

# RAISING THE BAR

## HIGHER EDUCATION GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS

By Candace Gwaltney



INDIANA

The image shows a field of numerous blue signposts on wooden sticks, each with a state name written in black marker. The signposts are scattered across a light brown, sandy ground. The sign for 'INDIANA' is the only one that is bright yellow, making it stand out prominently in the center of the field. Other visible state names include North Dakota, Tennessee, Missouri, Iowa, Georgia, Montana, and Minnesota.

Nearly two-thirds of Indiana's recent high school graduates are flocking to colleges and universities to continue their education. With 58% of its high school graduates earning a bachelor's degree, the state ranks 15th in the nation. Sounds like a success story, doesn't it?

The problem is one-fourth of those students require remediation in math or English and only 34% of full-time baccalaureate students finish their degrees in four years. Even with so many students going straight to college, Indiana ranks 44th nationally in the percent of its adult population (21%) age 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher, according to 2005 U.S. Census Bureau data.

Indiana must do better to remain competitive nationally and internationally, contends the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (CHE). That's according to the agency's *Reaching Higher: Strategic Directions for Higher Education in Indiana* report. The 2007 document reveals five focus areas for targeted improvements. Described in the report as "challenging and bold ideas," the commission recommends sweeping initiatives to improve: access, affordability, student success, college preparation and contributions to Indiana's economy.

"We need to think about doing things differently in higher education so we get more success," explains CHE commissioner Stan Jones.

The recommendations include developing a more comprehensive financial aid plan for adult students, boosting enrollment at the community colleges and regional campuses, and increasing admissions standards to four-year universities to ensure students earn college preparatory diplomas in high school.

The commission has continuously sought and received input from university leaders, the public, the Legislature, business groups such as the Indiana Chamber and employment coalitions, explains commission member Mike Smith. While the university presidents are supporting many of the recommendations, some areas fare better with certain universities and some leaders are waiting to see how their input affects the final report.

"The key here is that we are attempting to set a very high mark in terms of the spirit of cooperation and co-ownership of these ideas," Smith says. "This is not intended to be a prescription by the commission or a set of commandments that 'thou shalt do these things in order to achieve statewide goals.' Rather than a prescriptive tone, we are attempting to strike a very balanced, cooperative tone of work with the institutions."

The 14-member commission (12 members appointed by the governor, one student and one university faculty member) released the *Reaching Higher* report in June. Since then, an eight-member strategic directions committee has continued to review the key areas and issued five white papers to further detail each topic. Smith, the former CFO of Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield (now WellPoint), leads that committee.

Created in 1971, the commission is a coordinating agency for higher education that plans and manages the state-supported system of postsecondary education, reviews budget requests from public institutions and defines educational missions of public colleges and universities.

## Access and affordability

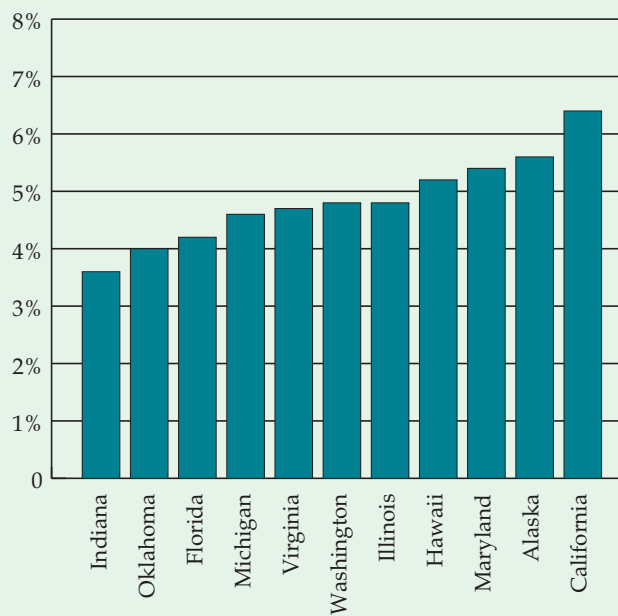
About 62% of Indiana high school students attend college the fall following graduation, according to 2004 data. While the state ranks 10th nationally in college-going rates, Indiana should aspire to break into a top-five ranking, the *Reaching Higher* report says.

The commission proposes that expanding transfer opportunities



### College Participation

Percent of population age 25 and older participating in postsecondary education



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 2000.

will give students more options if they are denied admission to a four-year university. This will also help keep them engaged in higher education.

