

Final Report of Open Option Task Force

June 11, 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

For Iowa State University to achieve its undergraduate student enrollment goals, it must be successful in the recruitment and retention of prospective students who are undecided about their major. To address this issue, the Undergraduate Programs Council created the Open Option Task Force in August 2007. This group was charged with researching the status of undecided students on campus and to make recommendations to improve Iowa State's recruitment and retention of undecided students. Although the task force was initially charged to explore Open Option students, the task force expanded its mission to also include those students who were undecided within an academic college (e.g. undeclared engineering students).

As of May 1, 2009, 46 percent of all the rising high school seniors who have indicated an interest in Iowa State University have been classified as undecided by the Office of Admissions (this includes those students coded as OPEN, AG X, DSGN, ENGR, or H SCI). On a national scale, recent ACT data shows that 'Undecided' ranks second only to 'Health Sciences & Allied Health Field' for the most popular planned majors of high school seniors graduating in 2008 who took the ACT. Finally, data from ACT also shows that the undecided student population has grown significantly over the last several years.

Research by the task force and previous studies dispel some of the commonly held misperceptions about undecided students at Iowa State:

1. Myth: On average, undecided students have a lower academic profile than students who've declared a major. Reality: Undecided students present an academic profile that is very similar to declared students.
2. Myth: Undecided students take longer to graduate from Iowa State. Reality: The average time to degree is only slightly higher for undecided students (4.38 years for OPEN students) vs. declared students (4.34 years).
3. Myth: A lower percentage of nonresidents enroll as undecided students compared to nonresidents with declared majors. Reality: The percentage of undecided students who are nonresidents (23.7%) is similar the percentage of students with declared majors who are nonresidents (24.6%).
4. Myth: The majority of those undecided students who are offered admission to Iowa State, but do not enroll, end up at two-year institutions. Reality: Eighty-four percent of these students end up enrolling at other four-year institutions.

Because the undecided student population represents the largest portion of Iowa State's prospective student pool, it is critical that Iowa State University do all it can to be recognized as an attractive college choice for this group of students. To maximize its potential for recruiting and retaining these students, Iowa State must address certain challenges, most of which emanate from the strong college organization of the university:

- There has not been a strong visible presence or program for Open Option students at Iowa State. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences currently provides academic advising and other student services for these university-wide undecided students. However, unlike students who have a declared major, or even undecided students in a college, Open Option students have not had a visible academic program/home to which they can connect.
- Since many learning communities and scholarships are based in colleges or departments, Open Option students are at a disadvantage in qualifying for these key recruitment, retention, and financial aid opportunities.
- Iowa State does not have a common university-wide set of general education requirements. This tends to reinforce a perception that undecided students who enroll at Iowa State need to declare a major as quickly as possible to avoid delaying their graduation. This perception was confirmed by research conducted by the task force.

While Iowa State has seen some growth in the enrollment of undecided students, there are still opportunities for even greater increases in undecided student enrollment. The admission yield rate for undecided students is significantly lower than for students with declared majors. Focusing resources on the recruitment of these undecided students (who represent 46% of our incoming freshman prospective student pool) could have significant enrollment and financial implications for the institution.

The task force has already implemented a number of changes to enhance the recruitment and retention of undecided students. These changes involve enhancing the university's communication with undecided prospective students, and making basic organizational changes within Iowa State to provide a better level of support to currently enrolled undecided students. The task force has also identified many on-going enhancements that can be made (e.g. improving the Open Option website and continuing to approach learning community coordinators about including undecided students) that will improve the undecided student experience. In addition to these enhancements, the task force has five major recommendations for improving Iowa State's recruitment and retention of undecided students:

- Funding of the task force's marketing plan for Open Option prospective students.
- Targeted fundraising for scholarships specifically for Open Option students.
- A designated funding source for Open Option initiatives within the Resource Management Model.
- The formation of an advisory committee to provide oversight to recruitment and retention issues for undecided students.
- Modification to the Admissions Office student information system to accommodate more than one area of academic interest for a prospective student.

BACKGROUND

The Open Option Task Force was formed in August 2007 by the Undergraduate Programs Council. The task force's main objective is to enhance the university's overall recruitment and retention of Iowa State's largest population of prospective students, those who are undecided about their major. This group currently makes up 46 percent of Iowa State's Fall 2010 freshman prospective student pool.

Task Force Details

Task force members and regular attendees included:

Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost: Karen Zunkel, Task Force co-chair
Office of Admissions: Phil Caffrey, Task Force co-chair
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences: Tom Polito
College of Business: Ann Coppernoll
College of Design: Michelle Rasmussen
College of Engineering: Jodi Gilbertson, Vicky Thorland-Oster, Joel Johnson
College of Human Sciences: Darlene Fratzke
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Jane Jacobson, Mark Imerman
University Marketing: Carole Custer

The initial guiding principles for the task force include the following:

- To better position ISU as a destination of choice for undecided students.
- To increase the enrollment and success of undecided students.
- To ensure that undecided students have the information, services, etc. that they need to have a successful academic experience and to be able to decide upon a curriculum/major.
- To ensure that undecided students have equivalent opportunities as students who enter the institution declaring a curriculum/major.
- To ensure that students have the opportunity to connect/explore all the undergraduate colleges in a fair manner.
- To provide a list of recommendations for possible changes that is driven first and foremost by what is in the best interests of undecided students, without being constrained by the financial and political realities of the university's current environment.
- To make sure we 'walk the talk' – that if we advertise ISU as the destination of choice for undecided students, that we have the opportunities, services, etc. to back those statements up.

