

Review of Recruitment and Retention of Undeclared Students
January, 2004

Working Group

Marc Harding, Director of Admissions

Kathy Jones, Registrar

Carole Custer, Director of University Marketing

Jane Jacobson, Coordinator of Academic Advising, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Corly Brooke, Associate Vice Provost

Background

At the President's Cabinet meeting on September 29, 2003, the subject of attracting and serving undeclared students at ISU was discussed. President Geoffroy and others have raised the question of what should be our philosophy and culture related to students who come to campus without a clear degree path in mind. This includes, but is not limited to, students who

- do not declare a college and enter under the GENUS designation.
- declare a college because they feel various pressures to do so.
- change their minds once or more.
- are prospectives and get the message that ISU is not a place for them if they are unsure about their area of emphasis.

During the discussion, Dr. Geoffroy indicated that he was not expecting a great overhaul of our system, concluding that we are doing a reasonable job over all. However, he cast the issue more as an opportunity that we should address to find ways for improving our practices with respect to undeclared students. He assigned the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs to lead a review of the issue and to report back to the Cabinet.

Process

A working group was formed to investigate the issues and to identify areas for improvement. The group met on several occasions, and also convened a larger group of interested parties in a brown-bag lunch discussion of the issues. The following is the report of the working group.

Data

Retention

Iowa State has had an open option-type of enrollment alternative since at least the early nineteen-eighties. The program has been centered in Liberal Arts and Sciences. In the early years, pre-Business students were included. When the Business College was formed, the pre-Business students were split off and advised in the Business College advising office. The GENUS program (General University Studies) dates back to the early nineties. GENUS students choose not to identify a specific college and enter the university without such an affiliation. The GENUS students are advised in Liberal Arts and Sciences. Once admitted to ISU, the services provided these students are not significantly different from those provided to LAS Open Option students, the program for undeclared students within the LAS College. Agriculture, Engineering,

and FCS each have programs specifically for students who are undecided about which major to choose within the college.

Table 1 shows retention, graduation rate, and time-to-degree data for all LAS/GENUS undeclared freshmen as compared to new direct enrollees from Fall of 1992 through Fall of 2002. These data show that first-year retention of undeclared students generally lags behind those who declare initially, although the differences are not very large. Specifically, first-year retention is about 4-6% less than the average for all new direct freshmen. Graduation rates for LAS/GENUS students also lag behind those of the averages for direct freshmen enrollees by 4-9% for four and six year graduation. However, time to graduation appears to be comparable to students who declare majors upon entry. This is an important finding in that it suggests students who enter undeclared as LAS/GENUS students do not take longer to graduate than those who enter with a major in mind. The likely reason is that even students who enter in a particular major often make at least one change.

The working group believes that the data do not raise any major issues with respect to the way in which undeclared students are served. However, the consistency of the graduation rate data suggests that increased attention might be paid to this group of students. Some of the considerations below address this issue.

Recruiting

The working group believes that there is increasing opportunity and potential for attracting students to Iowa State who identify themselves as undecided. With over 100 academic programs to choose from, these students should be attracted to ISU because of the many options available to them. Table 2 shows that high school graduates of the class of 2003 taking the ACT identify “undecided” as their educational major more than any other choice. For those who submit scores to ISU, “undecided” is selected at more than two times the rate of the nearest option. Further, the students in the undecided pool have virtually the same average ACT composite scores as all who send scores to ISU. Data compiled by the Director of Admissions also indicate that the percentage of students describing themselves as undecided has been increasing in the last few years. Thus, the recruiting pool is expanding.

Table 3 summarizes the top ten choices of major of Fall 2002 and 2003 visitors to campus. *Undecided leads the list for first-time visitors, applicants, those receiving offers, and for enrolled students. This also reinforces the opportunity that exists and the need to pay particular attention to this pool of students.*

Recommendations

The working group recommends increased attention to enhancing the experience of undecided students and a concentrated effort to recruit students who wish to explore ISU’s many options.

Immediate Actions

- The GENUS designation should be dropped immediately in all recruiting materials. Few even know what it is, and as noted above students admitted in this category are treated identically to LAS Open Option students. Also, the term Open Option reflects a positive institutional philosophy toward these students and implies we have a great deal to offer.

