

Spring 2007

LUMINA FOUNDATION

# Lessons

**Places – and  
faces – that foster  
student success**

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## *What if...?* Supporting a laboratory for change

Five years ago Lumina Foundation for Education issued a challenge. Envisioning Indiana as a laboratory, we invited six of the largest universities in our home state to experiment with new strategies to improve the persistence rates among their underserved freshman and sophomore populations. Two years later we expanded the list of these President's Fund grants to include nine regional campuses.

Our grant awards were intentionally modest – no more than \$100,000 per school – to encourage creativity and sustainability. We certainly didn't expect to solve the complex problem of retention with a \$1.5 million grant initiative; we merely hoped to discover and document several promising program components that we might share with other educators, funders and policymakers interested in boosting student success. The goal of our grants was to give college administrators the funds to push their retention efforts to the next level. We wanted them to put into practice ideas that frequently surfaced during brainstorming sessions when participants prefaced their thoughts with the words: "What if...?"

We limited our "test sites" to Indiana for two reasons. First, proximity meant that we could easily gather teams from participating schools for occasional conferences where they could swap ideas and offer advice. Second, we recognized that the mix of Indiana schools mirrors several types of institutions found in almost every state of the union. Among our grantees were commuter and residential schools; a private national university and several public state universities; campuses with student bodies as small as 2,500 and as large as 39,000; schools with enrollment policies that ranged from open to highly selective. We even included a program based at a state correctional facility. We believe the lessons learned and the successes experienced in such diverse environments are likely to have application in other settings.

The results of this experiment make up the content of this publication. We offer it in the hope that retention-minded institutions outside our "laboratory" will sift through the findings and identify program components that might expand the comprehensive plans that they already have in place. Some outcomes surprised us; others confirmed what we already suspected; a few invite further study. Without exception, all added to our growing knowledge about the vital issue of enhancing college access and success.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martha D. Lamkin".

Martha D. Lamkin  
President and CEO  
Lumina Foundation for Education

We hope you enjoy this first issue of *Lumina Foundation Lessons*, an occasional publication in which we will share the results of our grantees' work. By thoughtfully evaluating the programs we fund and then sharing what we learn, we hope to broaden the impact of our grant making, while also boosting the effectiveness of the organizations and individuals who do the vital work of increasing students' access to and success in college.

# Fifteen university campuses in Indiana accepted Lumina Foundation's challenge to create or enhance programs to improve student success in the first and second years. Here is a snapshot of each of the President's Fund institutions.

**Ball State University** in Muncie is a residential campus with an undergraduate enrollment of about 16,000. Through a program called Freshman Connections the school has improved its retention of first-year students from 67.5 percent in 1996 to 76.9 percent in eight years. It has raised retention among second-year students from 67.5 percent to 76.6 percent in the same period. ([www.bsu.edu](http://www.bsu.edu))

**Indiana University Bloomington** typically enrolls about 30,000 students each fall. The persistence rate from the first year to the second year for beginning, full-time students averages 88 percent. About 49 percent graduate within four years; about 70 percent graduate within six years. ([www.iub.edu](http://www.iub.edu)) The service-learning program that was expanded with Lumina funds has its own Web site at [www.indiana.edu/~copssl/](http://www.indiana.edu/~copssl/).

**Indiana University East** in Richmond is the newest and smallest of IU's eight campuses and has an undergraduate enrollment of just under 2,400. The persistence rate from the first year to the second year for beginning, full-time students averages about 57 percent. The average six-year graduation rate is about 20 percent. ([www.iue.indiana.edu](http://www.iue.indiana.edu))

**Indiana University Kokomo** enrolls about 2,800 students, 80 percent of whom work either full time or part time. The campus has an average first-to-second-year persistence rate of about 58 percent for full-time, beginning students. The five-year average graduation rate is about 21 percent; however, IUK's new strategic plan sets a target graduation rate of 30 percent. ([www.iuk.edu](http://www.iuk.edu))

**Indiana University South Bend** enrolls about 6,500 students. The five-year average fall-to-fall persistence rate for full-time, beginning students is 66 percent. The five-year average graduation rate is 25 percent. About 60 percent of the student body attends school full time. ([www.iusb.edu](http://www.iusb.edu))

**Indiana University Southeast**, located in New Albany, enrolls about 5,700 students. The five-year average persistence rate for full-time, beginning students is 66 percent; the five-year average graduation rate is about 28 percent. Because of the school's location, 13 percent of the students are Kentucky residents. ([www.ius.edu](http://www.ius.edu))

**The University of Notre Dame**, located near South Bend, is an independent Catholic university with about 8,000

undergraduate students. Highly selective, the school receives more than five applicants for each freshman class position and has a retention rate of 96 percent. In place since 1986 is the Balfour-Hesburgh Scholars Program ([www.balfourscholars.nd.edu](http://www.balfourscholars.nd.edu)), a four-week summer experience that works with incoming freshmen from historically underrepresented minority groups. ([www.nd.edu](http://www.nd.edu))

**Purdue University** in West Lafayette has an enrollment of slightly more than 38,000 students on its main campus. Overall, 84 percent to 87 percent of first-year students return for their sophomore year, and about 68 percent graduate within six years. The university started offering learning communities in 1997 and currently offers 26 different options – including the four multicultural learning communities started with Lumina funds – for students on the main campus. ([www.purdue.edu](http://www.purdue.edu))

**Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis** typically enrolls about 29,000 students – a majority of them commuter students – on its campus in downtown Indianapolis. Just 865 of the students are African-American males. In 2003 when the university started a chapter of the nationwide mentoring



# PARTICIPATING CAMPUSES

organization,  
Student African  
American  
Brother-  
hood,

only 12 percent of IUPUI's African-American male students graduated in six years. Overall, about 25 percent of all of the university's students graduate in six years, although the statistics do not capture students who transfer to other campuses to complete their studies. The school was created in 1969 as a partnership between Indiana University and Purdue University with IU as the managing partner. ([www.iupui.edu](http://www.iupui.edu))

**Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne** enrolls about 12,000 students, and most work off campus an average of more than 20 hours per week. Many students are the first in their families to attend college, and many freshmen test into at least one developmental course in reading, English or math. Only 20 percent of students graduate within six years. The campus, which is managed by Purdue University, opened in 1964 when Indiana University and Purdue University decided to offer classes in one location. ([www.ipfw.edu](http://www.ipfw.edu))

**Purdue University North Central** is a commuter campus located in Westville. Nearly 3,500 students attend classes there, and the college runs two programs at nearby prisons – the Westville Correctional Facility and the Indiana State Prison-Outside (ISO), a minimum-security unit at Michigan City. Since 1985 the university has awarded 449 certificates, 406 associate's degrees and 76 bachelor's degrees to prisoners at Westville. In 2000 the university began offering classes at ISO and since then has awarded 20 certificates and 11 associate's degrees. ([www.pnc.edu](http://www.pnc.edu))

**Purdue University Calumet** in Hammond has a student population of about 9,300. Nearly 80 percent come from the surrounding area in northwest Indiana, and three-fourths are the first in their families to attend college. Minority students make up 31 percent of the student body, and the campus has more Hispanic students than any other university or college in the state. Overall, 64 percent of freshmen return for their sophomore year, and 23 percent of students graduate within six years. ([www.calumet.purdue.edu](http://www.calumet.purdue.edu))

**Indiana University Northwest** in Gary enrolls nearly 5,000 students – 99 percent of them from northwest Indiana. African-American and Hispanic students

make up 35 percent of the student population. About 57 percent of freshmen return for their sophomore year, and about 25 percent of students graduate in six years. ([www.iun.edu](http://www.iun.edu))

**Indiana State University** in Terre Haute is a residential campus. About 10,500 students are enrolled on campus and in the university's corrections-education and distance-learning programs. About 40 percent of students come from homes where neither parent has attended college. At the time of the President's Fund grant, about 70 percent of beginning freshmen returned for the second year of classes. The retention rate now is 68 percent. ([www.indstate.edu](http://www.indstate.edu))

**University of Southern Indiana** in Evansville started as a regional campus of Indiana State University and in 1985 became a separate state university. About 10,000 students are enrolled, and about 40 percent come from homes where neither parent has attended college. In 2003 it used its Lumina Foundation grant to start a series of e-mail "lessons" to students and parents to help students succeed. Freshman-to-sophomore retention jumped by more than 10 percentage points when both students and parents participated in the "lessons." ([www.usi.edu](http://www.usi.edu))

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- GEOMETRY
- Larson Hostetler **Calculus** 11th edition
- ADVENTURES in Algebra
- CALCULUS
- CALCULUS
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- CALCULUS
- GEOMETRY
- Mathematical Concepts
- CALCULUS II
- CALCULUS II

## *Summer transition programs*

# Jump-starting the freshman year

**W**hen Carla DeLong graduated from high school in 1987, she told her dad: "If I were to go to college now, I would waste your money." Not until she was 34 years old and wandered into a college fair did she seriously consider returning to the classroom and pursuing a degree. But was it too late? "I talked with an admissions counselor from Indiana University Southeast (IUS) and told her my brain was turning to mush," recalls DeLong. "I didn't think I was smart enough for college because school is so different now... much more 'high tech.'"

Her timing was excellent. IUS was about to launch a program called Access to Success, supported by a Lumina Foundation President's Fund grant. "I took a leap of faith and quit my job," says DeLong. "I didn't know the college lingo, I had no direction, and I needed help. The people at IUS took me by my hand and walked me through my first two years." Now a junior with a grade point average of 3.3, she juggles single parenthood, a demanding academic load, part-time work and an internship. She also takes time to mentor younger students, often inviting them to her house for study sessions. "They call me 'Mama,'" she jokes.

DeLong credits her success in part to IUS's Collegiate Summer Institute, a component of the school's Access to Success program. IUS is one of three regional campuses within the Indiana University system that used their President's Fund grants either to launch or enhance summer programs intended to jump-start the freshman experience. Although each school – IU South Bend, IU Kokomo and IU Southeast – experimented with different approaches, all faced similar challenges.

- Because IU's regional campuses are not residential, students come and go at various times and divide their attention among home, school and work. Building a sense of community is difficult.
- The target populations of the summer programs were at-risk students who often are "fragile," according to Stuart Green, vice chancellor at IU Kokomo (IUK). "They're easily bruised," he explains. "When they have negative experiences, they're more likely to turn and walk away."
- Among these at-risk populations were Twenty-first Century Scholars, low-income students who sign a pledge in the eighth grade in return for the state's guarantee of public college tuition. The students agree to complete high school with at least a C average, remain drug-free and crime-free, apply for financial aid, and enroll at an Indiana college within two years of high school. They often are first-generation college students with marginal SAT scores.

Well acquainted with these challenges, the three regional schools nonetheless created summer programs that had ambitious goals. By the end of the grant period, not every component of each plan had met expectations, and some aspects of some programs had undergone major adjustments. Regardless of eventual outcomes (graduation statistics may take years to compile because commuting students frequently drop in and out of school), each program contributed findings to existing research on how to serve underrepresented college freshmen on nonresidential campuses.

**"I didn't know the college lingo, I had no direction, and I needed help. The people at IUS took me by my hand."**

*Carla DeLong*

### **IU South Bend: High energy, record results**

Three characteristics set IU South Bend's Leadership Academy apart from the summer initiatives at IU Kokomo and IU Southeast. First, the program wasn't limited to incoming college freshmen but also included rising high school seniors. Second, the target populations were specifically minority youth with solid grades. Third, the Academy wasn't a new program; it had been in place since 2002 and already had proven effective in preparing participants for the transition from high school to college.