The task force was created with the expectation that it would likely meet over a two-year period. Its first priority was to focus on possible improvements to affect the Fall 2008 and 2009 recruitment cycles – short-term improvements that could have an immediate impact. The task force also was to make recommendations for more extensive and long-range changes that will impact the retention as well as the recruitment of undecided students at Iowa State University.

It is important to note that this task force does not represent the first time Iowa State University has established a group to review undecided students. Most recently, during the 2003-04 year the

president’s cabinet asked a working group to investigate the undecided student experience and to make recommendations. Many of the issues and findings of their report, “Review of Recruitment and Retention of Undeclared students” in January 2004 were reconfirmed by this task force. The trend of increasing numbers of students entering college undecided was one of those items identified in 2004.

Undecided Students

The task force’s efforts focused on two similar, yet distinct, types of undecided students:

- The first category of students is those who are undecided about both their major and their college. These students are referred to as Open Option and are assigned the OPEN curriculum code.
- The second category of undecided students is those who’ve declared a college, but not a major. Depending upon which college these students have been admitted into, they are assigned a curriculum code of AG X, P BUS, DSGN, ENGR, H SCI, or OPEN. Presently, the undecided students within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences are coded OPEN, but the college intends to begin assigning the LAS curriculum code to these students in the near future.

The College of Business presented a challenge for the task force, since all new freshmen enter the college as P BUS students. This P BUS classification is a mixture of undecided students and students who know what they want to major in, but who need to complete the pre-business curriculum prior to declaring their major. As such, the task force made a decision to exclude the P BUS students from the data analysis.

As the Table 1 indicates, Undecided ranks second only to Health Sciences & Allied Health Fields as the most popular major for the high school students who graduated in 2008 and who took the ACT.

Table 1: Top 10 Planned Educational Majors 2008 High School Graduating Class

Planned Educational Major	Number	Percent	Ave ACT Composite
Health Sciences & Allied Health Fields	247,393	17	20.6
Undecided	200,090	14	21.5
Business & Management	136,904	10	20.7
Social Sciences	83,039	6	22.1
Visual & Performing Arts	78,305	6	20.8
Sciences (Biological & Physical)	69,014	5	23.6
Engineering	59,339	4	22.8
Education	54,247	4	20.5
Communications & Comm. Technologies	37,921	3	21.4
Community & Personal Services	36,486	3	18.3

Source: ACT

ACT data also shows that the number of students who indicate Undecided as their major is growing significantly. Specifically, the number grew from 118,489 for the 2003 high school graduates to 200,090 for the 2008 high school graduates.

When looking at Iowa State University’s pool of prospective students for the Fall 2010 entering class (i.e., prospective students who’ve already indicated an interest in Iowa State), it is clear that undecided students represent the largest portion of this population. Specifically, 46 percent of the pool is undecided.

Table 2: Fall 2010 Freshman Prospects – Undecided vs. Declared (as of May 1, 2009)

College	Undecided	Declared Major	Total
AGLS	303 (15%)	1,701 (85%)	2,004
DSGN	99 (6%)	1,497 (94%)	1,596
H SCI	386 (19%)	1,628 (81%)	2,014
ENGR	1,579 (47%)	1,786 (53%)	3,365
LAS*	10,737 (56%)	8,512 (44%)	19,249
TOTAL	13,104 (46%)	15,124 (54%)	28,228

Note: Students in the College of Business are not included in this table as all prospects for this college are assigned the P BUS curriculum code.

*The OPEN curriculum code is assigned to two groups of students: those who indicate undecided within LAS, and those who indicate undecided and do not select a college.

STATUS OF UNDECIDED STUDENTS AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

To determine the current status of the undecided student experience, the task force collected a variety of data/information, including information on enrollment, recruitment, retention/success, and services provided. Information gathered in these four areas was based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. The following sub-sections will highlight the major findings in each area, with additional data available in the appendices.

Enrollment

Over the past five years, Iowa State University has seen a steady growth in ‘undecided’ student enrollment at the undergraduate level. At the beginning of Fall semester 2008, there were 1,307 students who were enrolled as Open Option or undeclared in a college (excluding P BUS students). This compares to 1,164 undecided students at the beginning of Fall 2004. Undecided students accounted for 6% of the total undergraduate population in Fall 2008. This may seem like a small percentage; however, when considering new first-year students at the university, the percentage increases significantly. Of the 4546 new direct-from-high-school students that enrolled at Iowa State Fall 2008, 848 of them (or 18.7%) were undecided on their major.

There is a misperception that Iowa State’s undecided student population is disproportionately Iowa resident (based on the assumption that nonresident undecided students are less likely to attend an out-of-state institution). However, the data over the past five years indicates that the percentage of undecided students who are nonresidents (23.7%) is very similar to the percentage of declared majors who are nonresidents (24.6%). (*Note: College of Business excluded from this data for reasons previously mentioned.*) Additional information on enrollment over the past five years for undecided students by college is available in the appendix.

