Quality

Increasing college completion and productivity need not come at the expense of academic quality.
Reduced quality for the sake of more college graduates does not serve the needs of Indiana students or the state. The state’s completion, productivity and quality goals are not, however, mutually exclusive. Indiana’s ability to succeed depends on achieving all three.

Indiana’s higher education system must continuously affirm the academic quality and value of all certificate and degree programs and work collectively to meet the needs of the state. Specifically, the Commission and Indiana institutions must:

- Expand the use of quality assessments that provide comparable measures of student learning outcomes.
- Embrace accelerated models with defined learning outcomes to safeguard quality.
- Increase public transparency through consistent return on investment information that demonstrates what Indiana graduates know and are able to do.

Rachel’s Story: Flexibility Meets Quality

“With raising seven children and working full time, I thought obtaining my BSN was not going to happen,” Rachel Ingram says of her journey to become a nurse. “WGU Indiana made it possible.”

Rachel is exactly the kind of student Western Governors University is designed to serve.

WGU Indiana provides more than 50 online bachelor’s and master’s degree programs in high-demand careers like business, education, nursing and information technology.

WGU Indiana’s flexibility helps students juggle the demands of work, family and school. Its competency-based model allows students to progress more quickly and graduate when they demonstrate a mastery of competencies required for a particular degree. Recognizing their prior experience means students avoid unnecessary courses and typically complete their degrees sooner.

Mentors provide students individualized support to help ensure their success. Tuition is about $6,000 a year—far less than state and national averages—and students can use state-funded financial aid to help pay their way.

According to Gov. Mitch Daniels, WGU Indiana is “helping thousands of adult Hoosiers attain the college degrees they’ve wanted and needed, on a schedule they can manage, at a cost they can afford.”

What’s next for Rachel? She plans to earn her master’s degree at WGU Indiana.
LEARNING OUTCOMES

Indiana’s higher education system lacks common measures of academic quality. The result is a cluttered picture of what students know and are able to do when they first enroll in college, when they transfer to other institutions, when they graduate and when they enter the workforce.

Students often are caught in the middle as institutions trade unanswered questions about the relative quality of their courses, degree programs and graduates. Students and employers alike must rely on dubious rankings and anecdotal evidence to make determinations about which colleges provide the best education and where to focus recruiting and hiring efforts.

Indiana colleges employ a wide variety of institution-specific quality indicators, but the ongoing academic ambiguity calls for consistent standards that avoid standardization.

Specifically, the Commission and Indiana institutions must:

• **Define student learning outcomes** relative to individual degree programs and track student persistence and completion relative to each.

• **Adopt comparable assessments** that use common metrics and competencies to gauge learning. This should include all public institutions using the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) or a comparable nationally recognized benchmark.

• **Align state and institutional quality measures** with those of regional accreditation bodies to ensure consistency and accountability across Indiana’s higher education system.

• **Implement a common general education core curriculum** (30 credits minimum) that builds upon the efforts of Indiana’s Statewide Transfer and Articulation Committee (STAC) and provides a consistent, high-quality foundation for seamless statewide transfer and degree attainment.

INNOVATIVE MODELS

Indiana’s higher education system must adapt to enable students to learn at the time, place and pace that best suits their individual goals and capabilities.

Indiana has begun implementing instructional models that offer students greater flexibility and accelerated degree completion without sacrificing quality.

WGU Indiana is one example of a competency-based model that caters to working adults. The state is

Quality Commitment: Voluntary System of Accountability

Indiana’s higher education community understands that the measure of success is about more than graduation rates. Ensuring a quality education and effective support throughout students’ academic careers is the key to success for students and the state’s economic future.

That’s the driving force behind Indiana’s involvement in the national Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) Initiative.

"The big thing about the VSA is the required assessment testing by universities," says Dr. Katherine Draughon of the University of Southern Indiana (USI). Her school is already a pioneer in tracking student performance over time. The VSA initiative helps inform USI’s and seven other participating schools’ efforts to improve the quality of their degree programs and student support services. A focus on transparency through a College Portrait website provides a user-friendly way for students, their families and the public to access and compare information among colleges and universities.

