

CAUSERIE / CONVERSATIONS
Friday, October 3, 2008 • Topic: Retention
At Alfred Guillaume's Home

Attendees:

Eileen Bender, Co-chair Self-Study Committee and English
Rebecca Brittenham, English
Sam Centellas, Student Life
Marvin Curtis, Arts
Steven Gerencser, Political Science
Alfred Guillaume, Academic Affairs
Jerry Hinnefeld, Academic Senate President and Physics
Randy Isaacson, Education
Jeff Jones, Student Services and Enrollment Management
Larry Lambert, Arts
Monica Lynker, Advising Director, CLAS, and Physics
John McIntosh, Academic Affairs
John Novak, Institutional Research
Mae Reck, Chancellor
Paula Smith, Student Housing

Alfred Guillaume, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, welcomed everyone, briefly explained the history of *causeries* at IU South Bend, and introduced this *causerie* which was to focus on retention at IU South Bend. Mae Reck, Chancellor, stated her established view and message to the campus that we are all champions of retention. She noted the IU Degrees of Excellence initiative and that expansion of U100 was the primary focus of IU South Bend's efforts for the initiative this year. The Chancellor emphasized that every student we accept should have the opportunity to succeed. Both the Chancellor and Jeff Jones, Vice Chancellor for Student Services and Enrollment Management, provided some details about the Degrees of Excellence initiative and specifically how that affects IU South Bend. The initiative directed each IU campus to redistribute 1% of its nonacademic budget (administrative overhead) over 5 years to be used for retention efforts. For the IU South Bend campus this meant \$117,000 for the current academic year and a cumulative total of reallocated base budget of \$560,000 over the five years. In addition to support and expansion of U100 classes, the current-year efforts included also peer mentors, math graders, and book vouchers. The Chancellor requested that tonight she would especially appreciate hearing conversations focusing on current and possible future initiatives (e.g., scholarships, as IUB is doing with its Degrees of Excellence monies), considerations of admission standards, and new operational plans.

Following is a summary of the content contributed during the conversations. This account is not intended to represent every statement made but rather a summary as recorded in notes taken at the *causerie*.

It was suggested that substantial *financial aid is one of the most important things we can do for student success and retention*. Most students get loans, but this leaves many students with large debt when they graduate.

Institutional Research created a large report regarding retention among students who do and do not receive aid. This report could inform our efforts with respect to need-based scholarships/funds. We have 800-900 students in the beginning cohort and this forms the base for our retention numbers and tracking.

Even smaller/lesser amounts of scholarships show the value we place on students and that the university wants them to succeed and values them and the education they receive (i.e., any size scholarship provides positive evaluation and encouragement).

This fall there are 16 peer mentors in U100. They completed a summer prep class. They received a \$500 scholarship in fall for doing so and serving as a peer mentor. There were several criteria, including GPA, to become eligible to be a peer mentor. There is some likelihood that the criteria (e.g., GPA requirements) will be raised over time. This experience is intended to teach these peer mentors not only to serve in that capacity but to be leaders and to be involved in campus (and elsewhere) activities. One of the attendees relayed a positive experience with a peer mentor in U100 this semester.

The peer advisor model is used across the nation successfully as well. It has been demonstrated that there are benefits for students *and* peer advisors by the use of this model. Included among these benefits are positive influences on retention. Being a peer mentor reinforces their learning as well as their leadership. Peer mentors gain great experience.

Students who are *not* succeeding need to be contacted early and advised regarding turning around their performance. One problem occurs with respect to students withdrawing from a class and thereby dropping below 12 credit hours – creating financial aid as well as possible insurance problems for falling below full-time enrollment levels. ***How about an arrangement for instance with Ivy Tech (a “financial aid consortium agreement”) somewhat similar to our academic articulation agreements to confront this situation and help these students keep full loads*** (e.g., a student with 12 credit hours withdraws from an IU South Bend class, but then enrolls in a class at Ivy Tech – particularly if there would be classes on a different schedule than the start-end dates of IU classes – and the total load of 9 IU hours could be considered in combination with the 3 Ivy Tech hours to maintain eligibility for “full time” status for insurance/financial aid). Another important and often ignored approach to address this issue is to ***actively encourage students to initially take 15 credit hour loads rather than the more typical 12 credit hours*** that preclude dropping any courses. Both loads (12 and 15) are considered full time and if more students took (and completed at least sometimes) 15 credit hour semesters this would increase on-time graduation rates in particular as well as providing “insurance” in the case of a need to withdraw from a course. ***There is also an urgent need for universities, including ours, to do more “financial advising”*** that complements academic advising in important ways. This financial advising not only addresses

monetary issues related to educational costs, but the whole-person financial situation (i.e., assist students in plan to pay *all* their bills). 45% of schools offer or plan to offer financial advising. Could this be part of the curriculum somehow/somewhere (e.g., U100, gen ed, elsewhere)? It should be pointed out to students that it is better to finish their degree in 4 years and start working at higher income than to stretch their education out over a longer period of time at lower income levels. In truth, work is often jeopardizing the students' time toward their degrees. We have some data on these issues (e.g., students working and hours, etc.). The average number of hours worked by IU South Bend students is in the teens – National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) data – and these figures are part of our annual reports now.

