Final Report: Affordability Task Force for Instruction

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I.   Executive Summary

We investigated potential strategies or practices that would lower the cost of instruction for undergraduate students, either directly or indirectly. We looked at savings that could be realized at the course/classroom level, the academic programmatic level, and then by the creation of new policies at the university level. At the level of the course, both cost savings and increased student learning (the latter more often than the former) have been demonstrated in some settings when large-enrollment, lecture-based courses have been transformed from a strictly lecture-based format to mixed models (involving lecture, breakout sections (with TAs), blended delivery, and on-line assessment). At the program level, we proposed strategies that would reduce students' total time spent at the university. These included reducing the minimum credit hour requirements for graduation and setting maximum credit hour limits for majors, increasing course flexibility within programs, and allowing 8-week courses to be taken within a semester. We also generated a list of potential university-level policy changes that would expedite student progress, which include improving the ease with which students transfer from Ivy Tech, creating financial incentives for progressing quickly (via reduced tuition, increased scholarships), reducing the number of times students can drop courses mid-semester or re-take courses for a better grade, and via a number of strategies, improving the ways students are placed into courses and, generally, advised. We summarize all strategies in the Appendix, where they are grouped into categories of those that can be implemented relatively quickly, with moderate development, and with long-term planning.

II.   Prefatory Comments

The charge to the task force was to investigate practices or strategies that would increase the affordability of instruction for students. Through readings, discussion, and brainstorming, we reasoned that increases in affordability would come through both direct and indirect means. Students can save money directly by spending less time at the university. Therefore, any strategies that would result in reduced time should, in theory, increase affordability. We proposed a number of strategies that will reduce the number of programmatic requirements as well as a number of policies that would result in students spending less time at the university. Indirect savings to students comes through more efficient deployment of faculty and instructional personnel. The two strategies that pertain to classroom practices involve deploying faculty in ways that may save resources.

Within our discussions, three general principles emerged that influenced many of the strategies listed below: 1) It is no longer the case that academic programs carrying high credit hour requirements can go unnoticed. The Commission of Higher Education, as supported by the governor of Indiana, has made clear a strong commitment to eliminate "curriculum creep," and thereby reduce the average credit hour requirements of our academic programs. If we are striving to increase affordability of instruction in higher education, we must look at the credit hour

requirements of academic programs with a critical eye; 2) increased affordability must result from true cost reduction rather than transference of costs to some other aspect of the institution. We strove to generate solutions that led to truly reducing costs with the hope that these reductions would lead to greater affordability for students; and 3) more generally, if we are to take seriously the issue of increasing affordability of instruction in higher education, then we must be able to review, rethink, and refocus our efforts of its delivery. Some of the strategies listed below represent radical departures from the way instruction is currently delivered. True innovation requires risk and out-of-the-box thinking. We have attempted to do this, in the short amount of time devoted to this charge. Accompanying each strategy we have listed what additional data or information would be necessary to gather in order to confidently pursue the strategy.

III. Classroom Practices

The following are proposed practices implementable at the level of the course, which would potentially make course delivery more efficient. The courses targeted for this intervention are generally large-enrollment, lecture-based Foundational Studies courses (e.g., History, Psychology, Economics) "Efficiency" in the case is typically defined by teaching more students with fewer full-time faculty. However, it is important to point out that we gain nothing by merely increasing class sizes with no improvement in pedagogy. The models proposed below represent a shift in mindset, where attention to students typically comes from graduate teaching assistants (who run small, discussion groups) or technology-based paradigms. Consequently, these strategies may not save money per se (i.e., may not increase affordability to students). However, if learning is increased and costs remain the same, then one may argue that we have gained efficiency. One-time money has been made available to pilot test these efforts.

Strategy 1: Alternative classroom structure models.