Recruitment

The task force looked into three major aspects of the recruitment process:

1. Where did prospective open option students go who chose not to enroll at Iowa State University?
2. How do undecided student rates compare with decided student rates for application and enrollment rates?
3. What do current and former undecided students have to say about the recruitment process?

Competition for Undecided Students

The task force worked with Enrollment Services research staff to conduct a preliminary data analysis of who Iowa State's biggest competitors are for undecided students. A file of the Open Option and undeclared (within a college) students who were offered admission to Iowa State, but did not enroll, was matched with the National Student Clearinghouse database to identify where these students ended up enrolling.

As Table 3 indicates, most of the undecided Iowa residents who were offered admission, but ended up enrolling at another in-state institution, elected to enroll at one of the other two Regent universities. A significant number also chose an Iowa community college or private college/university.

Table 3: Undecided Iowa Residents Who Were Offered Admission to Iowa State (F'05-F'07) But Enrolled at Another In-State Institution – Top 10 Choices

College Attended	Number Enrolled
University of Iowa	374
University of Northern Iowa	156
Des Moines Area Community College	48
Kirkwood Community College	42
Central College	41
Simpson College	33
Drake University	27
Wartburg College	25
Luther College	23
Iowa Western Community College	16

Table 4 shows that the vast majority of undecided Iowa residents who were offered admission to Iowa State, but chose to enroll at an out-of-state institution, selected a college/university in one of the contiguous states. A closer analysis revealed that the student's college choice was closely related to proximity from home.

Table 4: Undecided Iowa Residents Who Were Offered Admission to Iowa State (F'05-F'07) But Enrolled at an Out-of-State Institution – Top 10 Choices

College Attended	Number Enrolled
South Dakota State University	13
University of Nebraska – Lincoln	12

Creighton University	10
University of Wisconsin – Platteville	8
University of Nebraska at Omaha	7
St. Olaf College	7
Northwest Missouri State University	7
St. Louis University	6
University of South Dakota	5
Arizona State University	5

Table 5 dispels a common misperception that the majority of the Open Option freshmen who are offered admission to Iowa State, but do not enroll, end up enrolling at two-year institutions. Only 16 percent of this population chose to enroll at a community college from Fall 2005 through Fall 2007.

Table 5: Open Option Freshman Offers Who Did Not Enroll (Fall 2005 – Fall 2007)

Location of College Attended	2-Year	4-Year	Total
In Iowa	197 (20%)	783 (80%)	980
Outside of Iowa	4 (2%)	241 (98%)	245
Total	201 (16%)	1024 (84%)	1225

Admission and Enrollment Yield Data for Undecided Students

The task force worked with Enrollment Services research staff to gather and analyze data associated with the apply/accept/enroll yield information for prospective students. The task force looked at the yield rates for students who started Open Option, who started in a major, who started as undecided within a college, and who transitioned between these categories. A sample of the admissions yield data are highlighted below and in tables in the appendix. In general, students who start undecided and stay undecided throughout the admissions process apply and enroll at lower rates than students who have declared majors. This is highlighted in Tables 6 and 7, where the:

- “Declared” columns represent students who entered the recruitment process with a major and completed the recruitment process with a major. They may have changed majors, but still had a major designated.
- “Undecided” columns represent students who entered the recruitment process as undecided (either within a college or as Open Option) and completed the recruitment process still in an undeclared or Open Option major.

Table 6: Prospect-To-Applied Yield Rate (Fall 2005 – Fall 2007)

College	Declared	Undecided
AGLS	40.49%	12.71%
ENGR	43.44%	22.48%
DSGN	36.17%	14.69%
H SCI	32.03%	8.72%
LAS*	18.89%	7.22%
TOTAL	29.43%	9.24%

Note: Students in the College of Business are not included in this table as all prospects for this college are assigned the P BUS curriculum code.

*The OPEN curriculum code is assigned to two groups of students: those who indicated undecided within LAS, and those who indicate undecided and do not select a college.

Table 7: Offer-To-Enrolled Yield Rate (Fall 2005 – Fall 2007)

College	Declared	Undecided
AGLS	56.88%	39.02%
ENGR	52.35%	45.19%
DSGN	50.15%	50.62%
H SCI	51.57%	0.00%
LAS*	41.59%	33.23%
TOTAL	49.49%	37.05%

Note: Students in the College of Business are not included in this table as all prospects for this college are assigned the P BUS curriculum code.

*The OPEN curriculum code is assigned to two groups of students: those who indicated undecided within LAS, and those who indicate undecided and do not select a college.

In addition to providing information on those students who were undecided throughout the recruitment process, the data from Enrollment Services provided an overall picture of the enrollment of students who started the recruitment process as Open Option, but maybe switched to a major or undeclared within a college sometime during the recruitment process. Table 8 provides the yield information for the students who started the admission process as Open Option for the Fall 2005 through Fall 2007 recruitment cycles.