The infusion of Lumina funds allowed IUSB to expand the summer Leadership Academy as part of a com-

prehensive plan to increase the minority presence on campus. Goals for the plan were to increase the recruitment of minority students at IUSB by 20 percent and boost the first-to-second year minority retention rate by 2 percent each academic year of the grant period. "When we submitted our proposal to Lumina, we wanted to enlarge the Academy so we could work with more students," explains Karen White, associate vice chancellor for student services. "Identifying, recruiting and retaining Hispanic students became a critical component."

Recent census data for South Bend had underscored the need to reach out to students of color. The African-American and Hispanic populations in the city represented 11.5 percent and 7.2 percent, respectively, of the general population. The South Bend Community School Corporation reported that minority students constituted 48.6 percent of its total enrollment. Yet for 2001-2002, IUSB had enrolled only 22 Hispanic students and 48 African Americans. One of the first priorities of the Lumina-funded program was to hire a bilingual recruiter/adviser to make inroads with Hispanic families. White found the perfect candidate in Cynthia Murphy Wardlow.

"I make at least two visits to each of the four high schools in our area each year," explains Murphy Wardlow. "I work closely with the guidance counselors who know the kind of students we hope to recruit into the Leadership Academy." The counselors frequently take Murphy Wardlow into their cafeterias at lunchtime and introduce her to groups of minority students. "Then I just plop down and talk with them in Spanish," says Murphy Wardlow.

Her strategy works. Karen White describes Murphy-Wardlow's influence as "huge" in attracting Hispanic students to the Leadership Academy and eventually to IUSB as freshmen. "Cynthia takes a case-management approach, so when students and their families come in, she meets all their needs. She walks them through the admissions and financial aid process, and she does it in either English or Spanish."

The staff of the Leadership Academy





Carla DeLong – a junior and a peer mentor at Indiana University Southeast in New Albany – takes a break from her own homework to work with her daughter, Breonna Jenkins, on language drills.

also works hard to reduce language and cultural barriers. Students are assigned to mentors who attend classes, take notes and lead small-group “debriefing” sessions at the end of the day. Several of the mentors are bilingual upperclassmen and serve as role models, as well as friends, far beyond the eight-week summer Academy.

The curriculum is designed to build confidence and instill ethnic pride. English class helps develop speaking and writing skills; history class focuses on the civil rights movement in the African-American and the Hispanic communities. The professors who teach the courses are selected for their credentials and for their animated presentation styles. “We definitely don’t water down the class content,” says Professor Hayley Froysland, an expert on the Chicano movement who integrates film clips and music into her lectures.

Overseeing the Academy is Robert Bedford, director of Multicultural Enhancement, who greets students by name when he leads a 10-minute “warm-up” session before classes begin. “When I was hired two years ago, someone warned me that the kids in the Leadership Academy sort of wander in at different times in the morning,” he says. “I created a grace period when we gather in the lobby of the academic building to sing and do icebreaker activities. By 9 o’clock they’re ready to settle down and head for class.”

The chemistry that exists among the Academy’s administrators, mentors and teachers is palpable and probably helped the program meet most of its goals. In fall 2005, the final year of the grant, campus minority enrollment at IUSB was at 11.7 percent, an all-time high. The number of Hispanic students increased from 192 to 221, another record. The campus succeeded in increasing minority recruitment by 20 percent but fell short of improving its retention statistics by 4 percent. Hispanic first-to-second-year retention numbers exceeded the grant targets, but African-American retention numbers slipped between 2003 and 2004. Most impressive: 100 percent of the Leadership Academy high school

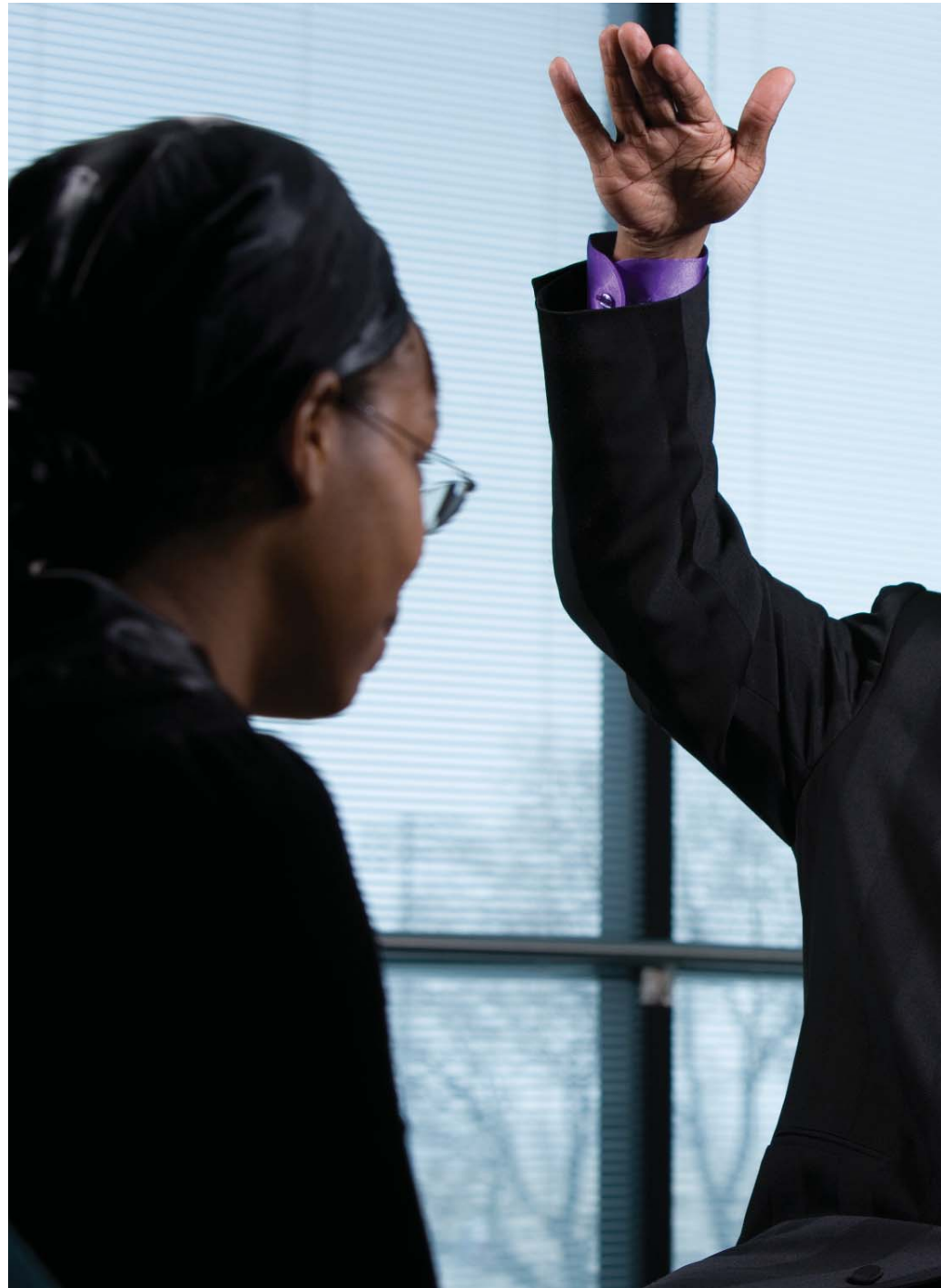
graduates enrolled at IUSB immediately after Academy participation.

Recognizing the value of having a Hispanic enhancement recruiter/adviser on campus, the university institutionalized the position at the end of the grant period. As Vice Chancellor Karen White notes, “It pays for itself.” White hopes to add a similar full-time staff member to reach out to African-American students.

## **IU Kokomo: Low enrollment thwarts bridge program**

Months before the launch of the Summer Transition Program at IUK, coordinator Carol Garber visited 12 area high schools, sent letters to potential participants, followed up with personal phone calls and distributed dozens of application forms.

“About 50 students went through the entire process of filling out the paper-



work," she recalls. The goal, established in the Lumina grant proposal, was to serve 25 to 30 incoming Twenty-first Century Scholars each summer for two years beginning in 2004. Faced with the possibility of enrolling twice the anticipated number the first year, Garber says she panicked. "I remember thinking, *What am I going to do with all these students?*" She needn't have worried. "We ended up with 13. The desire to

participate in the program was there, but the means were not."

In designing the six-week Lumina-supported program, IUK officials improved on what Vice Chancellor Stuart Green estimated were "about 10 years' worth of models." Earlier versions had convinced Green and his colleagues that summer program participants were more likely to persist if they built a connection to the campus, earned college

credits that counted toward graduation, and moved directly from a summer program in August to a year-long learning community in the fall. Green likens learning communities to "scaffolding" that provides support while students develop their academic and social skills.

"It's not about intelligence; it's about experience," explains Green. "Mentoring students in a pre-matriculation program in the summer and then following through with guidance and counseling seems useful." Voluntary learning communities already had a five-year history at IUK and had proven their value. The fall-to-fall retention rate for students who participated in learning communities was 71 percent; the fall-to-fall persistence rate for students who did not participate in learning communities was 44 percent. A key to the learning communities' success was that each community stayed intact for both semesters of the freshman year.

"The same students take 12 hours of classes (two courses each semester) from the same three faculty members," explains Susan Sciame-Gieskcke, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences and overseer of IUK's learning communities. "There's social interaction within the community during class and on field trips. We have a tutoring center, and we encourage students to use it. Our goal is to get them to the sophomore year."

The expectation in 2004 was that the Lumina-supported summer program, which included two for-credit courses, would help achieve this goal. Program planners knew that their targeted population would find the summer courses challenging. Typically, Twenty-first Century Scholars who enroll at IUK have graduated from high school in the 50<sup>th</sup> to 60<sup>th</sup> percentile and have average SAT scores of 880 to 940. Their persistence rate is 10 percentage points below the rate of other entering freshmen. An additional obstacle to student success is employment. Of the 13 participants in the first summer program, four worked 40 or more hours a week. All but three of the 13 participants in the 2005 cohort held down part-time or full-time jobs. "Our students come from a radius of 50-plus



**Robert Bedford, director of Multicultural Enhancement at Indiana University South Bend, leads a pre-class "warm-up" discussion with students Adele Burnett (left) and Priscila Rodriguez.**

miles," explains Sciamé-Giesecke. "Some young people have to work 25 or 30 hours a week because that's what it costs to pay for gasoline."

Disappointed by the low level of participation in the first year of implementation, IUK administrators made adjustments prior to the second year's program. They set aside a portion of the Lumina funds to add a fall learning community course aimed at the targeted students; they made an effort to educate parents on the rigors of college academics; and they eased enrollment requirements for the 2005 summer program and opened it to at-risk students who were not Twenty-first Century Scholars. Eighteen responded to the opportunity, but five dropped out for reasons that ranged from childcare problems to job obligations.

In spite of the lackluster turnout, students in both summer sessions gave high marks to several aspects of the program. In filling out an evaluation questionnaire, they responded that they appreciated the opportunity to earn six hours of credit in an abbreviated timeframe and enjoyed "getting to know people before fall classes start."