This strategy proposes utilizing new models of teaching that allow for greater efficiency (e.g., a "Starburst," "Inversion," or "hub-and-spoke" model, where centralized lecture has a number of spin-off discussion groups taught by graduate assistants). One weakness with this idea is that it is Graduate Assistant –intensive (we currently do not have the large number of graduate assistants that would be needed to make this work).

Strategy 2: General course redesign/transformation.

Transform massively-scheduled basic studies courses for large lecture section+ intensive, high impact, time-on-task sections to reduce the number of sections and paid instructors. These changes should improve student learning through closer mentoring and monitoring, as well as application of basic studies skills to Foundational Studies content. This strategy follows the work of Carol Twigg and her colleagues, where she has demonstrated limited success (lower cost; improved learning) in some high enrollment basic studies courses. To pursue this strategy, we would need to study the success of similarly structured courses at other institutions and obtain faculty buy-in for radical transformation of these courses.

Strategy 3: Audit of efficiency of course fees.

A number of courses may have course fees that are unnecessarily high and can be reduced. Furthermore, the current process by which course fees are audited annually could be changed to better calibrate course fee necessity with fee requirement.

III. Programmatic Practices

The following strategies apply to specific academic programs or to the completion of an academic program. The majority pertains to the number of requirements (courses/credits) of academic programs or how/when courses are offered. Thus, these strategies will increase affordability by reducing requirements or by increasing the eases with which the requirements can be met.

Strategy 4: Reduction in the minimum number of credits required to graduate (divisible by 3).

By reducing the minimum number of credits to graduate (from 124 to, say, 120) students would experience direct savings on tuition costs and additional costs for books and room and board (if they spent one less semester or term in session). Disadvantages to this strategy would include students potentially missing some key component of their university education. Also, programs would be forced to down-size to enable students to take advantage this degree size. To pursue this strategy, we would need to examine the prevalence of institutions nationally and among peers that require fewer than 124 credits.

Strategy 5: Reduction in the number of credits of 3/400 level classes in each major from 50 credits to 45.

With this strategy, students wouldn't struggle as much to locate classes satisfying this criterion in FS or in summer session, which would enhance their opportunity to complete their degree early and not defer requirements. Like Strategy 4, a potential disadvantage is that students may fail to experience some key component of university education. We would need to know the prevalence of the upper level class requirement nationally and among peers in order to pursue.

Strategy 6: Establish maximum number of hours per major limit for baccalaureate programs.

Implementing this strategy would be a significant (and potentially controversial) move that would lead to fewer students exceeding the number of total hours required for a degree (currently 124). Currently, we have many programs requiring a large number of credit hours for many reasons (i.e., including accreditation, licensure). To pursue this option, we would need extensive data on average major size for programs nationally (by peer institution). Also, we would need to take a very hard look at the requirements of every academic program and compare these requirements to similar programs. We would also need to take a deep look at the necessity of accreditation for each program, weighing its need for licensure and job placement).

Strategy 7: Increase number of options by which students may satisfy a requirement in each major.

This strategy involves faculty carefully reviewing academic programs to see if the number of electives and required courses are appropriate for today's market and a contemporary education. Also, faculty should look across programs (i.e., outside of departments) to see if courses can be shared, so that enrollments in upper division courses are maximized. This kind of review allows for the emergence of collaborative courses that fit across disciplines (involving possible team teaching, greater interdisciplinarity) and increases the number of potential electives outside of a department.

Strategy 8: Increase number of courses offered in summer.

By increasing the number of courses offered in the summer, especially online courses and Foundational Studies courses, students can potentially accelerate 4 years of a curriculum into 3 calendar years, and thereby save money. Currently, summer course offerings emerge from past schedules and not from potentially better, more efficient scheduling models.

Strategy 9: Develop summer session to the stature of a regular semester.