Table 8: Prospects Who Started Admission Process as Open Option (Fall 2005 – Fall 2007)

	Open Option Entire Time	Open Option Then Declared	Open Option Then Undeclared Within College (Excludes LAS)	Total Students Who Started As Open Option
Prospects	43033	4399	1458	48890
Applied	3108	3055	1029	7192
Offered	2678	2778	943	6399
Enrolled	890	1501	570	2961
Prospect-To-Applied Yield	7.22%	69.45%	70.58%	14.71%
Offer-To-Enrolled Yield	33.23%	54.03%	60.45%	46.27%
Prospect-To-Enrolled Yield	2.07%	34.12%	39.09%	6.06%

Students switch from Open Option to a major or from Open Option to undecided within a college for two main reasons: 1) they gain more information from ISU and other sources as part of the recruitment process, or 2) their interests were not fully known when they were entered into the

Admissions prospect file, so they were entered as Open Option. Once ISU receives more information from the student, his/her intended major is changed in the system. Whichever reason causes the shift, it is evident from the data that Iowa State has more success recruiting those students who shift from Open Option.

Feedback from Undecided Students

In Fall 2008 the Enrollment Services Call Center conducted telephone surveys with students who had entered Fall 2007 and Fall 2008 as Open Option students. Findings that would inform the marketing and recruitment of students include the following:

- Overall, Open Option students who selected ISU were satisfied with their experience at ISU, and over 90 percent would recommend Iowa State to future undecided students.
- The top four factors that impacted Open Option students' decision to enroll at Iowa State University (location, campus, programs, and family) are the same factors that influence students who've declared majors.
- Students provided quotes on 'advantages' of being Open Option that can be incorporated into marketing messages. An example is that as an Open Option student you have the freedom to choose from a wide range of classes and explore a variety of careers in a non-pressured, worry-free situation.

In spring 2008, RISE (Research Institute for Studies in Education) held focus groups and interviews with current and former undecided students. Feedback from those students support the telephone surveys done Fall 2008 as it relates to factors that affected college choice. The top two factors that influenced students were: 1) proximity of campus to home (location) and 2) family (support and family members were alums). Neither of these factors is unique to undecided students when compared to students with declared majors.

Retention/Academic Success

The task force worked with Enrollment Services research staff to analyze a wide range of data related to retention, GPA, number of major/curriculum changes, time to graduation, etc. for undecided and decided students. The task force also investigated whether there were differences in other demographic variables (e.g. gender and ethnicity) that might yield important differences between undecided and decided students. Data charts and methodology information are available in the appendix. The findings listed in this section highlight data where there are differences between undecided and decided students or data that dispel some of the common myths about undecided students.

- Average time to graduation – there were no significant differences between students who entered as Open Option compared to students who entered with declared majors. Table 9 provides the average time to degree for students who entered the university as “Declared Major/Discipline”, “Undeclared in a college” and “LAS Undeclared/Open Option”.

TABLE 9: Average Time to Degree for Entering Freshman Classes (Fall 1995 – Fall 2002)

Declared	4.34 years
Undeclared in a college	4.46 years
LAS Undeclared/Open Option	4.38 years
Average across all categories	4.35 years

The fact that there is no difference in time to graduation was also addressed in the 2004 working group report. However, at that time, the average time to graduation was 4.76 years for all students, and 4.79 years for undecided students. So the average time to graduation has dropped for both declared and undecided students over the past decade.

- As Table 10 indicates, there are slight differences in retention and GPA between those students who are declared, undeclared in a college, and Open Option. It should be noted, however, these differences are not as significant when you control for incoming student differences (in high school rank and high school GPA). Nevertheless, the lower retention of Open Option students still provides an opportunity for Iowa State to monitor and improve programming that supports Open Option students.

Table 10: Retention and GPA by First Fall Status (Declared, Undeclared or Open Option) for Students Who Entered Fall 2002 through Fall 2006

Data	Declared	College Undeclared	Open	Grand Total
Number of students	15551	1798	2249	19598
% retained one semester	94.51%	96.38%	92.62%	94.47%
% retained one year	84.44%	88.99%	81.01%	84.47%
% retained two years	76.68%	84.36%	70.81%	76.71%
% retained three years	73.74%	79.80%	66.99%	73.53%
% retained four years	71.09%	77.14%	64.76%	70.91%
Average first semester GPA	2.72	2.76	2.66	2.72
Average first year cum GPA	2.76	2.81	2.71	2.76
Average second year cum GPA	2.91	2.94	2.89	2.91
Average third year cum GPA	2.98	3.03	2.99	2.99
Average fourth year cum GPA	3.03	3.06	3.02	3.03
Average high school GPA	3.50	3.63	3.35	3.49
Average high school rank	74	79	67	74
Average ACT composite	24	26	24	25

When the data in Table 10 is disaggregated by colleges, there are some striking differences. For example, within Human Sciences, students who were declared have a four-year retention rate of 71% compared to a 55% rate for undeclared students. However, in Engineering, the students who entered with a declared major have a 75% retention rate, compared to a 78% retention rate for undeclared students. This disaggregated table is included in the appendix.

The three percentage point one-year retention difference between Open Option students (81%) and the overall average (84%) is consistent with the findings of the 2004 working group.

- Open Option four- and five-year graduation rates are very similar to the university averages for students who entered with declared majors. The college undeclared population 4-year graduation rate is significantly different. However, the majority of this attributed to the high percentage of engineering students in that pool (where intern/coop experiences are stressed). Table 11 provides four- and five-year graduation rates for the cohort of students who entered Fall 2002.