The students also unanimously answered "yes" to two key questions:

- Are you comfortable on the IUK campus?
- Do you feel more confident in your ability as a student?

At the conclusion of the grant period, the university decided not to continue the summer transition program but agreed to underwrite the expanded learning community class that Lumina funds had made possible. Staff members concurred with the decision and offered suggestions on ways to strengthen future retention efforts. Stuart Green believes that freshmen should have the opportunity to apply for on-campus jobs that often are reserved for upperclassmen. Such an arrangement would alleviate the financial burdens on many incoming students, eliminate travel time between school and work, and help students become familiar with the campus. Garber would like Twenty-first Century Scholars to have the option of attending part time at the beginning of their college careers, and she would

like more retention programs available to part-time students, as well as to those freshmen who enroll full time.

Although her on-campus duties have now changed, Garber keeps in touch with many summer school participants and is proud when they credit the summer program with launching them onto career paths. One of these students, John Kelderhouse, a participant in the 2004 program, maintains a 3.9 GPA. "In

**"I have very high expectations for our peer mentors. I tell them to step out of their student roles because as mentors they are paraprofessionals."**

*June Huggins*

fall 2006, I will start my third year of study at IUK in the business program while focusing on accounting," he wrote in an e-mail to Garber. "I'm on track to graduate in May 2008."

Other success stories may go undocumented. "Commuter campuses have a very high stop-out rate," admits Green. "Once students stop out, they're listed as attrition statistics." The good news is that many of them find their way back to campus several months or years later. "Some go on to other institutions, some go into the military," says Green. "But the reality is that they come back and, after several tries, they make it."

## **IU Southeast: Paraprofessionals are key**

Unlike the IUK program that brought students to campus Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. for six weeks, the Collegiate Summer Institute at IU Southeast met only on four consecutive Fridays for an intense orientation program. In their Lumina grant proposal, IUS staff members specified that 30 new students would participate in the program the first year, and that number would double the second year. Three targeted populations – Twenty-first Century Scholars, minority students and adult learners – would have equal representation. For this select group of 90 students, the summer institute (aptly called CSI) would replace IUS's regular orientation program that was a single half-day session and was very fast-paced.

"We found that students in the targeted categories wanted more hands-on training," explains Greg Roberts, an academic adviser who developed and coordinated the expanded summer program. Among the goals was to acquaint incoming freshmen with campus resources, register them for fall classes, and launch the long-term peer-to-peer mentoring relationship that was the key to the Lumina-funded Access to Success program.

"Student-to-student contact is a powerful tool," says June Huggins, director of the Center for Mentoring and Student Outreach. "I have very high expectations for our peer mentors. I tell them to step out of their student roles because as mentors they are paraprofessionals. The worst thing is to have a mentor who fails you in some way; but when a rapport develops between a student and a mentor...that is a beautiful thing."

Each peer mentor received an annual stipend of \$1,000 and underwent mandatory training. Huggins matched mentors and students according to age, major, interests and gender. During the first five weeks of the fall semester, the peer mentors met weekly one-on-one with their protégés to build bonds and provide support and guidance.

Throughout the remainder of the fall and spring semesters, the mentors and their charges met at least every two



**Cynthia Murphy Wardlow, a bilingual adviser at IUSB, meets with students at John Adams High School to discuss the steps they need to take to attend college. In part because she is fluent in Spanish, co-workers say her influence with Hispanic students is “huge.”**

weeks. In addition, the duos attended two large-group gatherings together. The one-on-one relationship continued the second year, but without a prescribed number of meetings.

“We don’t want to hover; we just watch and guide the students,” explains Atta Okyere, a student from Ghana who mentors Dilu Nicholas, a student from Sri Lanka. “If Dilu were to start missing classes, I would call him and make an appointment to talk.”

Each mentoring relationship is different, depending on the persons involved. Carla DeLong views her mentor as a big sister. “We’re total opposites, but she’s wonderful,” says DeLong, now a mentor herself. “Once my car broke down and I had no way to get to school. She loaned me her car for a week while mine was being fixed. It’s like having a built-in best friend.”

The Access to Success program and its CSI component came close to meeting all goals set forth in the Lumina grant proposal. The first year’s goal was to enroll 30 new students in the program. Final tally: 29 enrolled in 2004, and 26 remained in the program during spring semester for a 93 percent retention rate. The second year’s goal was to enroll 60. Final tally: 51 enrolled in 2005; of those, 44 continued their participation during the spring semester for an 86 percent retention rate. Both summer institutes were successful, drawing 19 students the first year and 28 the second year. Of the 28 mentors hired for 2005, six were “alumni” of the 2004 Access to Success program for a rate of 21 percent (the goal was 25 percent).

Huggins believes much credit for the program’s success goes to the peer mentors, an opinion shared by campus ad-

ministrators who agreed to fund 30 peer mentors beyond the Lumina grant period. If any aspect of the program has surprised Huggins, it’s been the success of the adult participants. “Once they became comfortable, they thrived,” she notes. “We have several adult peer mentors, and they are incredibly solid.”

One of those “incredibly solid” adult mentors is Carla DeLong. Now wrapping up her degree in criminal justice and psychology, DeLong often shares her story with incoming freshmen in the hope they will learn from it. “I tell them that I wish I had gone to college when I was 18,” she says. “I made mistakes, but thank goodness, they weren’t critical mistakes. I don’t regret what I’ve done or the path I’ve taken. Now I see life as a classroom, and I learn something new every day. Education has made me the person I am today, and I like who I am.”



*If you build it, will they come?*

## Support programs work, but attracting students remains a challenge

**T**he barriers to completing a college education seem particularly steep for students attending regional campuses of Indiana and Purdue universities in northwest Indiana.

Many are first-generation students working 20 to 30 hours a week to pay the bills while going to college. Some have families to raise.

Other students entered college after attending high schools where they had to share books. Because each classroom had only one set of books, students couldn't take them home to study.

Some students dropped out of high school, got in trouble with the law, and now are returning to education as their way out of prison – but it's a long road back when it's been years since high school algebra.

For these students, supplemental support programs can be the difference between success and failure. Peer mentoring, tutoring, supplemental instruction – all of these opportunities can tip the scales in students' favor. On average, according to school statistics, 35 percent to 40 percent won't make it to the sophomore year of college, and 75 percent won't graduate in six years.

"When you provide student support, it works," says Joe Pellicciotti, associate vice chancellor for enrollment management and professor of public and environmental affairs at IU Northwest in Gary. "The difficulty is getting the students there. These are commuter students – they have financial, family and work issues. It's amazing they can do what they do. It's not that they don't recognize the importance or don't want to attend – they can't. And it must be very frustrating to them."

### The orientation of learning

At IU Northwest, Psychology 101 is required for most freshmen. Two-thirds of first-semester freshmen enroll. If they fail the first exam, they most likely will fail the class. And 80 percent of students who fail the class eventually drop out of school.

Professor Mark Hoyert, chairman of the psychology department, set out to change those grim statistics. Motivational differences separate students who succeed from those who fail, Hoyert explains. Some students are motivated because they want to learn; others are motivated by performance or grades. In just about any class that Hoyert has studied, students are split – half possess learning-oriented goals, and half gravitate to performance-oriented goals.

Through years of research, Hoyert discovered that learning-oriented stu-

dents increase their grades by as much as 15 percent after failing the psychology course's first exam; performance-oriented students show a decline after failing the first exam.

"We wanted performance-oriented students to adopt more learning-oriented goals to try to keep those students from abandoning their studies," he says. He developed a tutorial about goal orientation to do just that. The tutorial includes exercises designed to help students adopt learning-oriented goals and provides real-life examples of successful people.

Initially he and peer mentors worked directly with students to review the ma-

#### GoFar Tutorial

Fifty percent of the students who had failed the first exam in Psychology 101 at Indiana University Northwest voluntarily agreed to complete the tutorial.

#### Results:

- 60 percent of the students who completed the tutorial passed the class.
- 85 percent of students who completed the tutorial persisted to the next semester.
- Only 53 percent of students who failed the exam but did not complete the tutorial persisted to the next semester.

Source: IUN final report to Lumina Foundation.

terial. But sometimes it was difficult to get students to attend the additional sessions. With different people leading sessions, the message wasn't always consistent.

With a portion of the Lumina grant, Hoyert put the course content on a CD and called it GoFar Tutorial. He and other instructors started offering the CD to students who failed the first exam in Psychology 101.

The CD worked. About half of the students who failed the first exam voluntarily agreed to complete the tutorial. Most of them – 85 percent – were retained to the next semester. Only 53

percent of the students who failed the first exam and did not complete the tutorial returned for the next semester.

"It cuts the failure rate in half. That's the consistent finding no matter how many students are involved," he says. Hoyert says test failure is an important component of the tutorial's success. The tutorial seems to have no effect on students earning a "C" or better on the first exam. "Because of the pressure from failure, students are willing to pay attention."

Hoyert asks students who complete the CD to write about their experience. One student wrote: "I will admit I am more grade oriented. I always try to get good grades and never really learn the material. I have a really bad habit of cramming the night before [a test], and I know that's really bad. But after watching the CD, I learned some new ways to study and to not cram the night before."

The campus is now experimenting with using the tutorial for other classes, including math, chemistry, anatomy and physiology.

### Mentoring at-risk students in different ways

Peer mentors can help ease the transition from high school or work to college for many students. These mentors generally are successful students who have had experience on campus and who have received special training so they know the best ways to help new students.

"Students have a lot of barriers to overcome," says Patricia Hicks-Hosch, director of student support services at IU Northwest. "These are first-generation students. There are a lot of things they don't know. They are apprehensive and many times don't know what to expect. Having peer mentors helps them make the transition from life experience to becoming a student."

The peer mentor program that Hicks-Hosch oversees is one of two such programs on the campus funded initially through the Lumina grant. Of the 49 students who participated in the program during the 2005-2006 academic year, 79 percent returned to school for the fall 2006 semester.





**Michael Jenkins, a senior history major at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, says his involvement in SAAB helped him raise his GPA from 1.8 to 3.0.**



IUPUI students Derrick Carpenter (left) and Michael Jenkins talk with SAAB chapter director Terrence Littlefield about the commitment and accountability expected of them as members of the organization.

The program pairs mentors with groups of six to 10 students, and students meet separately and in groups with the mentors. Any student can request a mentor, and many who do so are older students returning to school. Students also can take advantage of twice-monthly meetings that focus on a variety of topics including job opportunities on campus, scholarship programs available to students, midterm and finals prep sessions, cultural activities such as trips to nearby Chicago museums and theaters and much more.

Rachel Torres, a first-generation nursing student from Illinois who now lives in Crown Point, Ind., joined the peer mentor program two years ago. "As a freshman, I didn't know a lot about school activities or know about student insurance or the withdrawal system. I missed out on a lot of benefits," she says.

IU Northwest also used Lumina funds to start a mentoring program aimed specifically at freshmen through the Special Retention Programs depart-

ment. The peer network pairs a mentor with two to three freshmen.

"We want to give new students a sense of connection and community," says Cathy Hall, coordinator of Special Retention Programs. "We don't want them to see this as a place where they stop by, take a class and go home."