This strategy involves reconceptualizing the summer session from an extra, "catch-up" term to one of a regular semester. Such a model would involve expanding the diversity and frequency of available classes, adjusting costs to students, and redefining the concept of the 9-month faculty workload. If this strategy were implemented, students could complete their degrees more quickly, reducing costs of room and board, and by retaking courses required for graduation in a more timely fashion.   To make this work, departments would need to do a global analysis of course rotations and faculty schedules. Furthermore, the viability of this strategy could only be determined after computing the cost associated with delivering summer courses in their current set up. Also, we would need to determine the feasibility of offering a robust summer term (given faculty availability).

Strategy 10: Treat summer like a third semester in terms of tuition.

If students are taking a number of courses in the summer, then there may be savings for them by charging a similar rate of tuition for summer as they pay for fall and spring semesters. The viability of this strategy would need to be determined by the Budget Office, and the number of affected systems (e.g., financial aid) would have to be examined.

Strategy 11: Create a robust inventory of 3-credit, 8 week courses (in fall and spring).

This strategy would allow students to have the option to take some courses across an intensive 8-week term as opposed to only in a standard, 16-week semester. Such an arrangement would, for example, permit a student to drop a course in which he was doing poorly at the beginning of a semester and then pick it up again at the beginning of the 2nd 8-week point, thus complete the requirement by the end of the semester (and not be behind). Depending upon the number of courses available, there would be less re-work (students dropping re-taking courses for better grades) and a greater probability of students graduating in less than 4 years. A disadvantage of this strategy is that courses would have to be re-designed for the shorter, more intensive term. Before implementing, we would need to: a) explore the financial aid implications to assure all

federal compliance is met; b) know the success rate of similar practices at the national level and at peer institutions; and c) investigate other programmatic and system requirements before piloting.

Strategy 12: Intentionally address the problem of the high DWF rates in 100- and 200-level courses.

ISU struggles like many other institutions, with courses where high percentages of students who take those courses drop and withdraw early, and earn grades of D or F. There are a number of ways that colleges and departments can intervene in this issue in addition to putting the best teachers in critical, confidence-building early major courses (those courses allegedly where failing might cause a student to leave the university permanently). These other interventions include: helping faculty by providing infrastructure for informing students about expectations of each course, so they are prepared for the workload when they begin the course; creating a scheduling structure that would open courses on a timed schedule, so that classes would fill evenly creating a pedagogical evaluation instrument designed for all faculty reviews (tenure and non-tenure) that would help point out the extent to which poor instruction is the basis for high DWF percentages and assist in improvement; encouraging departments to discuss reasonable expectations for student grade performance.

IV.   General Policy change proposals: (e.g., Rework/Remediation)

The following list are proposed strategies that involve the creation of general, university-level policies that would directly or indirectly result in lower costs for students. The policies range from transferring from Ivy Tech to incentivizing students' retention and progression through the university to academic advising practices. If we improve transfer practices, students will need to take fewer courses at ISU. If we create policies that lead students to be motivated to stay enrolled and progress faster through the university, then they will complete their programs more quickly. Similarly, if we create structures (e.g., having to do with advising) that help students make better decisions about their major or coursework, then students will spend their time here more efficiently, thus save money.

Strategy 13: Implement a more aggressive, seamless transfer system between Ivy Tech and ISU.

Because of the large number of students who complete a substantial number of Foundational Studies (General Education) courses at Ivy Tech and then transfer to ISU, we propose a policy that would allow for students completing the Ivy Tech General Education program (i.e., those earning the Ivy Gen Ed Certificate) to satisfy all ISU Foundational Studies requirements, with the exceptions of Junior Composition, courses associated with the Ethics and Social Responsibility requirement and the Upper Division Integrated Electives. This strategy would allow transferring students to do so with greater ease, would eliminate the need for these students to take redundant courses, and would ultimately lead to faster graduation from ISU. It would be important to consult the data contained in Ivy Tech's proposal to the Commission on Higher Education for additional information.

Strategy 14: Better manage remedial courses-a: Establish sub-contract plan with Ivy Tech.

