

IU Kokomo: Rewarding Effort

Students Keeping Pace Get Price Break

By Rebecca Patrick

“We’re not going to accept the status quo. We have to increase degree attainment – and doing so in a timely manner,” declares Michael Harris, Ph. D., chancellor at Indiana University Kokomo.

Since the IU alum joined the regional campus in 2010, after spending 20 years at various Michigan colleges, Harris has been on a mission to create and promote “innovative, entrepreneurial and cutting-edge programs” to help achieve that ultimate goal of more students graduating within four years.

A self-pronounced agent of change – which you can also glean from his body of work –

Harris appointed a task force early on in his tenure and challenged its members to come up with the boldest of ideas to spur student learning and graduation.

Out of that exercise, Harris and the task force conceived the Student Success Tuition Discount initiative, which is in its pilot phase during the 2011-2012 school year. The goal is to explore whether a financial incentive will motivate students to complete college in four years.

And the university is dangling quite the carrot before students’ eyes.

That program centers on three successive years of incremental discounted tuition after the freshman year is completed. The price break is 20% off of tuition and fees in the sophomore year, 30% in the junior year and, finally, 40% the senior year.

“We’ve done calculations – based on assumptions that may or may not happen of IU increasing tuition rates by 3.5% during the next three years (see chart below).



Chancellor Michael Harris believes efforts in Kokomo “fit well with the vision (IU) President McRobbie wants to do for the regional campuses; that vision was a great attraction for me to come here.”

Year	Academic Level	Base Tuition/Fees	Discount	Actual Tuition/Fees	Discount
2011-12	Freshman	\$6,323	\$0	\$6,323	0%
2012-13	Sophomore	\$6,545	\$1,309	\$5,236	20%
2013-14	Junior	\$6,774	\$2,032	\$4,742	30%
2014-15	Senior	\$7,010	\$2,804	\$4,206	40%

“From that, the sum effect of the tuition discount is that it’s really equivalent to a full year of tuition,” Harris establishes. “In other words, you can graduate from Indiana University Kokomo in four years and pay tuition for really only three years.

“Our hypothesis is this kind of incentive will influence students to complete their baccalaureate degree in four years – and to not drag it on,” he reasons.

In particular, Harris believes it could have an impact on the campus’ many working students.

“If you can convince those students that by studying hard and working less, they will actually save – save a year’s worth of tuition and a whole year’s cost of living, including an apartment, plus the loss of professional work. Before, maybe they would never finish on time or finish (at all), but this could encourage them to do it,” he suggests.

For the students in the pilot (just under 40 of them), the discounts start at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year. These individuals are first-time college attendees, fresh out of high school; this population is the target for the initiative.

For this launch, the school “brought in a very diverse and representative group to see how the program impacts all (types of) students, and it gives all students an opportunity,” Harris notes.

“We track them very closely. We work with them very closely. We have advisors and so on.”

Harris, however, emphasizes: “We’re not trying to give them anything special beyond the discount – anything more than is offered to our other students; otherwise it would not be a good experiment.

“This takes a lot of self-discipline and, unfortunately, not all students who come in right out of high school have the best self-discipline. Some do, but not all,” he surmises.

Participating students commit to completing 30 credit hours per year (including continuous fall and spring enrollment), maintaining a minimum 2.0 grade point average and finishing all their coursework at the Kokomo campus. If at some point a student drops below a 2.0, he or she is put on probation; if there is no improvement to the required level, then the student is dismissed from the program.

Because of the uniqueness and infancy of the endeavor, Harris states he has no specific goals.

“It would be very different if we would have selected a group that wasn’t random. If we had (in the pilot) high-achievers or certain socio-economic factors, it would be easier to set targets. The students we selected are so broad academically and socio-economically that it’s very hard.

“After the first year, we will have a better understanding of what this incentive has done. To my knowledge, nothing like this has ever been done anywhere before,” he asserts. “Really very little has been done in higher education to change price and use that as some kind of leverage or influence on student behavior.”

The desire, Harris says, is at some point to open up the program to all first-time college attendees at the school. But he also realizes that must first be reconciled with the financial implications. “Some people have questioned why would I do it when in essence we lose money. The reason I’m not worried about it is my philosophy is to lead by programs and budgets will follow.

“I would like to get to a point where we can offer it to all students and find a way for us to stay financially stable and in business,” he concludes.

The efforts at IU Kokomo have garnered state and national attention. In fact, the Lumina Foundation recently testified before Congress on the school’s innovative program.

“We’re very proud of this experiment,” Harris shares. “The concept is a daring one in which you finish in four years and



Beautifying the campus and designing a new advising system are among other initiatives since Harris joined the school in 2010.



Around the Horn

While IU Kokomo’s cost-saving program for students represents the most expansive approach, it is by no means the only one in the state.

Various four-year higher education institutions are taking on the challenge of affordability. Among the efforts:

- **Ball State University (Muncie)**, now offering students a reduction in summer tuition by an average of 18%, reducing undergraduate credit hours, encouraging online courses and providing a \$500 scholarship during the last semester for students in line to graduate within four years
- **Indiana University**, giving a 25% tuition discount to students for summer semesters at any of its seven campuses beginning in 2012
- **Indiana State University (Terre Haute)**, reducing a scheduled undergraduate student fee increase for 2012-2013 from 3.5% to 1.5%
- **Purdue University (West Lafayette)**, gradually moving to a trimester year-round schedule of courses that will enable students to complete their degree in less time
- **University of Southern Indiana (Evansville)**, providing a 20% reduction in costs for summer session courses

you pay only three years. For the student, that means you need to study hard. We know it’s going to cost us (financially), but I can also tell you that this year alone we’ve also increased financial aid by 27%. (In fact, he says Kokomo students graduate with the lowest amount of debt of all the IU regional campuses.)

“We can do that because we try to run a campus that is very welcoming, but we are very lean in what we spend. We try to spend every dollar in a very intentional manner, to ensure academic success of students. We are making friends and developing relationships, and are helping to transform the region,” he determines.

Just as the conversation started, it ended by circling back to graduating students. “We are committed to enhancing degree attainment. We know the value of it and the value of the baccalaureate degree; it’s really a key for the future in life,” Harris reiterates.

“I’ve traveled around the world and I’ve seen what’s happening: It’s a tsunami out there. Our biggest and strongest power and ability is education; we’ve got to make sure that more students get quality, world-class degrees while also doing it in a more rigorous manner. I certainly believe Indiana University at Kokomo is a world-class campus, and I think repayment (like in the pilot) is the key to encouraging students to graduate faster.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Michael Harris, Indiana University Kokomo, at www.iuk.edu