Initially, the program recruited stu-

dents to work with mentors by using referrals from faculty, staff and other students participating in the supplemental instruction program. Hall says this approach was not effective because some of the "recruits" saw the program as punishment. "They had a negative reaction coming in that way," she says. The next semester the peer network changed its recruitment efforts to focus on freshman orientation and was able to increase participation from four to 11 students for the fall 2006 semester.

Peer mentor Jaclyn Hac says she wishes the peer network had been available when she was a freshman. Hac, now a senior anthropology and sociology major, says she enjoys working with students she mentors and enjoys watching them grow. "I think it helps both students really feel like a part of the school, and, if you feel that way, you're bound to try harder and succeed."

Connecting students to campus is a big part of what the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) does. A national organization started 16 years

**"I think it helps both students really feel like a part of the school, and, if you feel that way, you're bound to try harder and succeed."**

*Jaclyn Hac*

ago on a small college campus in Georgia, the group now boasts 126 chapters and 2,000 members across the country. As part of its efforts to improve retention, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) used part of its Lumina grant to start a SAAB chapter.

On a national level, SAAB has proved effective at helping boost retention and graduation rates for African-American males. In the last decade, SAAB has helped 80 percent of its participants persist from freshman to sophomore year and 86 percent to graduate from college. These numbers compare with a national freshman-to-sophomore retention rate for African-American males of just 42 percent and a five-year graduation rate for African-American males of 55 percent.

At IUPUI, an urban, commuter campus of about 29,000 students, only 865 students are African-American males. "Our overall goal is to make sure the minority students – especially the African-American males – are retained and graduated," says Terrence Littlefield, director of IUPUI's SAAB chapter. The odds are daunting: Before SAAB started in 2003, just 39 percent of African-American freshman males returned for a second year of school, and currently only 12 percent of IUPUI's African-American males graduate in six years.

The organization holds weekly meetings on campus and provides mentoring services to students, as well as information about services on campus. It also plans and carries out activities ranging from a campus talent show to career workshops to study sessions to lunch- eons with motivational speakers.

"We connect with students where we can find them," Littlefield says. "Research has shown that the more connected students are on campus, the more it helps with the academic process," he says.

The numbers support Littlefield. During the three years of the grant, retention of SAAB members ranged from 62.5 percent to 90 percent. In 2005, when SAAB had 20 members, the four freshman members earned a 2.75 grade-point average – nearly a full percentage point higher than the 1.85 GPA average for all African-American males on campus.

"Being involved with SAAB has really helped my grades," says Michael Jenkins, a senior history major at IUPUI. Jenkins, a first-generation student, says he has raised his GPA from 1.8 when he joined SAAB to a 3.0. The camaraderie and study sessions helped, Jenkins says, as well as the accountability stressed in SAAB. "It's also nice to be with others who know what it's like to be the only black student in the room," he says, "and it's easier to achieve when you see others like you who are achieving."

His friend and fellow history major, Lewis Jones, concurs. "When I connect with my brothers in SAAB, they say, 'That's Lewis. He's intelligent.' I need that time with people who respect me for who I am." Lewis returned to college a few years ago after dropping out in 1980s. "If there had been SAAB 20 years ago, I would have finished my degree then," he says.

### Preparing high school students to succeed in college

At Purdue Calumet, officials used Lumina funds to address factors that can help set the stage for college success before students ever arrive on campus. By cooperating with area high schools, they began an effort to enhance curriculum development and implement Supplemental Instruction (SI) at the high school level. Addressing academic deficiencies they noticed in freshmen, they hoped to improve students' preparation for college-level work.

About 80 percent of the university's freshmen come from the area surrounding the campus, located in Hammond, Ind., just outside Chicago. About 75 percent of students are the first in their families to pursue a college degree, and about 40 percent of enrolled students lack the adequate high school preparation for the rigors of college.

"The school systems told us they weren't aware of the gaps," says Jacqueline Reason, assistant director of supplemental instruction and tutoring at Purdue Calumet. "It took a while to convince them we genuinely wanted to work with their students."

Over a two-year period, the university worked with three high schools –

East Chicago Central High, Clark Middle and High School and Morton High School in Hammond – to introduce the concept of cadet teachers in math and English classes. The university based the program on its own SI program, which improves student retention by an average of 14 percent for students who attend at least one SI session, Reason says.

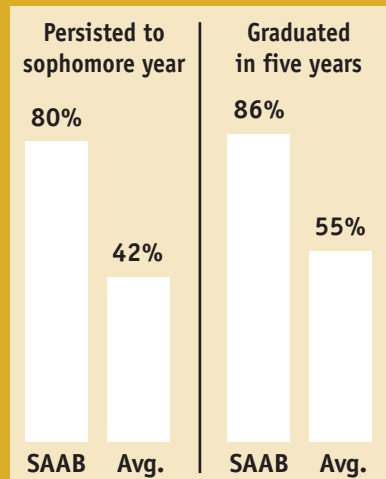
"This is the first time the university is making it our business to go to the high schools," says Nabil Ibrahim, vice chancellor of academic affairs. "We are reaching out to the high schools, saying: *These are the problems we're facing – let's work together to solve them.*"

### Student African American Brotherhood

Nationally, SAAB has 126 chapters with a total of more than 2,000 members.

The organization has made significant strides in helping its members succeed in postsecondary education. For example, in the last decade:

- Eighty percent of SAAB members have persisted to their sophomore year. (This compares to a national average of 42 percent for African-American males.)
- Also, 86 percent of SAAB members have graduated from college in five years or fewer. (This compares to a national five-year graduation rate for African-American males of 55 percent.)



Source: SAAB Web site [www.2cusaab.org](http://www.2cusaab.org)

At the high school level, senior students who were identified by the schools and trained by Purdue, sat in on classes and offered small-group assistance during part of the classroom period, and some even taught part of the class. "Students who participated as cadet teachers became much stronger students," says Ron Kovach, assistant vice chancellor for academic affairs.

In two years 46 students participated as cadet teachers, and nearly all rated the program highly. Of the 33 participants surveyed last year, 73 percent said the experience improved their knowledge of the subject; 79 percent said the experience improved their communication skills, and 76 percent said being a cadet teacher was beneficial to them as students. Of the 11 cadet teachers who participated in the program in the spring 2005, eight enrolled at Purdue Calumet.

While the concept appears promising, it faces limiting factors. The university was able to work with the schools to introduce the cadet teacher concept, but the high school teachers did not have the time to work with university officials to revamp course offerings. Likewise, summer internships were made available to students, but they could not take full advantage of them because they had to work full time in the summer to earn money.

Nonetheless, both Kovach and Reason say the program has forged relationships that will continue to benefit students in the future. "We thought we knew what they needed," Reason says of the high schools. "Through this process we learned students don't have textbooks they can take home. We were shocked that there was one set of books per classroom. It sounds like 'Little House on the Prairie,' yet this is East Chicago, 2006!

"It's a much deeper problem than anyone thought," she says.

### **The importance of tutoring**

The men who find themselves incarcerated at the Westville Correctional Facility and the Indiana State Prison's minimum-security unit at Michigan City (ISO) can reduce their sentences

by achieving certain academic goals. If they complete a vocational computer class, they reduce the incarceration by three months. An associate's degree gets them a one-year cut, and a bachelor's degree results in a two-year sentence reduction.

For years, Purdue University North Central at Westville has offered educational programs – an associate's degree in organizational leadership and super-

vision and a bachelor's degree in liberal studies – at the Westville facility. In 2000, it began offering an associate's degree in general business at ISO. To enroll in the Purdue program, the men must pass a four-part exam, which includes writing a two-page essay, completing 40 math questions, answering 80 vocabulary questions and responding to comprehension questions on seven reading passages. Only one in 10



**Purdue's Diane Borawski, coordinator of Postsecondary Correctional Education at Purdue University North Central, talks about classes with inmates Mark Chinn (left) and John Trueblood while Anthony Harris studies in the background.**

applicants qualify – most of them barely passing the exam, says David Crum, director of the Purdue program for the Westville facility.

“The overwhelming majority of students end up in remedial math before they can take the required college-level algebra and trigonometry,” he says, noting that, if the prisoners can answer 15 of the 40 questions, they qualify for remedial math. In 2004, the university

used the Lumina Foundation grant to pay for tutors to offer weekly or twice-weekly math sessions at both facilities.

The tutoring services have an uncertain effect on student retention because many factors influence an inmate’s completion of a course or degree program, says Diane Borawski, Purdue coordinator for the ISO program. The Department of Correction can release or transfer inmates at any time. During the

period tutoring services were available, the DOC changed the ISO to a minimum-security facility, which changed the inmate population, and moved a specific set of Westville’s prison population to another facility. Even so, an overall student-retention rate of 59 percent occurred during the six semesters tutoring services were offered.

Statistics aside, the men who received tutoring say the sessions made all the difference.

“I was lost at certain points and desperate and discouraged,” says John Trueblood, a 43-year-old ISO inmate serving time for drug-related offenses. “The tutoring really helped. In the environment I grew up in, I wasn’t aware that a college education was within my grasp.”

Mark Chinn, another inmate at ISO, says he used the tutoring services every week. “I never had algebra – I’ve been out of school 30 years,” he says. Although the tutoring services ended in 2006, Chinn tries to use his knowledge to help others who need it. “I enjoy doing it, and it’s pretty fulfilling to help someone who doesn’t understand something. There are so many guys here out of school for a while, and they want to do college, but they need the math help,” he says.

Matt Diehl, an inmate at Westville, says the tutoring services helped him get through a statistics course. “It’s been 12 years since high school. I barely remembered fractions,” he says. Diehl, who is serving time until 2008 for drug-related crimes, says the opportunity to take college courses has changed him. “I used to be close-minded about a lot of things. College makes me more open-minded.”

Several other inmates echoed Diehl’s sentiments. Anthony Harris, who’s scheduled to be released from ISO in June 2007, says the college experience has helped him learn about himself. “It boosts your self-confidence. If you leave here without self-confidence, you go back to the same ways,” he says.

“College helps you feel more confident,” says Donald Shaw, who dropped out of high school at age 14. “I have more knowledge about stuff that really matters. Instead of talking about drugs and stealing, I’m having conversations about economics.”





## *Reinventing the gateway class*

# Teaching ensemble replaces 'sage on stage'

University of Notre Dame biology Professor Harvey Bender disputes the idea that class size has little bearing on student success. "There's a myth that says enrollment doesn't matter once you get above a certain threshold level," he says. "That's wrong. It's more challenging to teach 50 students than 25; it's much more challenging to teach 100 students than 50; and all sorts of problems can arise when you get into the 150- or 200-student range."



**Harvey Bender, a biology professor and director of Notre Dame's Human Genetics Program, leads a discussion group that includes students Erin Clemens (left) and Nick Manieri. The group meets weekly to supplement Bender's lectures in an undergraduate class focusing on genetics research.**

Among the potential problems: freshmen feel lost in introductory classes that meet in large, impersonal settings. Struggling students go unnoticed until they are "outed" by midterm test scores. Faculty rely on lecture formats that cast them in the role of an intimidating "sage on stage." Students must wait

their turns in long e-mail queues to communicate with instructors. Bender estimates that his human genetics course (BIOS 101), which enrolls 250 freshmen each semester at Notre Dame, generates as many as 40 e-mail messages a day. In such oversized gateway classes, students view professors

as obstacles, says Bender. "They ask, 'How can I get through, over or around your gates?'"