Currently, Indiana State teaches all remedial courses (i.e., those courses that do not "count" towards graduation but some students need to gain admission to 100-level courses). By subcontracting these courses (primarily Mathematics) to Ivy Tech, these courses could be taught on ISU's campus (and thereby be convenient for students taking non-remedial ISU courses) but not be taught by ISU faculty. This would reduce costs for instruction (although, ISU would lose tuition dollars). To further explore this option, a more detailed cost-benefit analysis is necessary.

Strategy 15: Better manage remedial courses-b: Assign remedial courses delivery to a centralized all-university unit.

An alternative to Strategy 14 is to keep all remedial courses in-house but to deliver them outside the context of the relevant academic department. The unit delivering remedial courses would be a large, all-inclusive unit that would be devoted to serving all incoming students and would focus on evaluating and diagnosing incoming students and appropriately placing them in initial course work. Having such a unit on campus has the potential of more efficiently and personally placing students in coursework thus increasing the probability of success, which should result in less rework and faster graduation. This strategy would require the creation of a centralized academic unit, which is a large comprehensive undertaking. Before embarking, we would need to do a thorough analysis of current diagnostic and testing processes used with incoming students to make sure this proposed unit would be viable.

Strategy 16: Summer Financial Incentives for students who demonstrate a willingness to stay at ISU:

Related to strategies 8-10, this strategy involves using financial incentives, probably in the form of scholarship dollars, to motivate students to take summer courses. Providing financial assistance to students to complete summer courses will help increase summer enrollment, thus move the university toward the establishment of a more regular semester-style summer semester (see Strategy 9). This strategy will also increase student retention (there is some research to suggest that year-round enrollment positively impacts retention). By funding students in the summers, students will ultimately spend less money on non-tuition costs (residence hall fees, meal plan) associated with additional semester on campus past four years. An increase in summer enrollment will most likely lead to a higher number of on-line courses, where delivery costs may be less than face-to-face courses. A disadvantage of this strategy is the costs of the incentives themselves, although unused academic year scholarship funds could be used. Before implementing the strategy, we would need to be familiar with the relation between summer attendance and fall retention and student success, along with estimates on how many students would be affected by this strategy and how much it would cost. We would also need to investigate an aggressive summer employment program for students.

Strategy 17: Distribute per-year scholarship awards to incentivize progression

This strategy involves the use of four-year scholarship values and redistributing the per- year award to the sophomore year and beyond. This plan would presumably incentivize performance

and retention beyond the freshman year. In other words, students will be awarded more scholarship money as they progress towards completion, which would encourage graduation in four years. A disadvantage of this strategy would be that first-year awards could potentially be reduced and thereby affect ISU's ability to compete for students. To investigate the viability of this proposal, it would be important to view the prevalence of comparable scholarships nationally and at peer institutions.

Strategy 18: Financial incentives for student who transition from Freshman to Sophomore by the end of first summer semester.

Essentially, this strategy incentivizes freshmen to return to ISU in the fall, followed by some sort of university recognition of that progress. Savings to students would be in the form of reduced costs of books, meal plan (or whatever the financial incentive may be) as well as in the savings from graduating in a timely manner. This strategy has the added benefit of meeting the 30-hour progression benchmark set by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education. Disadvantages would be the cost to the institution. We would want to see if other institutions nationally or at peers have successfully implemented such a strategy. (A version of this strategy may have been implemented in the past; we would want to review the results of this prior effort before repeating).

Strategy 19: Reduce student tuition nominal for each semester that they complete with a least a 15 hour load in good standing

Incentivizing student progress, through reduced tuition, is one way to help students move through the university. Many students will enroll for fewer than 15 credit hours, often for reasonable reasons (e.g., working to pay tuition). However, progression through the university is difficult and slow when taking less than 15 hours. This strategy would encourage students to complete a semester in good standing with at least a 15 hour load. Ultimately, students will complete their program more quickly. Similar to Strategy 18, this strategy has the added advantage of assisting ISU in meeting the 30 and 60 hour progression benchmarks. Disadvantages of this strategy are the costs associated with the incentive. We would need to see if this model has been tested elsewhere. Also important would be to investigate the impact and personnel demand on administrative offices that might have to implement a fee calculation differential.

