

## 2016 Strategic Plan Key Question Committee – Final Report

**Question:** Looking critically at the most current student surveys, particularly NSSE, what are the implications for enhancing the ISU student experience?

**Members:** Kimberly Monte and Steve Stofferahn (Co-Chairs); Erin Sluyter, Sam Wetherell, Maggie Dalrymple, Faith Hudnall, Kevon Christian, Michelle Fowler, Trista Gibbons, Rusty Gonser.

### Summary:

Based on a careful study of NSSE and BCSSE survey data, interviews with campus stakeholders, and an examination of peer institutions' best practices, this committee has identified three key areas in which the ISU student experience could be significantly enhanced through future strategic plan initiatives, specifically with regard to academic advising, support services for working students, and the experience of online students.

### Key Findings Summary

Key Finding 1	Many ISU students wish to have a more meaningful mentoring relationship with their departmental advisors.
Key Finding 2	Many ISU students find it difficult to balance school and work responsibilities, but are often unaware of existing support services.
Key Finding 3	Many online students are interested in developing a closer connection to ISU, but find that difficult to achieve outside the virtual classroom environment.

### Recommended Actions Summary

Recommended Action 1	Intentionalize the departmental advising relationship, particularly as students transition from University College to their major departments in the Sophomore year.
Recommended Action 2	Streamline and expand access to "self-care" time-management resources (including new apps) on the ISU website.
Recommended Action 3	Expand opportunities for online students to participate in student-centered activities and organizations.

## **Background:**

The “student experience” on any campus is a constantly changing phenomenon, with both ups and downs at any given time. Still, the striking increase in recent years of the proportion of our students who identify ISU in the NSSE and BCSSE surveys as their top college destination choice bears witness to the great strides that the university has made over the past decade in fostering institutional pride, an essential component of the overall “student experience.” These surveys also point to positive developments in the areas of diversity, experiential learning, and community engagement, for which ISU is widely recognized. Having determined from the NSSE and BCSSE survey data three areas of focus for our designated topic (i.e., achieving academic success, balancing study and work, and integrating online students more effectively into the ISU student body), the committee endeavored to explore in detail both previous and present initiatives aimed at enhancing “the ISU experience” and expanded that investigation to include peer institutions. Studying Goal 1, Initiative 12 from “The Pathway to Success” provided some insights into the co-curricular side of things, with its emphasis on (and resulting accomplishments in) the intentional expansion of student events programming on the ISU campus.

With regard to the three areas noted above, **academic success** initiatives appear to be most heavily vested in Supplemental Instruction, the primary challenges being to identify students in need, and to match those students with the most appropriate resources. Streamlining that process across campus seems poised to occupy the attentions of the principal stakeholders in this area for the immediate future. The creation of University College to address the specific needs of first-year and transfer students has also re-shaped the landscape of student success, although it may be too early to tell what effect this will have on retention and on-time degree completion. The recent work of the Advising Task Force has likewise explored the challenges in fostering and maintaining effective advising across campus. The NSSE survey results and responses (for senior students in particular) draw attention to the key relationship between student and advisor, pointing out both negative and positive illustrations.

Helping students find an appropriate **balance between academic study and on/off-campus employment** does not seem to have been addressed in a systematic manner to date, although it is likely that it will, given the financial pressures facing many of our students and their families. However, several entities at ISU, including the School of Graduate Studies, Division of Student Affairs, Baptist Collegiate Ministries, Black Women’s Summit, and Student Counseling Center have highlighted the issue in recent years through various venues. The Work-Life Balance Conference has gained widespread recognition for its work on behalf of faculty and staff, so it seems likely that this will serve as an impetus and model for future student-based initiatives.

Finally, the Office of Extended Learning has pursued various strategies to **connect online students more effectively to the ISU “student experience”** over the past several years, particularly in ramping up its training of faculty teaching online, ensuring that distance students

have access to campus resources (e.g., Math and Writing Centers, supplemental instruction, tutoring services, etc.), and fostering increased interaction with on-campus students via technology classrooms in hybrid courses. This will likely remain a significant area of concern as enrollment and budget projections become increasingly bound up with these student populations.

## **Analysis Methods:**

The committee met on a weekly basis throughout much of the fall semester. Each member studied the results for the NSSE (2013) and BCSSE (2015) surveys, identifying core points of interest. The committee as a whole then determined by consensus issues of “student experience” that might fruitfully be addressed in the next strategic plan, including academic success, school/work balance, and facilitating campus connections for online and commuter students. Three breakout groups were formed to investigate the background and development at ISU of each of these key areas. Each group met with various campus offices to gather applicable information, which was then shared and discussed with the larger committee. Brooks Moore attended the November 12 meeting to share his insights and provide feedback regarding the proposed areas of concentration. Each breakout team then went on to examine peer institutions’ best practices in the areas of academic success, school/work balance, and integrating online and commuter students, and reported their findings to the larger committee in early December, paving the way for the completion of the final report. The committee adhered to the following timeline throughout the fall semester:

### Late September-Early October: FORMATION

- confirm committee members, including students, faculty, and staff from across campus
- \* *Assignment:* Review strategic planning document flow; arrange regular meeting time

### October 15: INTRODUCTION

- disseminate NSSE (2013) & BCSSE (2015) data for ISU to committee members
- \* *Assignment:* Read through ISU survey data (sent via e-mail), especially the open-ended responses

### October 22: DATA

- identify core points of interest from NSSE (2013) & BCSSE (2015) for further consideration
- MAP-Works overview
- \* *Assignment:* Examine data from core points of interest (sent via e-mail)

### October 29: ISSUES

- identify issues of “student experience” that can reasonably be addressed in the next Strategic Plan
- select teams/partners for each core issue
- \* *Assignment:* Each team investigates its chosen issue’s background/development at ISU

### November 12: BACKGROUND

- teams share background findings for each core issue
- invited guest Brooks Moore responds with further context, insights, suggestions
- identify peer/aspirational peer institutions
- Co-Chairs draft Progress Report, share via e-mail, incorporate revisions; submit November 16

\* *Assignment:* Each team investigates how peer/aspirational institutions address its issue

November 19: BEST PRACTICES

- teams share insights gleaned from peer/aspirational institutions' approaches

\* *Assignment:* Each team identifies and justifies key findings supported by data/info

December 3: KEY FINDINGS

- teams share key finding(s) for their issues

- committee arrives at consensus for overall key findings

\* *Assignment:* Each team identifies and justifies recommended actions supported by data/info

January 7: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- teams share (via e-mail discussion) recommended action(s) for their issues

- committee arrives at consensus for overall recommendations

\* *Assignment:* Co-Chairs draft/share Final Report, incorporate revisions; submit by January 11

## **Key Findings:**

### **Academic success:**

Creating the conditions in which students may reach their full academic potential is the primary calling of any university, and is, of course, a complex and multifaceted endeavor. Ensuring access to supplemental instruction is vital, but as ISU already appears poised to streamline those efforts, the committee has chosen to call specific attention to the desire among many ISU students for a more meaningful mentoring relationship with departmental advisors that goes beyond scheduling classes.

### **Study and work balance:**

As more students work more hours at on- and off-campus jobs to help pay for college, many are finding it increasingly difficult to balance the demands of school and part-time employment. ISU already has support services geared toward helping students find a workable balance, but these services are sometimes difficult to locate or to access. As a result, many students end up falling behind in their academic responsibilities, thus putting them at risk of not completing their degrees on time or at all.

### **Online students as part of the student body:**

Since the growth of online enrollment is likely to remain an institutional priority in the coming years, it is in the university's best interest to help online students find ways to "belong" in the ISU "community." Many services and resources already exist to foment such feelings of belonging for traditional students, but these are not easily accessible for the online student.

## **Recommended Actions:**

### **Academic success:**

Having benefited from the guidance of University College professional advisors during their first year at ISU, most students will first meet department-specific advisors early in their Sophomore year. At present, both students and faculty advisors often express frustration at the fact that so much effort goes toward filling out degree-completion templates during advising sessions, that little or no time is left for the development of a meaningful mentorship as the student strives to establish her/his credentials in a chosen discipline. One way to address this problem is to follow the example of several peer institutions by placing a greater emphasis on the Sophomore year than is currently the case at ISU. Some go so far as to institute a Sophomore Year Experience, complete with a series of structured interactions among students and advisors, seemingly intended to facilitate mentorship. This would directly address the concerns noted by many NSSE respondents, but would also necessitate a continued reconsideration of how academic advising should be incorporated into tenure/promotion guidelines and/or remunerated at the College level.

### **Study and work balance:**

Based on what our peer institutions offer and what ISU offers, it is evident that colleges have recognized that students find it increasingly difficult to balance the demands between their academic and non-academic lives. Some of that difficulty appears to stem from a lack of coordination between campus units whose responsibilities span this divide. A more coordinated approach to this issue by both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs would help ensure that students in need of help have more ready access to the resources already available. Having support and contact information both online and on campus is vitally important to reach students. The more effective use of current and forthcoming technologies will surely help students take advantage of “self-care” services, especially when it comes to efficient and productive time management. Adding “self-care” tabs to the ISU main web page, creating apps that are accessible by cell phones, linking meaningful videos to those tabs, and/or offering a related class through Sycamore Express or New Student Orientation could all prove useful.

### **Online students as part of the student body:**

Services or resources across campus could be expanded to make it possible for the online student to be “involved” at ISU. Communication and marketing of current resources for the online student on the existing website could be adjusted so that students have a clear portal to the campus community. Wherever possible and practical, units/offices could coordinate efforts with Indiana State Online to make student activities, student government, community engagement, speakers, bookstore, library, wellness, and career center resources readily available for the online student. New technology or apps may prove particularly useful in connecting these students to core existing resources.