Table 11: Four- and Five-Year Graduation Rates by First Fall Status (Declared, Undeclared, or Open Option) for Students Who Entered Fall 2002

Data	Declared	College Undeclared	Open	Grand Total
Starting number of students	3326	383	509	4218
% degree within four years	35.09%	19.32%	33.40%	33.45%
% degree within five years	62.00%	69.71%	58.55%	62.28%

It should be noted that the four-year retention rate gap between the Open Option students and the overall population has narrowed considerably over the last few years. This gap was 3.6% for the Fall 1999 entering class and only 0.05% for the Fall 2002 entering class.

- Curriculum/major changes:
 - After students select their initial major, students who started with a declared major change majors 0.69 times, students who started undeclared in a college change their major 0.35 times, and students who started in Open Option change their major 0.53 times.
 - By the beginning of the junior year (third year fall), 85% of declared students, 88% of undeclared students, and 80% of Open Option students have ‘settled’ into their final degree program.

Findings from the Enrollment Services Call Center telephone interviews conducted in Fall 2008 helped identify why students are still remaining Open Option into their sophomore year. Of the Fall 2007 entering students who were still Open Option during Fall semester 2008, 47% reported that they knew what they wanted to major in but hadn’t declared yet, while just 14% said they were really unsure. The remaining students were still exploring and narrowing down from among a few potential majors or career paths.

Services/Programs Available to Undecided Students

The task force reviewed range of services and programs for students to gain an understanding of how undecided student experience compares with the experience for students with majors and to identify any services/programs needed to better support undecided students.

Scholarships

Scholarships can serve as an important recruitment and retention tool for undergraduate students. The college representatives on the task force gathered information on accessibility of scholarships for Open Option and undeclared students.

- Open Option students compete with all other students for university-level scholarships (administered through the Student Financial Aid Office and the Office of Admissions).
- Open Option students are not eligible for college or departmental scholarships offered by any of the colleges outside of LAS. Within LAS, there are 38 scholarships that Open Option students may compete for as incoming students. Of these, several have restrictions that are not major specific (e.g., may be gender specific, may require financial need, etc.). There is only one scholarship offered at the college-level that is specifically targeted to an Open Option student.
- Undeclared students within a college are eligible for general college-level scholarships, with the exception of those scholarships open only to students in specific majors (based on donor requirements).

Learning Communities

Learning communities at Iowa State University have been shown to be significantly correlated with improved success and retention. The university has invested significant funds into the program and is recognized nationally. Learning communities are an integral part of the Office of Admissions' recruitment/marketing plan. The task force gathered information to determine the participation level and access to learning communities for Open Option students.

- Of the 457 new direct from high school Open Option students who were enrolled Fall 2008, only 114 (25%) were registered for learning communities. This compares to a university-wide average of 65% of all first-year students being part of a learning community Fall 2008.
- Several of the colleges have been very proactive in enrolling undecided students in learning communities. In Fall 2009, of the 413 new direct from high school students enrolling as undeclared in a college, 350 (85%) were in learning communities. The college breakdown is as follows:
 - AGLS (AGX): 1 of the 13 new students was in a learning community
 - Design (DSGN): 28 of the 30 new students were in a learning community
 - Engr (ENGR): 319 of the 368 new students were in a learning community
 - HS (H SCI) 2 of the 2 new students were in a learning community
- The task force compiled a list of all first-year learning communities, and documented whether or not Open Option or college undecided students were eligible to participate. Learning communities can be classified in the following manner regarding their acceptance of Open Option or undeclared students: 1) open to all interested students (Open Option or undeclared students can register the same as students in declared majors), 2) open to undeclared students within a college – and Open Option students (if space is available after students from the

major or college have registered/enrolled), and 3) open to undeclared students from within the college, but not Open Option students, and 4) open only to designated majors (which does not include Open Option or undeclared within a college). It is important to realize that the second category above, in many cases, has the implication of no access for Open Option students, since most learning communities will fill with students from the college and/or major. Table 12 provides information on how many learning communities fit into each category for Fall 2009. (A complete list of the Fall 2009 first-year learning communities grouped by categories is provided in the appendix.)

Table 12: Undecided Students' Access to Learning Communities

Category	Number of Learning Communities	Colleges Represented
1 - Undeclared in college (yes) Open Option (yes)	20	AGLS, H SCI, LAS + all interdisciplinary LC's; students must meet prerequisites for courses
2 – Undeclared in college (yes) Open Option (if space available)	4	AGLS, BUS – Open with permission of coordinator
3 – Undeclared in college (yes) Open Option (no)	18	AGLS, ENGR – preference given to students in home college (Open Option may not have met ENGR admissions criteria)
4 – Undeclared in college (no) Open Option (no)	17 (2 are second year LC, 5 are third year)	AGLS, DSGN, ENGR, H SCI, LAS

Access to Introductory/Exploratory Courses

Students in the Enrollment Services phone interviews reinforced a concern that the task force members had about whether or not undecided students could get into courses that would allow them to ‘explore’ potential majors, while still being Open Option or undeclared. The college representatives of the task force gathered information from their colleges to create a grid of suggested ‘orientation’ and ‘exploratory’ courses for students who are undecided. This grid, included in the appendix, shows that there is great variance in how available exploratory courses are depending on the major and college. For example, the College of Design allows up to 20 non-majors in their introductory courses to give undecided students an opportunity to explore their college. In introductory courses for many majors (e.g. Chemistry, Physics, Sociology, Food Science, Animal Science, etc.) there are no restrictions, undecided students can enroll in the courses the same as students in declared majors. However, in the College of Engineering, non-engineering students would have to complete eight non-engineering introductory math and science courses before being allowed to take the ENGR 160 or ENGR 170 introductory-level courses. The entire grid of introductory courses is available in the appendix.