Strategy 20: Admission policy based changes

Many students enter ISU with strong and specific career expectations. Occasionally, the coursework is too difficult or student's performance is not at a level that will lead to success in that particular profession (e.g., entrance into medical school). When this happens, students will "change majors," often late in the game and may require more than eight semesters to complete a degree. This strategy is to revisit admission practices and advising for specific majors. If incoming students are provided with clear information about academic programs at admission (or administered diagnostic tools that clarify aptitude), then academic advisors can continue to provide this information during the freshman year. This strategy may lead to faster graduation. Potential disadvantages to this strategy is that it will require a strong coordinated effort between

the office of admission and academic affairs, leading to a potentially centralized advising model (see Strategy 24).

Strategy 21: Creating policies that reduce rework (withdraws, drops, course repeats, etc.)

 This strategy is to create a policy (or policies) that limit the number of times students withdraw* from courses, drop courses, or re-take a course   Reducing the number of repeated attempts to complete the same course would speed up graduation. For this report, we collected self-reported data from 174 undergraduates about their course repeat and drop practices. Twenty-eight percent of the students reported that they repeated at least one course, and 50% of the occurrences were *to improve their former grade*. About 50% of students reported dropping courses after the initial drop/add period, and 34% of those students did so because they were *not earning the grade they had set out to earn;* 47% did so because they simply *did not like the course*. These data suggest that it is appropriate to counsel students that minimal grade improvement, dissatisfaction with a grade in progress, or dislike of a course may not be sufficient as reasons to incur the costs of "rework." Implementing policies that help discourage routine repeating and dropping of courses could help change the culture. Limiting rework would help students move through their academic programs more quickly, thus eventually spend less time at the university (and thus, spend fewer tuition and living dollars). Disadvantages associated with creating policies like these would be providing the appropriate, clear information to students so they would be able to make solid decisions before enrolling.

*Note: We recommend removing the grade of WF from the G.P.A. calculation, as the basis for including it is unclear and the repercussions disproportionally severe (i.e., students must not only retake the course but also recover from the failing grade).

Strategy 22: Modifying Reclassification and the Registration Process.

Revise the definition of class standing to match a 120 hour degree and to reflect the fact that a 15 credit hour term is common. Students would be defined as sophomores when they have earned 30 credit hours, juniors at 60, and seniors at 90. This reclassification will allow for more efficient link to registration. Also, by allowing freshmen to register either before or at the same time as seniors, then freshmen will have a greater opportunity to gain admission to the courses they need (and department chairs will have an easier time arranging for the necessary sections). In addition, freshman registration could be facilitated by developing a secondary orientation session (sponsored by the university but run by each college), where students are reminded about connecting with their advisor and the mechanics of the registration process.

Strategy 23: General Changes in Academic Advising, including Centralized Advising

Providing high quality academic advising for all students is a challenge for most institutions. Students, especially new students, are faced with many issues and faculty are often put in a position of having to be familiar with a host of technical and logistical requirements that go beyond their own academic programs. A system which may increase retention would be to have professional advisors reach out to first year students in a centralized setting, and then have faculty engage in departmental advising for more advanced students. The savings associated

with this model for students may come in the reduction of rework and delayed decision making. Disadvantages are that first year students do not get exposed to faculty advisors in their first year. This strategy requires the university to invest in professional advisors.