Although Notre Dame's retention statistics are enviable – 94 percent of students graduate – the required two semesters of science often challenge students whom Bender describes as





"science shy." With support from a President's Fund grant, he deconstructed his gateway course and replaced the traditional sage-on-stage model with what he calls a "guide from the side" configuration. Friday discussion groups now supplement Bender's twice-weekly lectures, and all sessions are interactive to some degree. He created a three-level teaching ensemble that includes himself, 10 undergraduate teaching assistants (UTAs), and a post-

doctoral mentor who acts as an interface between him and the UTAs. Bender personally oversees the recruitment and training of his teaching team and meets with them on Tuesday evenings throughout the semester to monitor progress.

A key to the new course's success is communication. UTAs, all of whom have taken the genetics course or are science majors, fully understand the rigors of their commitment. They attend Bender's lecture classes, and each facilitates a Friday morning discussion group of 25 freshmen. The UTAs keep journals and read and react to the journals of their discussion-group participants. In return for all this work, they receive one hour of academic credit, a "benefit" that many say has little to do with their motivation for applying for the positions.

"I loved the experience," says Nicole Pretet, who served as a UTA for two semesters. "I might want to go into teaching someday, and I thought this would be a great way to explore whether I would enjoy that career down the road."

"The program allowed me to work with freshmen," says Wen Liao, also a two-semester UTA veteran. "When I was a freshman, I was lost. I didn't know where to go for academic guidance. Now I work with students who might have the same trouble as I did."

The role of the post-doctoral mentor is to act as a buffer, troubleshooter and facilitator. "If a UTA has a problem and hesitates to approach Dr. Bender with it, I can provide insights from my perspective as a teacher," says Dominic Chaloner, an ecologist who found his mentoring role so satisfying that he stayed on for three semesters. In addition to a modest salary, each mentor has the opportunity to work alongside Bender, a Carnegie scholar. "I teach a smaller course in environmental science and have about 100 students," explains Chaloner. "I'm using the model that Dr. Bender developed because I've seen how it encourages class members to discuss course material."

Bender imposes strict quality-control standards on his course. He personally led one of the weekly discussion groups to gauge its effectiveness during the

pilot semester of the redesigned course. In subsequent semesters he admits to "prowling the halls" on Fridays in case he is needed. He reviews the journals of his UTAs and randomly samples some of the journals that class members keep. He posts all of his lecture notes and PowerPoint presentations on a Web site devoted to BIOS 101 and says he "destroys class notes at the end of every semester" to ensure that his material is fresh and timely.

After fine-tuning the course during the Lumina grant period, Bender believes the design could have application on other campuses and in other academic disciplines. Out-of-state colleagues already are using the genetics literacy survey that he developed to assess students' knowledge at the beginning and end of each semester. This survey is one way that he has evaluated the success of the revamped genetics course. Some of the outcomes have surprised him. "I didn't expect to have such a profound effect on those students who profited with the weakest science background," he says.

If there is a factor in the success of Bender's redesigned class that cannot be measured, it's Bender himself. He's a charismatic teacher who, as a working clinical geneticist, has always used examples from his active practice to add relevance to his classroom lectures. During the grant period, he stepped up efforts to make lectures engaging by bringing in guest speakers and using electronic "clickers" that allow students to weigh in on controversial issues — cloning, stem-cell research, evolution — by "voting" with remote hand-held devices. "It takes about three minutes to poll a class," he says. "It's a little time-consuming, but you can get some interesting data that engender good conversation."

To further break down barriers with students who fear science, Bender initiated a Summer Start workshop as part of Notre Dame's Balfour-Hesburgh Scholars Program, a voluntary enrichment experience aimed at incoming minority freshmen. Bender's workshop culminates with "the Great Balfour Debate" that has students discussing an emotionally charged topic. One such

debate centered on intellectual differences between men and women, a discussion that one student described in her journal as “the most interesting class I have ever attended. I couldn’t believe the amount of participation!”

Among the positive outcomes of the redesigned gateway class and Summer Start workshop were:

- Students with lower SAT scores showed dramatic and sustained improvement in science literacy.
- On average, 248 of the 250 enrolled students completed BIOS 101 each semester.
- Fourteen non-science majors declared their majors either as biology or pre-professional studies.
- The small discussion groups earned student evaluations in the top quartile for entry-level science courses.
- All participating post-doctoral mentors obtained teaching positions and indicated plans to develop course sequences modeled after the redesigned genetics course.
- More than half of the participants in three Summer Start science workshops successfully enrolled in BIOS 101; two have become UTAs after completing the course.

Enrollment in Bender’s classes, an indicator of popularity among students, did not change as a result of the new design. He has always attracted capacity enrollment and continues to do so. Before he agreed to teach freshman-level genetics 10 years ago, typical enrollment was about 30 students. Now he caps the number at 250 because the lecture hall has 250 seats. At best, the Lumina grant prompted him to be more intentional about several practices that he has always followed in a casual way. This includes his recognition of the value of small-group discussions. For years he has made himself available to students during off-duty hours.

“Our students can requisition me,” he says of his ongoing willingness to meet class members on their turf. Then he adds a caveat: The students first must agree on a specific topic for discussion before they invite him for an informal get-together. “I’m not going to visit the dorm the night before an exam just to review old test questions.”

## Teaching the teachers

### *Faculty development was at the heart Indiana University Purdue University achieving a similar goal: to transform*

As longtime director of Ball State University’s Freshman Connections – a learning community experience aimed at first-year students – Paul Ranieri was well aware of the program’s missing piece. He also saw the irony of the omission. Ball State, nationally known for preparing students for teaching careers, did not provide for faculty to hone their teaching skills as part of its freshman-retention program.

“Many faculty members haven’t seriously studied pedagogy,” says Ranieri, a professor of English. “They’ve been in the classroom a number of years, are experts in their fields, but they don’t have a lot of background in teaching 18- and 19-year-old students.” To help meet the university’s goal of increasing its 76 percent freshman-to-sophomore retention rate to 80 percent, Ranieri proposed using Lumina funds to implement an intensive summer workshop program that, if successful, would improve teaching techniques in several core curriculum courses.

Participation in the three-year program was limited to 12 faculty members – an average of four professors each summer – who represent a range of disciplines and collectively teach from one-third to one-half of the university’s freshman class every fall. Ranieri served as facilitator, assigning readings and leading discussions about teaching techniques and learning styles. To gain admission to the workshop, each faculty member submitted a description of a specific classroom problem and solicited the group’s guidance in solving it. Through conversation and research, the participants then redesigned their classes to address the challenges they had identified. They field-tested their new designs in the fall and shared results with their colleagues at meetings throughout the year. As an example:

**“During the [Lumina] experiment’s first two years, the failure rate has decreased to 8 percent, and the ‘A’s have tripled to 38 percent. We’ve seen the most positive effect in the most at-risk students.”**

*Bill Magrath*

## *of the Lumina-funded programs at Ball State University and Indianapolis (IUPUI). Each school chose a different approach to introductory courses to raise student success rates.*

"From 1999 through 2002, nearly 25 percent of first-semester freshmen were failing a core curriculum course, 'World Mythology,' and only 13 percent were achieving an 'A,'" reports Bill Magrath of the modern languages and classics department and a participant in the summer workshop. "We selected a set of instruments for early detection of student performance levels; subsequently, students were assigned to specialized group work. During the [Lumina] experiment's first two years, the failure rate has decreased to 8 percent, and the 'As have tripled to 38 percent. We've seen the most positive effect in the most at-risk students."

Ranieri and his team are committed to comparing success rates of students in courses taught by project and non-project faculty, as well as tracking the graduation rates of project and non-project students. The program already has earned high marks from participating faculty who say they have benefited from working alongside colleagues from disciplines other than their own. "The strength of this program is stepping out of our fields and gaining different perspectives," says Dave Concepción, assistant professor of philosophy, who is pleased with students' progress in his redesigned introductory course. "This pedagogy is beginning to show results," he says. "My students are outperforming their peers."

Concepción and his colleagues credit the professional development program with breaking down barriers within Ball State's sprawling academic community with its more than 900 faculty members housed in more than 50 buildings. "We need more of this multidisciplinary engagement," says German Cruz, a member of the landscape architecture faculty. "My 'cave' is Room 229 in the architectural building. That's where I do the Plato thing by myself. But now I know that other people in other departments are trying to do some of the same things that I'm trying to do. My world is larger; I feel I'm connected."

### **Exploring diversity across the curriculum**

At Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), faculty members teaching freshman learning-community courses took a more tightly focused approach than their peers at Ball State. They used a portion of the grant funds to create a faculty learning community to explore ways to provide multicultural content in the curriculum. "If you have faculty thinking hard about inclusive teaching, students feel more welcome," says Anastasia Morrone, the project leader and now executive

director of the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Faculty in classes ranging from introductory economics to nursing education discussed classroom diversity issues and worked with facilitators and each other to broaden the curriculum and incorporate new teaching methods.

Although the number of minority students affected during the grant period was small, anecdotal evidence suggests the course transformations made a difference. Minority students were retained at a rate exceeding 80 percent. In the last year of the project, 2004-2005, students completed a questionnaire, and 35 of the 44 participants said the transformed courses had a positive impact on their perspectives of diversity. A sampling of student comments includes:

- "We must learn how to accept differences of all kinds, no matter what, and still supply everyone with the same humane care they deserve."
- "This course really opened my eyes to diversity being more than just race and economic status."
- "By showing diversity you begin to introduce the different ideas that will be present in the global market and how we (as engineers) must accept this as normal."

The revised curriculum also elicited positive comments from faculty who said the experience broadened their perspective on diversity, brought attention to diverse learning styles and instructional methods, influenced their views on teaching diverse populations and provided insights into how to use content and instructional methods related to diversity.

"I realized that, while I started out teaching English, I evolved into teaching students," says Terrence Daley, an English department lecturer and faculty learning-community participant.

Janet Meyer, freshman engineering adviser and Daley's colleague in the faculty learning community, emphasizes the importance of listening to students. "You cannot begin a dialogue, much less communicate, if you are doing all the talking," she says.

IUPUI extended its reach to other faculty on campus by developing a Web site focused on multicultural education: [www.opd.iupui.edu/diversity](http://www.opd.iupui.edu/diversity). The site contains materials such as a multicultural classroom resource guide; a multicultural teaching and learning module; an explanation of multicultural teaching techniques; and a collection of faculty essays, including submissions by faculty who participated in the Lumina-sponsored faculty learning communities.



## *The computer as a retention tool*

# Personalizing the college experience one keystroke at a time

**W**hen the University of Southern Indiana (USI) set out to improve freshman-to-sophomore retention rates, it focused on a tool most students consider as vital as their cell phone: their computer.

School officials also beckoned another unlikely partner: students' parents.

With the help of a Lumina Foundation grant, teams of faculty and staff members worked with an outside firm – GoalQuest – to develop lessons that would help students make the transition from high school to college. The lessons were loaded into templates and sent to students' e-mail addresses, and the students completed the work online.

The Evansville-based school also offered parents a separate set of lessons on how they could help their children succeed in college. Parents and students had access to links in each lesson to ask questions and get specific information from university departments. University officials pledged to respond to all comments and queries within 24 hours. And students and parents alike had the opportunity to complete "e-polls" at the end of each lesson and to make comments on how things were going for the student.