- All new undecided students who do not choose one of the college programs, will be admitted as Open Option students without an LAS affiliation. However, they will be advised by LAS advisors.
- The Open Option admission and advising programs will be revised immediately for students currently being recruited for Fall, 2004. Specifically
 - Yield enhancement materials are being reviewed to make sure the language *encourages* rather than discourages exploration of options.
 - Orientation programs for undecided students will be reviewed.
 - Destination Iowa State will pay attention to the issue of so many students being undecided.
 - LAS 101 Orientation for Open Option students will be reviewed.

Longer Term Actions

- Appropriate university committees will be asked to identify roadblocks to success to students who are exploring options and to take steps to remove them.
- Recruiting and retention strategies will be reviewed to identify ways to be more proactive in attracting students *because* of the many options available to them.
- Discussion will be initiated as to how to handle the increased advising load associated with a potential increase in the number of Open Option students in LAS. Some strategies to be investigated include sharing the advising load with other colleges, integrating the exploration aspects more with the LAS 101 class, and others. We will ask the University Academic Advising Committee to take up some of these considerations.
- Focus groups will be used to develop better marketing plans.
- The 2005-2007 catalog will be reviewed to make it easier to understand common requirements (general education) and the specific requirements of individual programs. Also, the “friendliness” of the format, particularly for undeclared students, will be reviewed.
- Internal policy and coordination issues that present barriers to undecided students will be reviewed. A specific example is the lack of access undeclared students have to certain high demand courses that will allow them to explore possible areas of interest. Presently, those options are sometimes not available.

Admit Year		Total First-Time Freshmen	No. returned 2nd year	% returned 2nd year	No. graduated by end of 4th year	% graduated by end of 4th year	No. graduated by end of 6th year	% graduated by end of 6th year	Average years to graduation
1992	LAS/GENUS	394	295	74.9%	61	15.5%	196	49.7%	4.79
	All direct frosh	3333	2726	81.8%	723	21.7%	2035	61.1%	4.76
1993	LAS/GENUS	420	332	79.0%	74	17.6%	221	52.6%	4.75
	All direct frosh	3416	2769	81.1%	763	22.3%	2062	60.4%	4.75
1994	LAS/GENUS	425	323	76.0%	98	23.1%	241	56.7%	4.67
	All direct frosh	3325	2711	81.5%	799	24.0%	2075	62.4%	4.72
1995	LAS/GENUS	407	311	76.4%	86	21.1%	242	59.5%	4.74
	All direct frosh	3274	2668	81.5%	822	25.1%	2086	63.7%	4.71
1996	LAS/GENUS	455	346	76.0%	112	24.6%	256	56.3%	4.68
	All direct frosh	3559	2979	83.7%	1022	28.7%	2349	66.0%	4.65
1997	LAS/GENUS	516	403	78.1%	117	22.7%	292	56.6%	4.69
	All direct frosh	4007	3351	83.6%	1081	27.0%	2634	65.7%	4.68
1998	LAS/GENUS	419	329	78.5%	105	25.1%			
	All direct frosh	3800	3207	84.4%	1111	29.2%			
1999	LAS/GENUS	403	320	79.4%	112	27.8%			
	All direct frosh	4020	3421	85.1%	1261	31.4%			
2000	LAS/GENUS	543	460	84.7%					
	All direct frosh	4289	3591	83.7%					
2001	LAS/GENUS	534	422	79.0%					
	All direct frosh	4598	3837	83.4%					
2002	LAS/GENUS	510	413	81.0%					
	All direct frosh	4167	3510	84.2%					

Table 1: Comparison of retention, graduation rates, and time-to-graduation of LAS/GENUS students to all direct freshman. (Source: Office of the Registrar)

