

Task Force: Encourage and Maintain Academic Excellence
Phase One Report: 1 July 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Definitions/Purposes

Defining the Topic

One of the key tasks that we will need to undertake in this next year is to launch a campus dialogue on this issue of how we, as an institution, will choose to define “academic excellence”—in the process, we will be defining the unique identity of our institution. It became clear during our situational analysis that some current programs and policies on campus serve to reinforce the model of excellence as a scarce commodity, possessed by only a select few, while other programs and policies seek instead to develop the ability to excel for a much wider set of participants.

Planning Boundaries

The Planning Territory

In exploring what we currently do on campus to encourage and maintain academic excellence, we chose to focus on three areas for our situational analysis: 1) Excellence of Programs: standards, goals, assessment and accreditation reports; 2) Student Excellence: recognition, incentives, support for excellence (SMART, departmental/divisional student awards, other opportunities to excel); and 3) Faculty Excellence: recruiting, developing, and retaining excellent faculty (support for research, scholarship, teaching, service, role of UCET). These initial foci need to be expanded to include attention to staff excellence and to the role of graduate programs on campus as we move forward with our analysis. In addition, there is considerable overlap between our taskforce and the Student Learning Taskforce. We recommend that we coordinate our efforts so as not to duplicate effort.

Perceived Attainments:

IUSB offers over 100 academic programs at the certificate, associate, bachelor’s and master’s level taught by highly qualified faculty who take their teaching seriously. In an Image Study of the campus, prepared in April 2002 by Carnegie Communications, IUSB was compared to Ball State, Ivy Tech, and Bethel (institutions seen as our major competitors for students). Carnegie surveyed both potential undergraduate students (prospects) as well as alumni, teachers, business and religious leaders (influencers) in order to assess how IUSB is perceived in our community. While IUSB and Ball State rated equally high among prospects, influencers ranked IUSB in a league of its own above Ball State. IUSB was perceived to be more academically challenging, more personal, more diverse than Ball State by both groups.

For four key selected items, [1-Professors among the best in their fields, 2-Professors are great teachers; 3-People think highly of students and graduates; and 4- Would recommend institution], IUSB ranked highest among the four institutions.

The physical plant has been enriched by the addition of the Student Activities Center, the new Art Gallery, and the renovated International House. Future construction of the new bridge and the addition of a state of the art studio that will serve as the news bureau for WVPE and the new Spanish language radio station will further enhance the campus. Our capital campaign has reached the \$3.6 million mark (out of the \$5 million goal).

For our students, we offer a number of initiatives to enhance excellence. These include the Honors Program; a number of scholarships (not all of which are based on academic merit); student honorary societies in the various schools and disciplines; honors recognition through the Dean's List and graduation honors; unit-based student excellence awards; the SMART program to fund student research; and the ACP program for talented high school students.

Our staff have benefited from an investment in bringing salaries up to market (\$490,000) as well as new initiatives to provide merit raises for staff members. A number of 39 hour positions were converted to full-time positions and these often long-time employees were able to qualify for university benefits programs.

More than 90% of our faculty hold the highest degrees in their disciplines, earned at many of the world's finest graduate institutions. Almost all of the current 42 junior faculty graduated with their PhDs from institutions that hold the 2000 Carnegie Classification of extensive doctoral research universities (Research I under the older system of classification). Faculty benefited from an equity review of salaries (\$120,00). New faculty now receive start-up grants of \$1000 to allow them to begin a research program. IUSB awards for excellence in teaching, research and service, IU awards for excellence in teaching, and the FACET program all recognize faculty accomplishments in these areas. IUSB has the highest percentage of faculty who have won distinguished teaching awards of any IU campus. UCET provides: a broad spectrum of ideas and strategies, including innovative and alternative methods of instruction; strategies and support for assessment of teaching effectiveness and student learning; services such as confidential consultations, workshops, mentoring programs, and conference funding; access to teaching technology and training; opportunities for university-wide dialogue on teaching and learning; and overall support for the strengthening of teaching and learning on campus. Faculty have access to internal grant funding (about \$120,000 each year) and to travel monies through their schools or colleges. IUSB has an exceptionally talented group of associate faculty who provide important support to the academic program. We support these faculty in many of the same ways we support tenure eligible faculty, particularly in terms of teaching.

