

Purdue University

Rationale for this Approach to the First Year of College

In December 1996, Lilly Endowment, Inc. invited Purdue University to participate in a special initiatives grant focused on developing and implementing programs to increase baccalaureate completion rates. During the first quarter of 1997, a system-wide team representing faculty, students, and staff prepared a \$5 million grant proposal entitled Enhancing Undergraduate Commitment, Integration, and Persistence. The programs included in the proposal were selected on the basis of their ability to produce significant, positive changes in first-year retention and, ultimately, baccalaureate degree completion rates for students enrolled at Purdue Calumet, Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW), Purdue North Central, and Purdue West Lafayette. Lilly Endowment, Inc. approved the grant proposal in late spring 1997, and on September 1, 1997, the Purdue campuses involved in the effort launched their five-year project.

The grant-funded projects comprehensively and intentionally address learning, success, and satisfaction of students, primarily during the first year of college. A variety of national and campus-specific reports pointed out the merit for doing so. For example, a study of voluntary withdrawal patterns for the Purdue West Lafayette showed that nearly 45% of the students in the withdrawer cohort left the campus after the conclusion of their first or second semester. Comparable data from the other Purdue campuses involved in the project lead to the coordinated system wide focus on enhancing the first-year experience.

Program Description

The Retention Initiatives are based on the theoretical framework of student retention developed by Vincent Tinto (1975). Tinto postulates that a student's decision to persist or withdraw is a longitudinal process that is dependent on his or her academic and social experiences in college. These experiences impact the student's ongoing level of commitment to his or her college attendance goals, and the student's level of integration within the university community. Using Tinto's theory as an organizing principle, the following retention initiatives were proposed and implemented:

1. Enhancing Initial Commitment

- Expansion and Coordination of Orientation Programming
- Purdue Summer Start (Summer Bridge Program)

2. Enhancing Integration and Ongoing Commitment – Academic and Social Experiences

- First-Year Seminar Studies (Discipline Based First-Year Seminars)

- Supplemental Instruction and Flexible Pacing
- Honors and Research Experiences
- Learning Communities

3. Enhancing Delivery Systems – Instructional and Student Support Services

- Central Coordination of Retention-Related Programs and Services
- Faculty and T.A. Development
- Proactive Academic Advising
- Front-Line Staff Development
- PurdueNet (Web-Based Student Support Services)

Evidence of Effectiveness

One measure of the effectiveness of the project comes from the initiative-specific assessment results. Students participating in the grant-sponsored programs tend to earn higher grades and report higher levels of satisfaction with their college experiences than comparable non-participants. In addition, first-to-second year retention rates, perhaps the truest measure of students' satisfaction with their learning experiences, are higher for Lilly Endowment Retention Initiative participants when compared to comparable non-participants. The campus-specific differences in first-to-second year retention rates for program participants compared to comparable non-participants follow:

§	Purdue Calumet	+7.5%	§	Purdue North Central	+22.7%
§	IPFW	+16.7%	§	Purdue West Lafayette	+11.4%

Evidence of an intentional, comprehensive approach to improving the first year, appropriate to an institution's type

The systemwide structure of the project, which includes staff charged with University-wide coordination, serves as evidence of the intentional and comprehensive nature of Purdue's effort. While an array of first-year student focused initiatives are associated with this effort, it must be noted that not all campuses are initiating all of the programs that fall under the project's programmatic umbrella. In addition, even when multiple campuses are conducting the same project, each campus has created a version of the initiative that fits the culture of that particular environment. In this way, the project serves as an example of "mass customization" – where programs are common throughout the Purdue University system but are tailored to meet the unique needs of the respective campuses on which they exist.

Evidence of assessment of the various initiatives that constitute this approach

The impact each program is having on first-to-second year and cumulative retention, student grades, voluntary and involuntary withdrawal rates, and graduation rates is being examined as is the impact that participation in multiple programs is having on student success and retention. In addition, qualitative assessment activities such as focus groups, open-ended surveys, and structured interviews are being used to help the University community understand why particular programs or combinations of programs contribute or fail to contribute to increased student learning, satisfaction, and retention. The outcomes are reported annually to Lilly Endowment, Inc., and have been used to successfully prove that the programs should be internalized. Copies of the annual reports and project-specific assessment results are available on the web respectively at http://www.purdue.edu/Retention/pages/reports/re_annual.html and <http://www.purdue.edu/Retention/pages/assessment/assessment.html>.

Evidence of broad impact on significant numbers of first-year students, including, but not limited to, special student sub populations

Since their inception in fall 1997-98, thousands of students have taken part in the grant-sponsored programs. Participant numbers by campus through the end of spring 2000-01 follow.

Retention Initiative Participation Numbers by Campus Through the End of Spring 2000-01

Campus	Participants
Calumet	2,272
IPFW	2,777
North Central	5,791
West Lafayette	4,392
Total	15,232

While none of the programs are solely targeted at either group, underrepresented minorities and women constitute a large portion of the program participant population. Some examples follow:

- Minorities are represented in the SI participant population at IPFW and Learning Communities population at Purdue West Lafayette to a larger extent and persist at a higher rate than the non-user populations.
- Females account for a much larger part of the Honors program population on the West Lafayette campus than they do in the non-participant population, and persist at a rate that is ten percentage points higher.

Strong administrative support for first-year initiatives, evidence of institutionalization and durability over time

The projects have the highest senior level support and commitment, with the Provost serving as the Principle Investigator. With few exceptions, all of the initiatives described in the grant proposal have been institutionalized and will be supported with non-grant funds in 2002-03.

Involvement of a wide range of faculty, student affairs professionals, academic administrators, and other constituents

The engagement of faculty, staff, and students in projects that span schools has enriched Purdue's culture. Nearly six hundred University employees from four campuses have come together since the start of the Lilly Endowment Retention Initiatives to design, implement, and modify projects that intentionally make the college learning experience more cohesive, rich, and satisfying.