Strategy 24: Increased early feedback to students in Foundational Studies courses

For students to progress, students must successfully navigate through critical Foundational Studies courses. Currently, faculty members have limited tools at their disposal to provide feedback to students about their performance (other than grades). This strategy proposes to help students make better, earlier and more informed decisions about course progress as well as help students own their own performance. To that end, we recommend implementing mechanisms by which students in FS courses will receive course grades earlier in the term. Mechanisms could include FS programming, targeted use of Mapworks, and a quarterly grade report. Disadvantages to this strategy are minimal, but one might include the programming and administrative work to create an official quarterly grading system, if the desire is to have this collected officially through the portal/Banner. Creating a mechanism and timeline for recording and submission of midterm grades would also be necessary. Faculty buy-in would be critical.

Strategy 25: Creation of a University College

A recommendation held by the majority of the task force, but not all members, is to create a "university college," a large-scale, academic unit that would admit and process all incoming freshmen. The UC would house a centralized advising department and would be an incubator for collaborative interdisciplinary courses as well as activities that would support co-curricular engagement. The savings to students would come from more focused university attention on students' first year which may lead to better student decision making (thus less rework) as well as potential improvement to retention, progression, and graduation.   See final report from the Task Force on the First Year (TAFFY), which addresses this strategy in greater detail, http://irt2.indstate.edu/nca2010/assets/pdf/C3/final-report.pdf.

Strategy 26: Take advantage of College Challenge

College Challenge and other high school programs identify and direct students to Indiana State. College Challenge saves students money by allowing students to earn credit for college courses for very little cost while they are still in high school. By using students enrolled in our College Challenge courses, we can direct these students to appropriate coursework and potential academic majors and advisors prior to their arrival on campus; the same goes for programs like the International Baccalaureate. By linking students with majors and faculty earlier, progression through the university is likely to be faster. To our knowledge, there are no disadvantages to this strategy.. To implement, we would need to work early with high school counselors to correctly align student College Challenge/AP credit with their target institution, which hopefully would be ISU.

Grouping	Ease of Implementation (*would require faculty governance approval)	Proposed Strategy or Practice
Course /Classroom Practices		
	Easy	Different teaching platforms (1)
	Moderate	Course redesign (2)
	Moderate	Audit course fees (3)
Programmatic Practices		
	Easy	Increase number of courses offered in the summer (8)
	Easy-Moderate	Intentionally address the problem of high DWF rates (to increase student success) (12)
	Moderate	Reduction in number of upper division courses in each major (5)
	*Moderate	Develop summer session to the stature of a regular semester (9)
	Moderate	Treat summer like a third semester in terms of tuition, thus reducing the cost of summer courses (10)
	Moderate-High	Create a library of 3-week 8-credit courses to be offered in fall and spring (11)
	*High	Reduction in the number of credits to graduate (4)
	*High	Establish a maximum number of hours for each baccalaureate major (6)
	*High	Increase number of options by which students can satisfy requirements in each major (7)
General Policy Changes		
	Easy	Subcontract remedial courses to Ivy Tech (14)
	Easy	Create financial incentives for students completing faster (19, 16)
	Easy, Moderate, High	Create a seamless transfer policy with Ivy Tech (ease depends on what state does) (13)
	Easy, Moderate, High	Tie financial incentives to retention, progression, and not dropping courses (18)
	Easy (to decide) High (to implement)	Increase scholarship dollars as students progress towards degree completion (17)
	Easy (to decide) High	Changes in student performance feedback in FS

	(to implement)	courses (24)
	Moderate	Policies that reduce rework (i.e., re-taking courses for better grades) (21)
	Moderate	Improve academic advisement, where professional advisors are used (23)
	Moderate	Create a University College (25)
	Moderate	Utilize College Challenge and other high school programs (IB) to identify and direct students to appropriate programs and coursework (26)
	*High	Subcontract remedial courses to a centralized advisement unit 15)
	High	Hone admissions placements, so that students get placed into programs where success is most likely (20)
	*High	Change nomenclature of freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior to first-year, second-year, third-year, fourth-year (22)