Services/Programs to Help Undecided Students in the Decision Making Process

Iowa State University currently provides a variety of tools, courses, and experiences that will help students through their process of deciding on a major. These resources are highlighted briefly below:

- Academic Advising:
 - Open Option students are assigned to an academic adviser in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Student Academic Services Office (LASSAS). Advisers help each student to develop an exploratory program of study unique to the student's interests and abilities. The adviser guides the student through an informed decision-making process to find the academic niche and potential career path that best suits the student's personal and professional goals. Students spend one to three semesters as Open Option before declaring a degree-granting major. Advisers in LASSAS are well informed about the breadth of academic options at Iowa State and frequently refer students to other advising units to learn the specifics of curricula and career opportunities.
 - Undecided students within academic colleges also have academic advisors who work specifically with this population. The structure and number of advisors varies, based on the number of undecided students within the college. The responsibility for assigning advisors and developing the undecided student academic advising system resides in the respective college student services office. Similar to Open Option advising, academic advisors within each college work with undecided students individually to guide the student through a decision making process to select the appropriate major based on the student's interests and goals.

- Orientation Courses for Undecided Students:
 - LAS 101: LAS 101 is the required Orientation class for all Open Option students. The class seeks to continue the orientation experience by addressing issues and needs of students in the first weeks of their university experience. The fall format is lecture-recitation which features guest speakers for each of the first eight weeks followed by more recitation discussions about more applied aspects of the student transition. Representatives from all of the undergraduate colleges present the academic options available and serve as resource persons for the students. Other featured guests are Career Explorations and Career Services. Recitation topics include study skills, degree-program planning, degree audits, calculation of grade point average, and registration for the next semester. In spring the course is only one small group session. Open Option students who have a strong interest in a specific college or program are allowed to enroll in that Orientation class as a substitute for LAS 101. The learning outcomes for LAS 101 are:
 1. Be able to identify and use campus resources.
 2. Know the university requirements for a bachelor's degree.
 3. Understand general education as it applies to all colleges.
 4. Understand the policies and procedures of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the University, be aware of the range of academic and career options available to you.
 5. Know the other students in your recitation class.

- College Orientation Courses for Undecided Students: The availability of an orientation course appropriate for undecided students varies by academic college. In the Colleges of Engineering and Agriculture and Life Sciences, there are required orientation courses (ENGR 101 and AgEdS 110C) or sections of courses that are specifically tailored for undecided students. A significant portion of time in these courses is dedicated to introducing students to the various majors and degree programs available in the college. In the Colleges of Design and Business, all first year students (both undecided and decided) are required to take a college-level orientation course. Similar to the orientation courses for undecided students in Engineering and AGLS, these courses (DSN S 110/115 and BUSAD 101/102) also include components that introduce students to all the majors and career options available in their college. Undecided students in Liberal Arts and Science take LAS 101 (described above for Open Option students). The only college that does not offer an orientation course that covers the wide-range of majors available within the college is Human Sciences. Undecided students in Human Sciences must choose an orientation course associated with one of the degree programs/departments in the college (e.g. HDFL 110, FS HN 110, C I 115, etc.).
- Career Exploration Services: This program uses a multimodal approach in assisting students through the career and major exploration process. There are four main services offered through this program:
 - LAS 104
 - Four sections (25 students per section) have been offered in both fall and spring. The course is open to second semester (or later) students who want to explore different career/major options. There has been excess capacity in the course over the past two years.

<u>Term</u>	<u>Offered</u>	<u>Enrolled</u>
S'09	4 sections, 100 seats	3 sections, 63 students
F'08	4 sections, 100 seats	2 sections, 31 students
S'08	4 sections, 100 seats	3 sections, 55 students
F'07	4 sections, 100 seats	4 sections, 40 students

- Curriculum is based on current models of career development and effective career choice.
 - Class guides students through process of both self-exploration and exploration of the world of work.
 - Students integrate these two spheres to achieve a successful personal/career fit.
 - Developmental Career Counseling
 - Free one-on-one counseling provided by Student Counseling Center staff and psychology graduate students.
 - Counselors use a variety of counseling tools and assessment to help students connect with career path.
 - Average student seen for career counseling attends four sessions.
 - Students never have to wait more than three days to meet with a counselor for career counseling.