The VSA initiative is now a central part of Indiana’s focus on ensuring academic quality and accountability for student success.
deploying this approach to allow students to learn at their own pace online in targeted bachelor’s and master’s degree programs.

Through a partnership with the state’s Ivy Tech Community College system, WGU Indiana offers community college graduates seamless transfer, an application fee waiver, and a 5 percent tuition discount.

Another accelerated approach is Ivy Tech’s highly structured associate degree program that enables students to earn a two-year degree in 10 months. The accelerated program is intensive: applying rigorous interventions to address remediation needs and requiring students to be on campus 40 hours each week for coursework and group study.

Together, the Commission and Indiana’s institutions must continue to advance flexible learning opportunities that meet high standards of academic quality.

Specifically, the Commission will champion state and institutional policies that:

- **Increase opportunities for flexible and accelerated learning**, including expanded use of online course delivery and scheduling options that allow students to earn an associate degree in one year and a bachelor’s degree in three years.

- **Give students credit for prior learning** through competency-based assessments that evaluate the knowledge and skills individuals have accumulated from work and related experiences.

- **Promote degree profiles and research-based instructional practices** that provide faculty and students with targeted assessments of how concepts and skills are being taught, acquired and applied.

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**QUALITY METRICS**

1. **Learning Outcomes**: Comparable institution-level and degree-level reporting of student learning outcomes, as defined by the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) or other comparable nationally recognized measure of student learning.

2. **Transfer**: Percentage of students who successfully transfer from a two-year college to a four-year college and earn a bachelor’s degree within four years.

3. **Return on Investment**: Comparable institution-level and degree-level reporting that includes graduates’ job placement rates, licensure rates and average annual earnings.

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**Josh’s Story: A Partnership Paves Path to Success**

Josh Summey is very motivated. So when he was told in high school that he wasn’t college material, Josh worked to earn 17 dual credits that were later applied to Ivy Tech’s auto program.

With an AAS degree from Ivy Tech and the Dean’s Award from the School of Technology under his belt, Josh seamlessly transferred 45 credit hours toward a bachelor’s degree at Indiana University East. “Ivy Tech made me ready for a four-year program. I had a degree. I knew I could be successful,” Josh notes.

The partnership between the two institutions helped Josh avoid duplicative course-taking and provided a clear path to a college degree. “I would not have gone to school if it were not for dual credits and the ease of transferring to a four-year institution.” In 2009, Josh earned his bachelor’s degree with highest distinction. And, he completed four years of college on time while working full time.

Josh is now giving back as an adjunct professor at Ivy Tech. He also served on the board of a research project reporting on college preparedness among high school students.

Pretty impressive for someone who was told he wasn’t college material.
Esmeralda’s Story: Accelerating Student Success

Esmeralda Sanchez knew education was her ticket to success. But like many low-income high school students, Esmeralda didn’t know exactly how to make it happen.

Ivy Tech’s Accelerated Associate Degree Program (ASAP) offers a transferable associate degree that takes only 10 months to complete. “I don’t know where I would be now if it were not for ASAP,” Esmeralda says. With a weekly stipend that eased the pressure of juggling work and school, she was able to focus her attention where it mattered most—keeping up with her coursework.

ASAP selects students with strong prospects of succeeding in college. Close mentoring by a program counselor and support from faculty kept Esmeralda on track to get her associate degree within a year.

Esmeralda then transferred to Ball State University, where she expects to get a bachelor’s degree—a double major in business administration and marketing—at least a year ahead of her peers. “Ivy Tech’s ASAP program inspired me to work hard in school and be somebody in life. I feel blessed each time I see others taking longer to get to where I am now.”

METRICS THAT MATTER: QUALITY

1. **Learning Outcomes:** Comparable institution-level and degree-level reporting of student learning outcomes, as defined by the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) or other comparable nationally recognized measure of student learning.

2. **Transfer:** Percentage of students who successfully transfer from a two-year college to a four-year college and earn a bachelor’s degree within four years.

3. **Return on Investment:** Comparable, institution-level and degree-level reporting that includes graduates’ job placement rates, licensure rates and average annual earnings.