We also *need to maximize the use of federal work-study funds on our campus*. This is a benefit to us *and* students (and we can hire more of them) when they are part of federal work-study. We need to build this into our campus culture.

Work-study also will help students to work on campus rather than elsewhere (at off-campus employment) and this is a benefit again to all. We did not use our allocation of work-study funds in year 1 (universities can ask for more if they exhaust them). Eligibility for work-study derives from/is based on FAFSA. Work-study has not been part of the financial aid “package” offered to students by our office, so we are now being more aggressive. It might be kept in mind that these tend to be the poorest (financially) of our students who may also lack work experiences. But students who receive work-study can be engaged on campus and involved. Enrollment Services could inform students better that they are eligible and will work to do so. Unmet needs (typically approximately 55% of the gap: difference between the total cost and the expected family contribution), if addressed, can significantly affect student retention. The current market crisis has already affected student loads; IU has moved more to direct lending which will help. Another program available is a PLUS Loan (Federal Parent Loan for Undergraduate Student). 60% of students receive some kind of assistance/aid. Most students probably file FAFSA.

An issue that was raised focused on the question: What is our responsibility to the small number of students who have become disengaged/inactive in class? Do I take from the top students to help/contact/encourage these inactive students or do I devote that time to the top students and those in the middle? This is an early career question, but it persists. It was suggested that perhaps reporting such students on IU-Retain would make the faculty member feel better (like you had done something), but... If students are reported through/to IU-Retain, this will be forwarded to their academic advisor who would send an email and/or make a phone call to them. Recruitment and advising need to be synchronized to increase retention and success. Remedial needs are being phased out, which creates more challenges. It was observed that these low performance, disengaged students often are hard to help/”get” to advise and assist.

Specialists need to work together and talk to one another so that we have strategies to employ and know what others are doing. The professor is the main contact students have but faculty may not be involved in retention. *That seems to imply that we need to train*

faculty on what to do with students who seem at risk. We need to understand why students have “escaped” and make certain there is a triage with our campus specialists to try to retain them. Faculty need to have strategies/training on how to get them to go to get help. *One way to do this is to let the U100 instructors (who have these students in class and see them twice a week) know which of their students are having problems (i.e., IU-Retain information!).* Faculty need to know what approaches to take. IU-Retain makes reporting which students are in trouble possible – once you know who they are sometimes “seizing them” is needed in order to advise them (particularly if they are not attending often).

In response to a question about who the students in U100 are: U100 students are primarily probationary admits or those who are advised into the class by their advisor; 365 students in U100 this fall (>300 1st semester students). There are special programs that have been developed for probationary students – a national conference reported on these efforts – that provide some strategies to get them off probation. There are 18 sections of U100 in the fall, and 5-6 more for the spring (latter are usually probationary students – we had bad experiences with this group last spring). This fall students in U100 were given a contract regarding absences from class and “mandated” withdrawal as a result (i.e., a signed agreement).

Each unit has different probationary policies. This represents a problem. It would be desirable to have a common policy and central advising director who would coordinate advising efforts. The Advising Task Force report and recommendations are being discussed with the Deans on Monday. The VCAA also will be meeting with the Task Force and PAC, and there will be a *causerie* on advising. Advising commonalities and practices, regarding probation and other issues are also being considered. The current practices sometimes hinder retention and student success (as well as debt). This is another place where “financial advising” would help students to understand their financial aid situation and how the system works.

The number of students in classes lessens the capacity/chance for faculty to intervene with students having problems – thus the issue of increasing class sizes to deal with enrollment pressures may create additional problems with retention. It was noted that this is more problematic in some classes than in others.

An interesting approach is being implemented at IUPUI and was discussed at the recent ALC meeting. In this approach, *students who need remedial work in particular, but otherwise meet admission criteria, are offered provisional admission for the fall. If the student attends summer class(es) and addresses his or her remedial needs, then the student is assured of admission and gets a priority status for class registration. These classes are taught on the IUPUI campus by Ivy Tech faculty at no cost to the students.*

The focus on degree completion may actually aid our efforts to retain students (i.e., with its inclusion in the enrollment change formula).

We can look at *and* pay attention to the data we have on these issues to eventually improve retention and graduation rates.

The specter associated with the exclusion of remedial courses on our campuses was raised and some of the implications discussed. It was pointed out that this is not really an issue we can reverse since the HEC has already made a decision. The emphasis needs to shift to how we can partner with Ivy Tech to get the students who need remedial work to IU South Bend and to identify with IU South Bend (either from the beginning of their higher education careers or at the conclusion of their Ivy Tech courses or associate degrees). Another issue here involves the use of qualified instructors as well as the tuition dollars. There still seem to be some problems with students coming from Ivy Tech with respect to their level of preparation but also with retaining qualified teachers as well. This underscores the need for lecturers – full-time faculty, not emergency appointments as we currently so often do – that still exists.

The Vice Chancellor thanked everyone for coming and for sharing their thoughts in the conversation. He emphasized the need for all of us at IU South Bend – faculty, staff, and administration – to work together as a team. We need to be sure IU South Bend is the best education and best opportunity for students.

After two hours of lively discussion, *causerie* members enjoyed an authentic New Orleans dinner and continued their discussions informally.

Notes submitted by
John McIntosh
October 9, 2008