Challenges/Goals

Perceived Challenges:

One of the concerns expressed by the North Central team had to do with the quality of communication on campus, a problem they saw as exacerbated by the volume of administrative and staff changes and temporary appointments. Communication flow between various units on campus is less than optimal. One of the major challenges to move us forward in terms of excellence will be to stabilize the administrative structure, restore effective communication channels and build better teamwork across the entire campus in order to achieve our desired ends.

Given the poor prospects for increased state investment in our programs at this time, reallocation of resources will have to occur on campus in order for us to innovate. Reallocations will not be possible if a climate of trust does not exist. With our current system of zero-based budgeting, there is no incentive for fund managers to realize savings in the accounts they control. We need to develop a system of budgeting that will allow fund managers to reallocate some funds internally, without being penalized for their ability to efficiently use their funds, in order to gain their cooperation for the necessary broader campus-wide reallocations that might involve a loss in their budgets.

Programs such as the Toradze Piano Studio and the Chester String Quartet bring international attention to IUSB. They enrich the campus and the community by their presence. However, there is a considerable financial cost to maintaining programs of this quality. We need to be creative in finding ways to nurture these programs, as well as to look for further initiatives on campus—programs that have the potential to gain national or international acclaim—that we should be developing.

We need to develop structures and measures by which to gauge how well our programs meet student and community needs given the resources they consume. The Senate Budget Committee has been urging the development of cost/benefit accounting so that we can begin to see how efficiently we are using our current resources and to make improvements where needed. Some of these measures already exist (faculty/student FTEs, program cost per student credit hour); we need to institutionalize the collection and utilization of this data across all units and we need to bring this data into our planning and budgeting process.

We currently have much to offer students whom we categorize as “excellent”—scholarships, the Honors Program, various excellence awards. These students compose at most 7% of our student body. We also have targeted students at the lower end of the grade spectrum with services such as the Threshold Learning Communities and a variety of student peer mentor and supplemental instruction options. In the process, we are ignoring the large portion of our student body that lies between these two extremes.

We have a large number of faculty who have remained at the Associate Professor level for a number of years. This cohort needs to be encouraged to do what is necessary in order to be promoted to full Professor. In addition, for those faculty members who have recently been tenured, we need to make aggressive efforts to groom these individuals to assume more leadership on key campus committees. Otherwise, we will be left with a void as senior faculty retire and take their experience and knowledge with them.

The campus needs to become more aggressive about rewarding faculty who are performing at high levels. Since additional state monies for this purpose are likely to be nonexistent in the near future, we have to become creative about finding ways to reward high performers. Rather than thinking solely in dollar terms, we could use release time, extra travel monies, unusual or creative course scheduling, and other strategies to recognize the efforts of faculty who are contributing heavily to the institutional mission.

Most importantly, the campus needs to get the word out to the community about the quality and richness of the faculty at IUSB. We need a coherent public relations and marketing strategy that pulls it all together with the Office of Development and the Admissions Office so that our efforts knit together to strengthen IUSB's position in the community

Information Gathered

Sources: IUSB 2000-2002 Undergraduate Bulletin; IUSB 2001-2003 Graduate Bulletin; IUSB Website; IUSB Update, Foundation for the Future: Preparing for New Leadership (CDC report to the Chancellor's Search Committee, October 2001); Image Study Indiana University South Bend (Carnegie Communications LLC); departmental communications; Indiana Campus Profiles: Descriptions of Indiana's Public Postsecondary Campuses, February 1998, Indiana Commission for Higher Education; FACET Fact Sheet; IUSB NCA Self Study; *The Teaching Excellence Report: Indiana University South Bend*; Self Study Reports and External Reviews/Accreditation Reports; Indiana State Department of Education website (<http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/htmls/education.html>); Indiana University Fact Book 2001-2002 (<http://factbook.indiana.edu/fbook01/fbindx01.html>).