The Bridge to Student Success

By Samantha Thompson

One of the greatest challenges students face when entering college is the transition from a high school student into a successful, established college student. The transition can be a difficult task, but with the help of IUPUI’s Summer Bridge Program, the opportunity for students to make a successful transition becomes much easier.

The two week “crash course” is taught in August, right before fall classes begin. The program is designed to help incoming freshmen learn new skills that will better prepare them for a successful first semester in college. Currently seven IUPUI schools participate: the Kelly School of Business, the IU School of Education, the Purdue School of Engineering, the IU School of Liberal Arts, the IU School of Nursing, the Purdue School of Science, and University College.

Research from the 2006 Summer Bridge Program showed that students who participated in the introductory summer course earned a higher GPA their first semester than students who did not participate. Research also found that students who participated in the Summer Bridge Program retained 10 percent more information from the fall semester compared to the students who were not enrolled in the introductory summer program.

This past summer, 436 full-time students participated in the Summer Bridge Program. At the end of the program, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding what they thought of the summer course. According to students, the most valued aspect of the 2010 Summer Bridge Program was being able to “meet new people and develop friendships.” A small percentage of students suggested “more group activities and discussions” and “less time commitments and restraints.”

As plans are made for the 2011 Summer Bridge Program, feedback such as this will help advance the program as it seeks to continue providing a valuable college preparation experience for entering students this coming August and beyond.
University College’s student support programs, particularly its first-year programs, make a huge impact on entering students. Understanding the significance of its programs, University College conducts detailed research to determine the success rates of students who participate in the programs.

University College has in place a three-step assessment plan developed to help improve its many programs and endeavors. The three-step plan involves an evaluation of needs, processes, and outcomes to insure that all of University College’s programs are always striving for excellence and positive results.

One of the methods used to determine program success is end-of-course questionnaires given to students. Other methods include focus groups, interviews, and using mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative research.

The Themed Learning Communities (TLC) is one of the university’s first-year programs that has been producing positive results. The program consists of a series of three or four courses that follow a specific theme. Students enroll in each of these courses as a group, and develop bonds through their classroom and out-of-classroom (tutoring, attending plays, community service, etc.) experiences.

Michele Hansen, Director of Assessment at University College, said that the TLC program has “very good success rates.” Hansen specializes in the research of the effectiveness of programs, checking that student programs are meeting student needs and attaining their intended outcomes.

In 2008, Hansen’s research reported that 72 percent of the student participants said that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their TLC experience. From 2006 to 2007, there was a six percent increase in the retention rate of TLC participants (377 in 2006; 565 in 2007).

According to the University College website (http://www.universitycollege.iupui.edu/staff/assessment/index.asp), University College’s assessment plan facilitates “on-going communication with the campus community and outside constituencies concerning the effectiveness of all programs in contributing to student success.” Pushing for student success is the number one priority of University College, and the assessment plan supports that initiative.

What Students Say about TLC:

“It helped me transition from high school to college.”

“My TLC experience made it easier for me to transition from high school to college. The TLC made me feel comfortable.”

“It eased me into my first semester rather than throwing me into the deep end like most college freshmen.”

“Every class was connected so it helped with retaining the material.”

“The TLC gave me support because I met people who were in the same situation.”
Words from Interim Dean
Rick E. Ward

As promised, in an effort to keep you informed, I am sending you the second issue of UCOL News Report that gives you a brief overview of recent accomplishments and new programming endeavors. Please share this news with your colleagues. Thank you all for being such great colleagues.

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