"Early intervention is an important component to solving student problems as quickly as possible," says Robert Parrent, USI's vice president for student affairs.

Although all 2,000-plus freshmen received the e-mails, they could choose whether to complete the suggested lesson. One-third to one-half of the students registered and participated in the program. Students who completed the lessons returned for their sophomore year in greater numbers than those who didn't – about 67 percent compared to 65 percent in 2003 and 59 percent in 2004. When their parents participated with them in the project, the retention rates jumped significantly – to 78 percent in 2003 and 71 percent in 2004.

"When parents are involved, students do better in class, have higher test scores and higher graduation rates," Parrent says. "This program informs interested parents and lets them be partners without getting in the way of their students."

About 40 percent of USI's 10,000 students are the first in their family to attend college, so the information contained in the e-mails is key to helping their parents understand their child's college experience. "There's a high level of intimidation – some of these parents might not even understand what a midterm exam is," Parrent says.

Parents – and students – were grateful for access to information. One USI

parent wrote: "I was on the verge of pulling my son out of school. Making it easy for me to get in touch with the right person who could help me help my son was instrumental in keeping him in school. I can't thank you enough."

Lisa Johnson, mom of Jaclyn and Jamie Johnson, says the information covered a broad range of relevant topics. "We were able to find answers to a lot of general questions, and the site also addressed many of the freshman fears," she says. Jaclyn, a freshman elementary education major, and Jamie, a sophomore pre-med major, are following in their mother's footsteps: Lisa Johnson also graduated from USI with a nursing degree.

**"When parents are involved, students do better in class, have higher test scores and higher graduation rates."**

*Robert Parrent*

### **High-tech program creates "high-touch" experience**

One of the reasons for the project's success: It was designed to enhance communication with students and parents – not substitute for personal communication. GoalQuest, a company specializing in Web-based tools that help colleges interact with students and parents, monitored participation in the lessons and prepared index and trend reports for the university. It also gathered information through its e-polls. University officials received alerts about students who were homesick or having other difficulties adjusting to college

life, and the officials would call the students to talk or invite them to lunch.

"We make contact with these students and say, 'Congratulations – you've been selected to have lunch with a vice president today.' And we'd just have a conversation with the student to find out how it's going," says Parrent.

The first year USI used the program, called Project e-AGLE (Electronic Advice for a Great Learning Experience), John Deem, associate vice president of Student Affairs, worked with GoalQuest and an "editorial board" of faculty and staff members to develop the lessons. Topics included time management, working with faculty, getting to know the community, developing good study skills, and choosing a major. "We wanted to introduce students to university life and help them with the transition," Deem says.

Lessons for parents included topics such as campus safety, student privacy, first-semester dynamics and freshman financial issues. The editorial board updates the lessons each year, and Deem ensures that the people on campus receiving e-mail queries understand that follow-up must occur within 24 hours.

Students and parents first used the program in 2003. That year they began receiving e-mail lessons about two weeks after the first semester began. The next year, and each year thereafter, USI started sending the lessons two to three weeks before the fall semester began and sent a new lesson every five to 10 days. In addition, the school periodically sent "live alerts" to parents. For example, an alert might tell them when midterm exams are scheduled (and suggest that they send cookies).

For the 2006-07 academic year, USI is once again experimenting to see if it can further enhance student success. Project e-AGLE is continuing for all freshmen, but for a small subset of the freshman class (about 200-250 students), the lessons are required as part of their coursework in certain classes. Faculty who teach English, math, chemistry and other freshman classes work with GoalQuest to embed the lessons into the course curriculum. "We want to see if these students can be retained at an even higher level," Parrent says.

## Web-based portfolios prove to be an ineffective retention tool

Indiana State University also experimented with using computers to help improve retention by using a Lumina Foundation grant to develop and test the usefulness of Web-based portfolios.

The first year, 192 students took part in the program using a Microsoft Front-Page template developed in-house. The template offered students the opportunity to establish their learning goals, create resumes and post other reflections. Many of the participants were also in freshman learning communities, and the faculty members teaching those classes gave students different assignments related to the portfolio. For instance, one assignment asked students to take a picture of their typical study place and write an essay about the potential distractions. The goal was to get the student to think about the best place to study.

"Our expectation was that a more reflective student would be a better student," says Robert Guell, coordinator of First Year Programs at Indiana State University. Based in Terre Haute, ISU has a total student enrollment of about 10,500. Nearly all of the 8,000 students who attend classes on campus are right out of high school, and about 40 percent come from families where neither parent has attended college. When ISU tested the portfolio program in 2002 and 2003, about 70 percent of freshmen returned for their sophomore year, and ISU wanted to see if the portfolio experience would increase that success rate.

The first year was plagued with software issues. Students and faculty alike had difficulty learning FrontPage, and class time was taken up with teaching the software rather than teaching course content. "The faculty soured on the idea fairly quickly," Guell says.

The second year, the university used an outside source, Nuventive, for a portfolio program called iWebfolio. However, this program proved restrictive or difficult for users, Guell says. About 400 students used this version of the portfolio, but results were no better. In fact, Guell says, in the College of Business, students so disliked working with the portfolio that they stopped attending



**Lisa Johnson used the Web-based initiative Project e-AGLE to stay informed as her daughters, Jaclyn (left) and Jamie, made the transition to college at the University of Southern Indiana.**

class at rates higher than the school had ever seen before. In addition, the portfolios did not have a positive impact on retention or first-semester grades, Guell says.

After two years of testing the portfolios as a way to improve student success, Guell says he's changed his view on the usefulness of reflection in 18- and 19-year-old students. "Reflection is like broccoli to the 5-year-old. No matter how much cheese sauce you put on it, it's still broccoli," he says, noting that students simply didn't want to do the portfolio work.

"Good intentions are not enough," he says. "Even when you have the best people working very hard on a bad idea, it's still a bad idea."

The redeeming factor of this grant, however, was that it clearly revealed, in a well-documented empirical study, that student portfolios did not improve retention. That find, while disappointing to some, is instructive to the university and to funders of student retention programs. The conclusion of this experiment can lead to a more productive deployment of retention resources in the future.





## *Exploring the 'Cheers' effect*

# Linking service learning and persistence

Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) has offered classes with service-learning components for years, but not until 2002 did it test the hunch that community involvement can boost persistence among underrepresented students. IUB used its Lumina grant to expand the number of service-learning classes, recruit at-risk students to fill middle-management positions within the program, and create incentives for faculty to build community-service requirements into courses that typically enroll high numbers of the targeted population.

Early results confirm the accuracy of the hunch. Minority and low-income participants in IUB's Community Outreach and Partnerships in Service-Learning program (COPSL) were 10 percent to 15 percent more likely to persist toward graduation than minority and low-income peers who did not participate. "Across the board, these students were retained at rates greater than non-COPSL students," says Todd Schmitz, executive director of university reporting and research. "Targeted groups are clearly benefiting from the courses."

Claire King, former director of COPSL, credits part of the program's success to the "Cheers" effect. Students develop a sense of identity when they assume active roles in nonprofit organizations where their efforts are valued, the environment is collegial, and "everybody knows your name." This connection to the community can also strengthen the connection to the campus. The experiences that students have in the field support the material they encounter in the classroom. The academic correlation is intentional and keeps participants linked to both settings.

"I was the volunteer coordinator for the Boys and Girls Club," says Lynell Westbrook, a 2005 criminal justice graduate who now manages an Indianapolis-based program that provides mentors for children of inmates. A single mother of two, Westbrook learned about the opportunity after she completed a summer program that prepares first-generation and minority students for their freshman year at IUB. "What immediately grabbed me about service learning was the opportunity to get experience beyond the campus. I knew it would give me the tools to succeed inside and outside the classroom."

For three and a half years Westbrook was a member of a Lumina-funded cadre of undergraduates called ACEs – Advocates for Community Engagement. These mid-level managers were part of IUB's service-learning program before the grant, but Lumina funds strengthened their positions to maximize the impact on persistence. During the grant period, the number of ACEs increased from five to 20 per semester; the majority of ACEs were recruited from underrepresented populations;

hourly pay rose from the federal minimum wage to \$10; and leadership training expanded to include a retreat, several statewide and national conferences and biweekly meetings on campus.

"IU-Bloomington implements service learning primarily through the ACE program," explains King. "That's our distinction. Faculty members on other campuses lead the charge; on this campus, it's the students."

Specifically, ACEs serve as liaisons between the campus and various agencies within the community. Example: Beth Bowling, a senior first-generation student from Indianapolis, was assigned for three years to the local school system, where she recruited and supervised 20 IU service-learning students each semester. She scheduled the college students as tutors and childcare workers and guided them through their service-learning experience during reflection sessions. She wrote grants for the school corporation and was successful in attracting funding for a local literacy program.

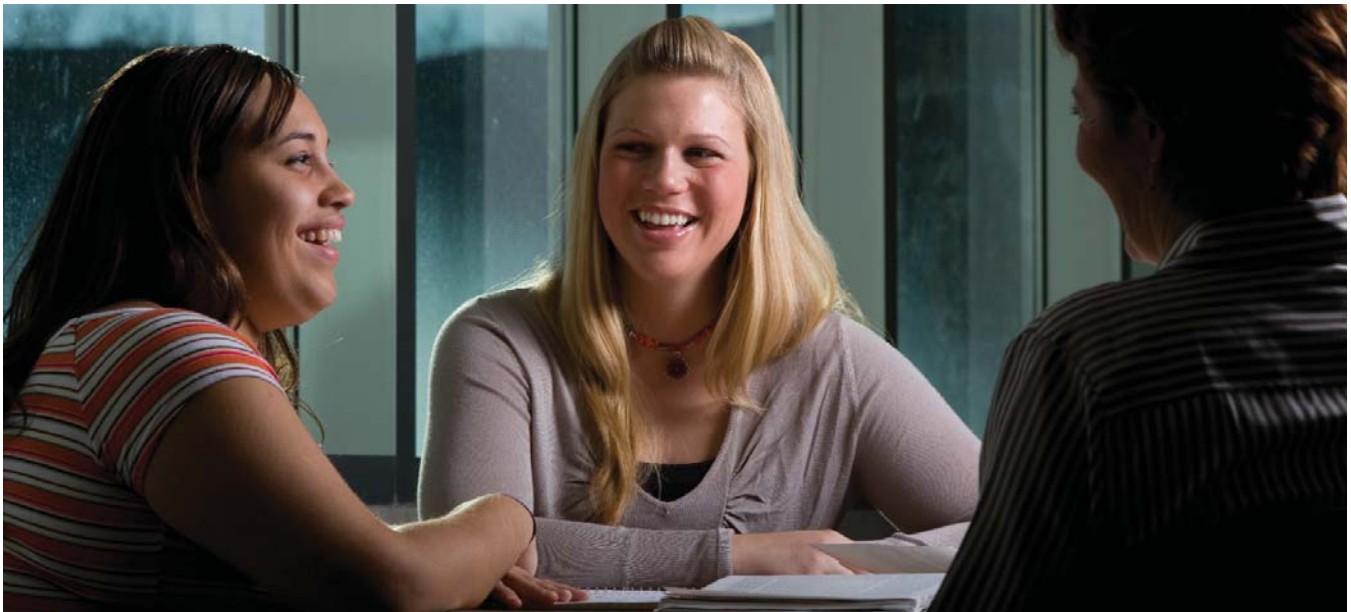
"The ACE program helped sustain me academically, financially and personally," says Bowling, who hopes to work for Teach for America after graduation. "I discovered what I'm capable of, and the experience gave me an edge for what I want to do in the nonprofit world. I understand the concepts of administration, but I've also worked one-on-one with students."