Educational Major	National		Iowa State	
	N	Avg	N	Avg
UNDECIDED	118489	21.0	1611	22.6
BUSINESS & MGMT, GEN	53361	20.6	708	21.8
HEALTH SCI & ALLIED, GEN	65183	20.5	608	22.3
ENGINEERING, GENERAL	23601	21.9	571	24.8
PSYCHOLOGY	28230	21.2	301	22.4
MEDICINE	32437	22.9	282	24.2
ARCHI & ENVIR DESIGN, GEN	10395	21.1	274	22.8
VETERINARY MEDICINE	7353	21.7	245	23.6
COMPUTER & INFO SCI, GEN	14355	21.0	244	23.6
EDUCATION, GENERAL	21152	20.6	237	21.6
ELEMENTARY EDUCATION	18460	20.1	229	21.2
AGRICULTURE & AG TECH, GEN	8847	18.3	218	20.6
ENGINEER-RELATD TECH, GEN	10035	22.3	208	24.8
SOCIAL SCIENCES, GENERAL	19104	21.7	207	22.9
SCIENCES (BIO & PHYS), GEN	13642	23.1	198	24.6

Table 2: ACT educational major preferences cited by 2003 high school graduate. Iowa State data are for all scores received. (Source: ACT and Office of Admissions)

Fall 2002 & Fall 2003 Visitors by Major at the time of the First Visit								
		1st Visitors	Applications		Offers		Enrolled	
	LAS Open Option	645	557	86.4%	536	96.2%	317	59.1%
	GENUS	1026	516	50.3%	499	96.7%	267	53.5%
1	LAS Open Option + GENUS	1671	1073	64.2%	1035	96.5%	584	56.4%
2	P BUS	1295	962	74.3%	909	94.5%	539	59.3%
3	ENGR	962	752	78.2%	737	98.0%	411	55.8%
4	ART	613	507	82.7%	475	93.7%	292	61.5%
5	P ARC	578	439	76.0%	428	97.5%	273	63.8%
6	P CS	404	302	74.8%	287	95.0%	172	59.9%
7	M E	383	346	90.3%	337	97.4%	213	63.2%
8	P H P	358	176	49.2%	170	96.6%	87	51.2%
9	PSYCH	328	235	71.6%	226	96.2%	149	65.9%
10	CPR E	327	301	92.0%	294	97.7%	218	74.1%
	Grand Total (All Majors)	12530	9025	72.0%	8661	96.0%	5313	61.3%

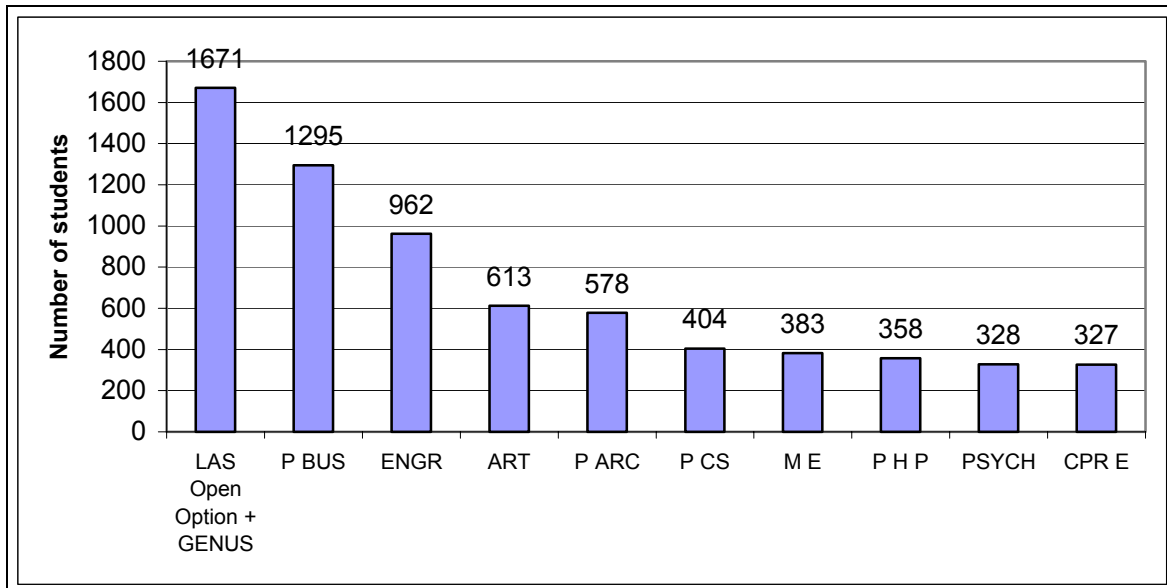


Table 3: Most popular majors identified by visiting students and enrollment yield. (Source: Office of Admissions)