Feedback from Undecided Students on Services/Programs:

Findings from the Enrollment Services Call Center telephone interviews conducted in Fall 2008 that might impact student success include the following:

- Services/programs offered
 - The most used by Open Option students were orientation, academic advising, and introductory courses.
 - Comparing the Fall 2007 and 2008 entering students, it appears that there has been an increase in use of the Majors Fair.
 - Less than 30% of the students reported using the Career Exploration Services and being involved with learning communities.
- Of the Fall 2007 entering students who were still Open Option during Fall 2008, 47% indicated they knew what they wanted to major in but hadn't declared yet. Only 14% said they were really unsure. The remaining students were somewhere along the continuum of exploring and narrowing down from among a few choices.
- Students provided suggestions for improvement to the Open Option experience that can be investigated further by faculty/staff working with Open Option students. (Examples include offering orientation programs in June that are separate from the LAS orientation program, increasing connection/use of career services by Open Option students, increased access to classes in majors, etc.)

The information received from the Spring 2008 focus groups conducted by RISE parallels the information from the telephone surveys. Students highlighted the importance of the orientation courses, meetings with academic advisers, and having the freedom and time to explore while choosing their majors. Students in the focus group also stated that being Open Option allowed them to 'adjust to college' for a year before dealing with the pressure of deciding on their major and career path. They viewed being Open Option as a very positive experience. One positive programming element that was not highlighted in the telephone survey, but came up in several comments in the focus groups, was the positive impact students had from job shadowing experiences. A concern raised in the focus groups, or reason that students felt rushed to select a major, was the need to declare a major in order to become eligible for departmental or college scholarships. The sense was that Open Option students were at a significant financial disadvantage compared to students who were declared or even undeclared in a college.

TASK FORCE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through the task force's efforts, many opportunities were identified that could have an immediate impact on the undecided student experience and that required minimal financial or staff time commitment. The task force members worked with the various colleges and administrative offices to develop and/or to implement the following improvements over the past two years:

Communications with prospective students

- Reviewed the Admissions website and made numerous recommendations for changes, including the creation of a new webpage dedicated specifically to undecided prospective students. Implemented changes to the Admissions website – to enhance the pages for undecided students.
- Reviewed the existing letter/postcard communication stream for Open Option students and made revisions to improve the tone and message.
- Each college created (or updated) websites to provide information for undeclared students within their college. In addition, LAS staff created a new “Open Option” website that links to college pages, and highlights information for Open Option students: <http://www.openoption.iastate.edu/>. The page includes profiles of former Open Option students. Colleges will continue to add to these profiles, highlighting students who started Open Option and are enrolled or graduated from all the colleges at ISU.
- Recommended changes for how the Holland codes that are currently on the Admissions website can be linked to various ISU majors.
- A display on Open Option has been added at Experience Iowa State days. This is separate from the Liberal Arts and Sciences college display. The table is staffed by current and former Open Option students.
- Development of a marketing plan for the recruitment of undecided students. The plan includes two separate communication streams: one to undecided prospects and one to undecided offers and accepts. These streams will utilize oversized postcards, letters, and a new Open Option brochure. The proposal is currently under review by Associate Provost Holger (to determine funding possibilities). The marketing plan builds in the ‘messaging’ based on feedback from students, data, and task force members (e.g. time to graduation and GPA for undecided students being similar to students who know their major when they enter, etc.). The proposal would require a one-time development cost of \$13,795, with an annual printing and mailing cost of \$37,233. The proposal is included as an appendix.

Organizational changes

- Gained approval to separate the LAS undecided population from the Open Option population (currently, LAS undecided students are coded as OPEN, making it difficult to distinguish between the two groups). This will allow LAS undecided students to be identified in a manner consistent with the other colleges’ undecided students, and it will reinforce the fact that the Open Option population is university-wide and not tied specifically to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.
- LAS revised the degree audits for Open Option students for the 2007-09 catalog to provide more guidance for undecided students on where their courses may be placed once they select a major/curriculum. The audits now group courses into general education areas (humanities, math, natural sciences, and social sciences) and provide messaging that says "All degree

programs require some coursework in general areas of education. Courses are listed below in broad categories. When you select a college and a degree program, these courses may be applied to fulfill specific requirements and specific credit number requirements will be defined."

- The LAS 101 course sections for Open Option students were modified for Fall Semester 2008 to provide more of a university-wide perspective. In place of being welcomed by the Dean of LAS, the welcomes were done by Executive Vice President and Provost Hoffman or Associate Provost Holger. In addition, the opportunities for connections with the various colleges throughout the course were increased.
- In response to a concern expressed by academic advisers, the task force worked through the Registration and Classification Committee to grant degree audit viewing access for all majors/degree programs for those advisers with primary responsibility for advising undecided students.
- Contacted all first-year Fall 2009 learning communities, to determine whether undecided students were eligible to participate in the community. If so, requested that the Open Option and undecided majors be listed as part of the description on the Learning Communities website.
- Created a list of orientation courses and exploratory courses for undecided students. This list will be posted on the advising website, for easy access by academic advisors working with undecided students.
- Individual colleges are planning to increase their partnerships and use of the expertise within the Career Exploration Services program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The task force has divided its recommendations into two categories. The first category of recommendations involves building upon the progress/changes that have already been started as a result of the task force's effort. These recommendations could be viewed as more 'on-going enhancements' to the undecided student experience. The second category of recommendations includes recommendations that will require the support and commitment of administration for their successful implementation.