The COPSL staff constantly tweaked the program throughout the Lumina grant period and eliminated aspects of the original proposal that proved ineffective. Two discarded strategies involved efforts to reach underrepresented students and expose them to service-learning opportunities. Initially the COPSL office asked the campus registrar to provide a list of courses that tended to enroll large numbers of the targeted population. The COPSL representative then approached the teachers of those courses and tried to persuade them to redesign their syllabi and add service-learning components.

"The first problem was that the snapshot the registrar took to identify those courses didn't hold true every semester," says King. Courses that were popular



**Lynell Westbrook, a former IU Bloomington student who participated in a service-learning program called Advocates for Community Engagement (ACE), has since graduated and now manages a program that provides mentors for inmates' children.**



**Indiana University Bloomington senior Beth Bowling (center) shares insight about the ACE program with Heydi Correa-Encarnacion (left) and Claire King. Beth says the ACE program helped sustain her academically, financially and personally.**

among underrepresented students in the fall might fail to draw them in the spring. "Second, some professors didn't buy into the concept even when we offered a modest amount of money for them to redesign their courses. We learned not to do 'cold calling' on faculty who had no interest in or idea about service learning."

A more effective strategy involved identifying a professor who was open to the concept and asking an ACE to visit the instructor and explain how service learning could support the classroom curriculum. "Research shows that faculty members are more apt to adopt a service-learning pedagogy at the request of students than at the request of administrators or consultants," says King. The ACE also was available to visit the class and offer a peer-to-peer explanation of the opportunity. "Students listen to other students, whereas they might zone out if an older person were telling them about the program," adds King.

COPSL used Lumina funds to make grants to departments to develop service-learning classes and to fund undergraduate STARS – Student Teaching Assistants for Responsible Service – to handle clerical tasks attached to the startup of a new course. A Service-Learning Faculty Institute was held each summer during the grant period to

provide pragmatic advice for faculty interested in the program. "We included a poster session this past summer," says King. "Faculty who received Lumina grants showcased some of their best practices." The various strategies implemented during the grant period contributed to increasing the number of service-learning courses from 40 to 66, a jump of more than 60 percent.

With so much of the program's success depending on the ACEs, King recommends careful recruitment techniques and training procedures. Students submit written applications, supply references and undergo interviews. Because some students lacked entry-level employee skills, King added a peer-mentoring component so Lumina-funded ACEs can be better prepared.

Although the COPSL office receives about 40 applicants for its 20 ACE positions, King regrets that males of color are more difficult to recruit and retain than other students. "They are unfortunately sometimes regarded as a commodity by certain student organizations and leadership groups who want to have their presence," she explains. "Often times they are overcommitted and aren't able to participate wholeheartedly."

The conclusion of the Lumina grant period in August 2006 brought the end of the STARS component, although

COPSL officials hope to create a downsized version in the future. The program will aggressively seek funding to continue the summer institute and the grant awards to departments that agree to redesign courses to include service learning.

The ACEs will remain the key to the program, and COPSL staff hope the university will increase funding so each ACE can work 20 rather than 10 hours a week. Ongoing evaluations have built a strong case for the program, documenting benefits that range from public relations to persistence.

The mayor of Bloomington describes COPSL and ACE as "IU's single most productive town/gown initiative." As for retention, cumulative statistics support the premise that participation in service learning improves persistence, and in-depth participation profoundly improves it. Of the 62 students who have served as ACEs since the program began, 90 percent have graduated within five years, as compared with 65 percent of the total undergraduate population.

Although not all IUB faculty members have become service-learning advocates, the program is gaining favor. The Faculty Council is now considering a proposal to make service learning a recommended component of the university's general education requirements.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a white card. The card has text printed on it in green and black. The background is a colorful, abstract pattern of various shapes and colors, including green, orange, blue, and white. The card is held at an angle, and the text is clearly legible.

**\$\$\$**

**COLLECT  
FREE  
TUITION**

**GO TO THE HEAD  
OF THE CLASS**

## *The power of community*

# Making it easier for students to learn, persist, succeed

**L**earning with a community of students can have a profound impact on student success in college. Just ask Jay Lauer, a sophomore at Indiana University Purdue University – Fort Wayne (IPFW). Partway through his first semester at school, he cut off part of his thumb while working at a local hardware store. At the time, Lauer was enrolled in a learning community that consisted of a group of students jointly taking an introductory sociology course, a reading class and an English class. He also was taking a math class apart from the learning community.

"In my learning-community classes kids took notes for me and made copies for me," he recalls. "In my math class, I had to use a tape recorder in class and type the notes with one hand into my computer at night."

The example, though atypical, illustrates the sense of community that students can forge when they take multiple courses together that are linked through faculty collaboration. That sense of community can translate into improved student success, higher grades and greater persistence between the freshman and sophomore years.

Learning communities are as varied as the campuses on which they exist. Some, such as the learning community at Indiana University East, seek to involve freshmen in social activities to create a sense of belonging. Others, such as the multicultural learning communities at Purdue University, seek to provide diverse curriculum and experiences to enhance student success and broaden their perspectives of diversity issues on campus. Still others, such as the learning communities at IPFW, seek to offer students integrated content, out-of-classroom experiences and a sense of identity on campus.

Despite their varying configurations, all learning communities strive to do the same thing: create camaraderie among students to help them learn, persist, succeed – and eventually graduate.

"It's so much easier to learn when you feel that you are cared about," says Britany May, a freshman at IPFW.

"The advantage of learning communities is that students have instantaneous study groups and academic-based relationships," says Drew Koch, director of Purdue's Student Access, Transition and Success programs. Indeed at Purdue's West Lafayette campus, where nearly 40,000 students attend classes, having an instant peer group can help to make the campus seem a bit smaller.

"The multicultural learning communities give students the ability to see people who are different from themselves in the same boat," says Thelma Snuggs, assistant professor in Purdue's College of Consumer and Family Science. "They seem to be one big family at the end of the semester."

## Purdue tests impact of multicultural learning communities

Purdue first began offering learning communities in 1997. In 2003-04, the university used its President's Fund grant to test the idea that learning communities could be effectively arranged around a unifying theme. The thread that tied the academic coursework together in this case was multiculturalism.

In addition to improving freshman-to-sophomore retention, Koch says, "We wanted to see if students were more comfortable with their environment and whether they connected with one another." Faculty developed the themes and worked together to make their courses cohesive and reflect multi-

**"The advantage of learning communities is that students have instantaneous study groups and academic-based relationships."**

*Drew Koch*

cultural content. "The courses are mutually reinforcing," Koch says.

These multicultural learning communities (MLCs) linked two or three courses for first-semester freshmen. Two focused on science: One linked general chemistry, introduction to careers in engineering and engineering problem solving and computer skills; the other put together the general chemistry course with English composition and a chemistry service-learning class. A third paired a speech class with an English class focused on "coming of age" stories. Students took their classes together and roomed with another student from their specific learning community.

Snuggs, who helped to develop the

Marketplace 2020 MLC that was launched in 2004-05, says she teaches multiculturalism as the norm. "We know our country's ethnic population is growing. Diversity will become the norm in the future."

April Quarles participated in the Marketplace 2020 MLC as a freshman. Now a junior pre-pharmacy student, she says the experience helped motivate her to get better grades and learn how to talk with professors. Quarles came from a home-school environment, and she says developing a relationship with Professor Snuggs gave her the confidence to approach other professors. "Being given the opportunity to speak with a professor in a small classroom helped me not to be intimidated when I needed to talk with other professors," she says.

Purdue worked hard to develop the appropriate racial mix that would create an optimal learning environment. "Initially we worked to have 50 percent minority participation in the multicultural learning communities," Koch says. However, after examining the results for the first year and reviewing relevant research, the group lowered its minority participation targets to 35 to 45 percent. (Research published by Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund and Parente shows that 33 percent to 38 percent minority representation in classrooms is optimal for learning.)

The university studied the impact of the MLCs for three years on a total of 212 students. Overall MLC participants were retained for their sophomore year at a rate nearly 8 percent higher than that of nonparticipants, with minority students showing even greater gains – at more than 10 percent.

One surprising finding emerged: Retention of white participants was slightly lower than it was for nonparticipants the first year. Koch responded with some changes in the second and third years of the project.

In addition to improved retention from the freshman to sophomore years, Purdue officials found that students in multicultural learning communities were more likely to have relationships and friendships with people of different racial backgrounds, and they were more likely to view the campus climate on di-



After cutting off part of his thumb during his first semester, Jay Lauer (right), now a sophomore at Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne, relied on classmates such as Kevin Tumbleson (left) to take class notes for him. Greg Anderson (center), associate director of the IPFW's First-Year Experience, says peer support keeps students on track.

versity more positively. "That (pattern of relationships) can be a huge contributor to minority-retention issues," Koch says.

### Commuter students benefit from learning community program at IPFW

At IPFW officials embarked on a campus-wide journey to build learning communities from the ground up. It started its Lumina-funded initiative by forming three large teams – one team to focus on curriculum, one to explore co-curricular activities that became an integral part of the learning communities, and one to make sure the learning community message was spread throughout the campus.

"We wanted buy-in from across the whole campus," says Marc Lipman, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and project leader. "From the beginning, the project was always looked at as everyone's program – not just a program of one area."

Representatives from all walks of campus life – from administrative secre-

taries to information technology workers to staffers from the registrar's office – participated in the planning process. "When we told people this program would be built on their ideas, they came up with great ideas," he says.

"We wanted to build a cohort of students who saw each other in two classes and developed working relationships. And we wanted each class to support the success of the other class," he says.

The university experimented with a variety of models. Some learning communities linked two courses that were the same size, such as an English and a speech course. Other learning communities paired one large lecture class, such as sociology, with two sections of a smaller English class. Still others took two smaller linked classes and integrated them with a larger class so that only a portion of the larger class belonged to a learning community.

"We worked with the faculty to design the models that would work," says Rachelle Darabi, director of the First Year Experience and Center for Academic

Support and Advancement, which houses the learning community program.

In its first two years, IPFW offered 18 to 20 learning communities each year; about 420 to 435 students enrolled in them. For 2006-07, the communities greatly expanded to 31 with 675 students – about half of the freshman class.

Results show that learning-community participants return for a second year of college at a rate about 10 percent higher than that of non-learning community participants. In addition, grade-point averages of learning-community participants ranged from .44 percentage points to .73 percentage points higher for different cohorts of students when compared with students taking the same classes that were not linked as a learning community.

Although initial results are promising, Lipman says the concept still should be considered experimental. "We don't know if the bump we see in the first year will sustain itself in ways that lead to a change in the graduation rates," he says, noting that IPFW's six-



**A robot assists Purdue's Thelma Snuggs as she teaches Marketplace 2020, a service-learning opportunity in which students help local organizations plan for their future.**

year graduation rate is just 20 percent. "We lose a lot of students I don't think we should lose. We haven't persuaded them that going to the university is the most important thing for them to do."

