	
	N	Retention	N	Retention	N	Retention
AHLT	83	57.8%	53	58.5%	54	57.4%
PAHM	6	66.7%	1	100.0%	1	100.0%
BUS	79	59.5%	84	66.7%	66	57.6%
EDUC	60	75.0%	67	65.7%	95	64.2%
CJ	41	61.0%	31	80.6%	34	61.8%
HUM	57	56.1%	55	67.3%	32	68.8%
PSY	35	74.3%	34	52.9%	23	69.6%
SHPS	36	58.3%	15	80.0%	10	60.0%
NURS	175	66.9%	176	60.8%	173	61.8%
GENSTUD	15	80.0%	16	56.3%	24	66.7%
SCI	61	62.3%	69	63.8%	59	67.8%
UDIV1	95	50.5%	101	50.5%	78	52.6%
Grand Total	743	62.3%	702	62.0%	650	61.5%

- Improve student performance
 - Establish a baseline and the monitor it over time as we continue to develop our programs. We will implement a system to track overall first year student GPA of those enrolled in learning communities compared to those not enrolled in them and track differences among the various models we implement. However, given that students self-select into learning communities, resulting numbers will only be suggestive.
- Improve student engagement
 - We do not have a baseline engagement measure. But as part of the project we will begin measuring engagement.

6. Describe plan to evaluate program and results

There will be annual assessments which include:

- The FLC goals and outcomes
- Student retention (Fall to Spring, Fall to Fall)
- 4-year and 5-year degree completion rates
- Student first semester and first year GPA
- Surveys of student engagement
- Measures of Faculty participation (number of faculty involved, participation in meetings and development opportunities, etc.)
- Satisfaction surveys of participating faculty, staff and students
- Descriptive and inferential analyses of the data using standard statistical methodologies
- Indiana University is participating in a systematic effort to evaluate student success using data mining and other analytical tools. Our efforts in these two programs will be a part of this larger data collection and analysis effort.

7. Describe Potential Challenges

Change efforts provide challenges when you move from the status quo. The FLC program was a long standing program that was successful in a different time, with different students and faculty. Effective communication and consensus building will be necessary to move the new program forward. The campus is currently seeking a new Director of Student Engagement to lead this effort. The proposed project will allow the campus to focus on renewing the Freshman Learning Community Program and adding a new dimension with a Summer Bridge Program. Some of the challenges include:

- Implementing ongoing assessment of the program, as described in the next section.
- Involving faculty and staff in the decision making process of the program, so they are active participants and supporters. We will create an advisory board with faculty and staff, plus we will more actively solicit faculty and staff participant input.
- Providing the program with a separate budget to ensure it has resources to develop faculty and support community building activities for students, faculty and staff.
- Providing on campus training opportunities for participants in the program to help develop a shared understanding of the methods and strategies of the program.

- Sending some program faculty and the administrator to national conferences to provide additional development opportunities and to build an external support network.

8. Describe the extent to which internal and external groups support the initiative.

The initiative has the support of the following internal groups:

- The IU Kokomo Faculty Senate -sought project ideas for the HLC Quality Initiative. After consideration of various worthwhile projects, the Senate chose to focus on these two high impact practices that would affect first year retention rates. The proposal received unanimous approval.
- Faculty - A number of faculty members have already joined a group to work on the two projects. Faculty members have already volunteered to create the Summer Bridge Program and the Freshman Learning Community courses for the fall 2014 semester.
- Staff - A variety of staff members will be involved in this initiative. This will include staff in advising, financial aid, student activities, institutional research, the Registrar's office, and academic support.
- Administration - Several deans will participate in this effort, and it also has the support of the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and the Budget director.

9. Describe Groups and Individuals that will lead and be involved in the work

- Dr. Scott Jones, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), has agreed to lead the process until a Director of Student Engagement is appointed. At that time, he or she will assume oversight of the program
- Dr. Kathy Parkison, Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (VCAA), will oversee the process
- Dr. Michael Tulley, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs will assist in overseeing the projects
- Deans of Allied Health, Business, Education, Nursing and Sciences will encourage faculty participation and will be involved with the planning of the programs.
- A program director (to be named), will administer the program.
- The *Project Engage* Advisory Board that is comprised of faculty and staff, will work to make sure all relevant parties are represented.
- Dr. Todd Gambill, Vice Chancellor of Student Services and Enrollment Management

- The faculty and staff in the program will work in various groups and task forces to develop the program and teach courses.
- Norma Fewell, Institutional Research, will provide institutional research data and support.

10. List Human, financial, technological, and other resources committed to the initiative

IU Kokomo is very committed to this initiative. As such, resources have already been committed from the 2014-2015 budget both for the planning stages and for the ongoing continuance, growth and success of the programs.

- Hire a Director of Student Engagement, to lead the program
- Support for a faculty coordinator for day-to-day management of the programs
- Travel funds for conferences
- Funds for guest speakers/faculty development activities
- Funding for 2014 Summer Bridge pilot

11. Describe the plan for continuing the work, sustaining, and integrating results

The program will have a coordinator responsible for the leading the program, coordinating assessment efforts, and reporting results. He/she will work with advisory committee and other faculty and staff to perform annual assessment of the program. The results will be reported to the advisory committee, the VCAA, and the Chancellor, and made available to the campus as a whole.

12. Describe the primary activities planned and a timeline for implementation

- Spring 2014 – finalize summer and fall schedules for FLCs and *Bridge* programs
- Summer 2014 – Supplemental materials and Training provided to FLC and *Bridge* Instructors and Staff
- Summer 2014 – Pilot of *Bridge* Program – this will be a self-selected group of students but coming from an at-risk population (we are likely to target 21st Century Scholars for this pilot program – as noted earlier 21st Century Scholars is a state of Indiana financial aid program that targets at risk students)

- December 2014 (end of the first semester) – Do assessments of fall semester and make appropriate revisions – begin the planning for the Summer 2015 next iteration of the *Bridge Program*
- Spring 2015 – NSSE survey administered
- June 2015 (end of the first year) – Do assessments of the year and make appropriate revisions
- Summer 2015 – Second iteration of the *Bridge Program*
- December/June of subsequent years – do assessments and make appropriate revisions
- Summers of subsequent years – additional iterations of the *Bridge Program*
- Completion of this project cycle in May 2018. This will provide data from 2014/2015, 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018.