Recommendations that build upon and enhance changes already made or in progress

- Continue to enhance and expand opportunities for undecided students to explore the broad range of majors/careers available through Iowa State University degree programs/majors. Examples might include:
 - Review/expand the Major Fair
 - College presentations in LAS 101

- Clarify within each college how the Career Services office is or could be more involved as part of the career exploration process
- As new learning communities are created, identify which ones are available to undecided students. (Explore the possibility of adding a question on the Learning Community request form to raise awareness among coordinators to this possibility.)
- Continue to work with the colleges and departments to increase ease of access for undecided students to enroll in exploratory courses for majors.
- Regular review of all recruiting materials (websites, letter streams [both college and Admissions], tele-counseling scripts, e-mail correspondence, etc.) to determine ways to improve the materials and to reduce any unintended biases against undecided students.
- Continuing to ‘package’ and ‘market’ that Open Option and undecided students have a home here, have opportunities, etc. Part of this includes a continual expansion/enhancement of the Open Option and undecided college websites to highlight:
 - Learning community options currently open to these students
 - Scholarship opportunities
 - Services offered – link to career exploration services, etc,
 - Increase diversity of student profiles/stories
- Ensure that all colleges have an orientation course specifically for undecided students at the college level that allows students to enter the college undecided and explore the opportunities across all majors within a college. These courses should also be available to Open Option students.

Major recommendations that require commitment of the administration

- **Formation of an Open Option Advisory Committee.** The task force recommends that the Provost create a committee that would meet at least three times a year. This committee (which would report to the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost) would include representatives from each undergraduate college, the Office of Admissions, Career Exploration Services, and the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost. The committee will ensure that the positive momentum and changes recommended by the task force are not lost. Examples of roles that this committee might serve:
 - Provide feedback/guidance to the staff in the College of LAS who are recruiting and advising Open Option students
 - Serve as the college contact/resource for LAS for such things as identifying former Open Option students to highlight on website, serve as ambassadors at EIS Open Option table, etc.
 - Identify opportunities, issues, concerns, etc.
 - Review any updated data, marketing materials, etc.
- **Fund/implement marketing plan.** The task force has developed a framework that would allow for the enhanced application and enrollment yields of the large pool of undecided

students by the university. Implementation of this plan, which has relatively modest costs, would have a significant impact on overall student enrollment at Iowa State University. Without an investment in the marketing area, Iowa State University's ability to make serious in-roads into improving our yield rate for undecided students is unlikely.

- **Targeted fundraising for scholarships for Open Option students.** Data collected by the college representatives supports the comments of students in the focus groups that Open Option students are at a financial disadvantage in the scholarship area. If Iowa State University wants to actively recruit Open Option students, the task force recommends that the university should include scholarships specifically for Open Option students as a priority in the fundraising efforts of the ISU Foundation.
- **Determine funding source for Open Option initiatives under the RMM budget.** The issue of who should fund the marketing plan highlights that the current RMM budget may not adequately address how funding for Open Option initiatives should be handled. Open Option students are truly students of the 'university'. They eventually end up enrolling in all of the colleges of the university. In the current model, LAS provides all support for college-level marketing, advising, website development, etc. for this pool of students. However, the prospect pool in a typical year is huge, over 15,000 students. The task force agrees that leaving Open Option students 'housed' in LAS makes sense from a logistics/support system, especially since most of the courses taken by these students are in LAS. However, if LAS is forced to provide all funding for Open Option initiatives, that leaves one college controlling and making decisions on what funding level to put toward the recruitment of these students. The task force believes these decisions should be made with input from all the colleges. The pooled funds (such as the student services pool) might be a logical place to house funds for Open Option, other than the fact that those are typically Student Affairs controlled/directed funds. What is needed is an 'academic affairs' controlled fund that is shared by all colleges. The task force recommends that the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost, in concert with the academic colleges, should address this issue and develop an agreed upon method of funding Open Option programming and initiatives.
- **Explore the possibilities of identifying students with multiple interests in the admissions system.** The current admissions database system allows for only one 'major code' to be used for a student. However, a significant number of prospective students indicate an interest in more than one major, and in many cases these multiple majors are not closely related (i.e., they may cross colleges at Iowa State). The Admissions Office is currently forced to select the first major that the student lists, so the college that houses that major is made aware of the prospect, while the colleges that house the other majors are not. This reduces the university's ability to recruit these students. The task force realizes that students change their majors constantly during the recruitment process. We also acknowledge that due to the current systems, the collection of multiple majors is problematic. However, from a student service and recruitment perspective, we recommend that the Office of Admissions, with input from the Undergraduate Recruitment Coordinating Council and the Open Option Advisory Committee, should continue to explore the feasibility of gathering multiple interests from students now, or in the future as new computer systems are implemented.

LISTING OF APPENDIX MATERIAL

- Undergraduate enrollment data charts for undecided and declared students
- Admission yield data charts: Fall 2005-Fall 2007 by college
- Retention and academic success methodology and data charts
- RISE focus group: A Conversation with 12 Undecided Students at Iowa State University
- Phone interviews: Open Option Program Study
- Undecided Student Academic Recruitment Communication Campaign
- Fall 2009 learning communities for undecided students
- Orientation and exploratory courses for undecided students

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