### **IU East creates camaraderie through learning-community field trips**

Like the learning communities at IPFW and Purdue, the freshman seminar at Indiana University East (IUE) in Richmond set out to ease the transition to higher education for low-income and first-generation college students. What distinguished the IUE program from its counterparts was a travel component designed to address an unusual characteristic of the targeted population.

"Many people in this part of the state are area-bound," explains Lanette Young, assistant vice chancellor of student success. "We have students who have never been to Indianapolis, Dayton or Cincinnati, even though those

cities are less than two hours away."

Through a series of field trips, students in the learning community class built relationships with each other based on shared adventures. In the process, they learned about Civil War history at the Freedom Center in Cincinnati, about African-American culture at Black Expo in Indianapolis and about Indiana pioneer life at Conner Prairie in Fishers. They improved their writing skills by recording their reactions in journals and overcame their fear of stepping outside their familiar environment.

"We hit home runs with the trips," says Young. She estimates the persistence rate for program participants at about 70 percent. "Before this class we were lucky to hit 50 percent," she says. Encouraged by the success, IUE expanded the learning community for fall 2006 and linked four courses, one of which is the piloted freshman seminar. In addition to the academic classes, students and faculty will participate in field trips, attend campus events together, join in a service-

learning project and meet other IU East faculty and staff in informal settings.

### **The importance of out-of-classroom experiences**

Both the Purdue and IPFW learning communities also incorporated out-of-classroom experiences into the learning-community curriculum. "We are convinced that this aspect of learning communities is very important to getting students emotionally connected to IPFW," Fort Wayne's Lipman says. "The emotional attachment to the university increases their focus on academics."

In the IPFW learning community that links an introductory criminal justice course with a speech fundamentals course, students attended a debate among sheriff's candidates before the fall elections. Students rated the speakers and learned first-hand how important communication can be for a career in criminal justice. Later in the semester, the same students and their instructors attended a campus theater production of *Exonerated* – a drama about six people who were convicted and placed on death row for crimes they didn't commit.

At Purdue, the multicultural learning communities tapped into service-learning opportunities. Snuggs' Marketplace 2020 students joined with local organizations such as the Trinity Mission and worked with mission staff members to determine the organization's needs 20 years from now and helped develop a program to address those needs.

Students in the two science-related learning communities, called Bonding and IDEAS, worked closely with the university's Science Bound program, which encourages students to consider careers in science and helps to put them on the path of earning a Purdue degree. First-year chemistry and engineering students assisted Indianapolis Public Schools teachers by making science presentations to high school students, working on projects with them and acting as mentors.

"The service-learning component of the multicultural learning communities brings a lot of the cultural context into reality," says Michael Thompson, a Purdue graduate student who worked with the two science learning communities.



## IPFW Learning Communities

Students enrolled in several learning communities at Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne achieved higher grade point averages in their learning-community classes than students enrolled in the same classes that were not part of a learning community.

Comparison of Students' GPA in specific courses in Learning Communities and out of Learning Communities (Fall 2005)

Linked courses	GPA (LC)	GPA (Non-LC)
Fundamentals of Speech Introduction to Computers	2.89	2.35
Introduction to Engineering Fundamentals of Speech	3.24	2.51
Principles of Business Elementary Composition	3.09	2.51
Elementary Composition Fundamentals of Speech	3.05	2.53
American Criminal Justice System Fundamentals of Speech Freshman success	2.42	1.98

Source: IPFW statistics.

## Purdue Multicultural Learning Communities

As part of Purdue University's study of the impact of multicultural learning communities, it created and administered a Diversity Perceptions Scale to participants in the multicultural learning communities and the university's other learning communities. Students answered 37 questions pulled from the National Survey of Living/Learning Programs by rating their levels of agreement on specific topics.

### Findings:

Multicultural learning community participants were more likely to:

- Interact with students from other racial backgrounds.
- Display greater appreciation for and more awareness of multiple values, viewpoints, races and ethnicities.
- Be involved in and/or be aware of multicultural relationships on campus.
- Feel more comfortable with diversity and being a diverse student on campus.

Source: Purdue University final report to Lumina Foundation.

"A lot of engineering students think 'I'm an engineer – I don't have to deal with the world.' When we train them to go into an urban school system, their eyes pop open."

### Faculty members are key drivers to learning-community success

Key to the success of learning communities is faculty interest, participation and training.

"Our multicultural learning communities are very faculty-driven and faculty-specific," Koch says, noting that when a faculty member involved in the Coming of Age learning community took a sabbatical during fall 2005, Purdue didn't offer that learning community for that semester.

The first year Purdue offered the MLCs, faculty spent time during the summer incorporating multicultural content into courses, developing new courses, and working with other faculty members to ensure cohesive content throughout the learning community.

At IPFW, faculty members are trained every year they participate in a learning community. The training sessions give faculty tips on how to ensure their courses are linked. They also identify campus resources and provide feedback from students who have taken the learning community courses in the past. Training also stresses how important it is for collaborating instructors to set up a regular meeting regimen, Lipman says.

"This training is mandatory even if they've taught the learning community before," Lipman says. Staff members also support the learning communities through the university's First Year Experience program and Center for Academic Success and Achievement. They meet with university advisers, ensuring they understand the goals and requirements of the program.

"One of our challenges is to complete the education of all of our advisers," says Lipman.

Another challenge is this: How to extend learning communities past the first

semester of the freshman year. During that second semester, the freshmen scatter across disciplines, Lipman says, and it is harder to find coordinated pairs of classes to take.

Purdue's Koch agrees there is a need for more coordinated experiences following the first year. "... while initial retention results were strong, students, particularly minority and female students, failed to be retained into their junior years at the same level as seen from their first to second years of college," he wrote in his final report to Lumina. "Further, they seemed to lose more ground than their non-participating counterparts.

"This finding suggests that the learning community model of linked courses, out-of-class support, and increased instructor-student contact can be one of the major factors involved with retaining underrepresented populations. Stronger, more connected sophomore-, junior- and/or senior-year experiences could help to maintain the increases."

*Editor's note: John N. Gardner, executive director of the Policy Center on the First Year of College in Brevard, N.C., is one of the nation's leading researchers and practitioners in a critical area of postsecondary education: how to keep college students enrolled and progressing. Because this issue of "Lessons" examines a group of programs that share this goal, we knew that John could add an informed and valuable perspective. The following essay certainly does so, and we thank John for his time and his willingness to share his expertise.*

When it comes to higher education, what happens in Indiana matters. It matters to me personally. I am the recipient of both a master's degree in American Studies and an honorary doctorate from Purdue University. That university and the state invested a fellowship in me way back in 1965-66, and I am still repaying the balance due.

What happens in Indiana matters nationally, too. Indiana higher education has a long history of innovation in improving the first year of college. A convergence of factors has made this possible:

- Two major, Indianapolis-based philanthropies have made extraordinary investments in this work, among the largest state-level philanthropic investments in the country.
- Over several decades, a number of leading, Indiana-based practitioners, thinkers and researchers have made continuing contributions to this field.
- The state's colleges and universities have displayed a high degree of commitment and willingness to take risks.
- This trend has held true despite several changes in institutions' presidential administrations.
- The state has shown high aspirations for postsecondary performance and has

had the foresight to build and maintain three world-class AAU universities.

- The state's formerly prosperous industrial economy has undergone radical change because of globalization and other transformations in the American economy.

All of these factors have set the stage for the important work described in this publication. It has been my pleasure to review the reports from the programs at these institutions and to offer my perspective on the lessons they impart. In that spirit, I offer a dozen points for other practitioners to ponder:

**Return on investment.** Look at what just \$1.5 million will buy spread over just a few years in 15 institutions. Just think what we might be able to do if we ramped this up – and made a real institutional commitment to these activities.

**Put it in the budget.** These initiatives show me once again how colleges can demonstrate that, by using someone else's money, they can do what they should have been doing all along with their own money! The next step is to work on institutionalizing these initiatives.

**Fire up the faculty.** A core theme for improving the first year must be more of what this initiative yielded: a focus on engaging the faculty – full-time, tenure track and tenured – in redesigning introductory courses. The majority of these campuses were non-residential. Particularly on those campuses, if students are going to be "engaged" at all, it will only happen in the classroom. I believe that focusing on the faculty is the last remaining frontier in first-year retention work. These initiatives show promise for a real transformation of faculty pedagogies. As one faculty mem-

# the rest of the nation

ber put it: "I realized that while I started out teaching English, I evolved into teaching students."

**Transform, don't tinker.** One of the dirty little secrets being kept from the American taxpaying and college-sending public is the extraordinarily low rate of student success in introductory courses – particularly math courses. To me, this means we must accept nothing less than course "transformation." I applaud the efforts of approximately half of the grantees represented in this report to create such transformation. We need to encourage such bold action on other campuses.

**Students leading students.** Another pervasive theme – one that I think is one of the truly big ideas in this grant initiative – was the investment in, and the belief in, the power of student peer leaders to enhance student success. Research shows that the greatest source of influence on student learning and behavioral choices during the college years is that of other students. It seems intuitive, then, that we would want to place more of our most outstanding students in positions of leadership to influence incoming students.

**Tighten town-gown ties.** A number of these grantees used Lumina funding to take new steps to enhance campus-community connections through such initiatives as: 1) service learning; 2) minority student recruitment; 3) providing direct services to enrolled high school students; 4) and serving inmates in area penal institutions. The idea of taking retention efforts to the streets, off and away from campus, merits greater investment and effort.

**Trust the students.** These grantees believed that "if we build it, the students will come." Too often in my work, I encounter the all-too-prevalent negative self-fulfilling prophecies summed up in statements such as: "Oh, our students would never do that ... They don't have the time ... That would only work at a four-year, residential university." We have to believe that our students will take advantage of special opportunities if we create, market and execute them properly. These projects truly demonstrate that.

**Failure isn't fatal.** We must give license to both faculty and staff to experiment, to take risks. How much I admired Bob Guell's reporting from his work with electronic portfolios at Indiana State University that, for a combination of reasons, the strategy didn't seem right for his institution at this time. He is to be commended for trying it out and for reporting honestly what he found.

**Target students of color.** In this era of retreat from aggressive initiatives to enhance affirmative action and provide greater opportunities for students of color, I was pleased and inspired to see the number of Indiana campuses for which this is still a high priority.

**Mom and Dad matter.** Although only the University of Southern Indiana took this route, I was pleased to see an initiative focused on parents. We need to improve our outreach to families. For nearly three decades, American higher education has attempted to abandon the principle of *in loco parentis*, and we have paid a high price. To paraphrase one current presidential aspirant: "It takes a village ..."

**Break the cycle.** I was inspired to see that at least one institution used these precious grant resources to serve incarcerated persons. As a former vice chancellor who supervised prison college programs, I have long believed that our society must do more to educate imprisoned citizens if we are to have any hope of reducing recidivism and its attendant suffering. Kudos to you, Purdue University North Central!

**Never stop striving.** I was inspired that institutions that have already achieved levels of excellence and recognition for their successes with first-year students are not resting on their laurels. Rather than simply rolling out the same programs each year, they continue to ask tough questions about how they can improve their efforts.

In conclusion, I feel the programs examined in this report are highly relevant to the larger higher education community, with great potential for emulation and replication. As Indiana goes, so could the rest of the nation.

We certainly need to!



*John N. Gardner,  
executive director of  
the Policy Center  
on the First Year  
of College.*

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P.O. Box 1806, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1806  
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March 2007



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