For example, Indiana University offers a passport program for students who do not meet admission standards. These students live in the IU dormitories in Bloomington while taking classes at Ivy Tech. Students can participate in campus activities and then transfer to IU after passing certain classes. Ball State and IUPUI also offer similar programs.

### The dollar factor

Perhaps no action would have greater impact on increased college enrollment than getting tuition costs under control.

“Cost of our education has gone up faster than health care has or prescription drugs; and yet, just like health care, people know they need it. So there’s continuing demand for it,” Jones asserts. “But we also know that tuition has doubled in 10 years and student loan debt has tripled. Students are working more to pay for college and that’s why we think the whole affordability issue is pretty important.”

The commission wants to see more coordination between state and institutional financial aid to better serve low-income and lower middle-class families. A plan should be developed for adult students and for middle-class students who complete Core 40, the report says.

Indiana State President Lloyd Benjamin III believes improving financial aid will boost graduation rates because many students have to work while in school and help their families. He would like to see aid for students who are transferring from associate degree programs to four-year schools.

“Increasingly the middle class is feeling (a) tuition pinch,” Jones agrees. “I think it’s important to address affordability for middle-class families who may not be able to go mortgage their house to send their kids to college.”

Though Ivy Tech offers the lowest tuition among Indiana schools, that cost is about \$100 to \$450 higher than the national average for community colleges, the report indicates.

“There’s a recognition that if you are going to reach a broader group of people, it really needs to be the community colleges that are going to do that. And a significant part of that is that they need to be affordable,” Jones says.

The commission’s Ivy Tech working paper briefly mentions the possibility of even offering free tuition: “In Indiana, the current amount of community college tuition and fees paid minus state and college financial aid is approximately \$100 million per year. While this certainly is a large amount, it is not out of the question that Indiana could afford providing its residents with a free community college education considering that is \$100 million less than the cost of the recent full-day kindergarten proposal.”

Such a bold overhaul would require many more discussions and approval from the Legislature, but the bottom line is the commission believes keeping tuition affordable at Ivy Tech is a necessity.

“We think the community college will be kind of the entry portal for the system. So it will be, and has to be, more affordable,” Jones asserts.



### College Completion

Percentage of first-time, full-time degree-seeking students earning a baccalaureate degree, 2005

	4-year grad rates	6-year grad rates
Indiana University–Bloomington	49%	72%
Purdue University–West Lafayette	32%	66%
Ball State University	27%	54%
Indiana State University	18%	39%
University of Southern Indiana	12%	33%
Indiana University–Northwest	11%	27%
Indiana University–Kokomo	10%	28%
Indiana University–Southeast	8%	30%
IUPUI	7%	26%
Indiana University–East	6%	20%
Indiana University–South Bend	6%	25%
Purdue University–Calumet	4%	21%
IPFW	4%	18%
Purdue University–North Central	2%	12%

Source: Indiana Commission for Higher Education; The Education Trust, College Results Online

Ivy Tech is doing its part, says president Tom Snyder, by working to grow its endowment to increase assistance to students and remain competitive. In addition, the school is maximizing its state dollars.

“We’re trying to be prudent with funds received from the state. We need to make sure that we are letting the constituents know, particularly in the state, that we’re a good investment so that the funding continues to match the bill,” he explains.

### Growing the community college

Making sure Ivy Tech is affordable will help to continue growth at the statewide campuses.

“In the country, 45% of students are in community colleges. In Indiana, it’s 25%,” Jones reveals. “So we could double the number of students that we have in our community college to be at the national average.”

That’s exactly what the commission hopes will happen within the next seven to 10 years, and Snyder agrees.

“It’s an important goal if we are going to provide the workforce the state needs,” he says.

## Remedial Education

Percent of high school graduates enrolling in an Indiana public college or university in the academic year immediately following graduation and enrolled in at least one remedial English or math course

Campus	% Remedial	% Not Remedial
Four-year campuses (not IU and PU regional campuses)	6%	94%
IU and PU regional campuses	26%	74%
Two-year campuses	65%	35%
State total	26%	74%

Source: Indiana Commission for Higher Education; data submitted by public colleges and universities through the Student Information System

While Snyder believes it's possible to double enrollment, it will require some innovative approaches. Ivy Tech will have to offer more distance learning classes to reach another set of would-be students. Closer collaboration with high schools in developing dual credit opportunities will also help boost numbers, he explains.

## Student Success

### Degree completion

Attracting students to those halls of ivy is less of a challenge in Indiana than getting them into that mortar board cap. Only 34% of full-time baccalaureate students graduate from college in four years and 55% in six years, according to the commission. That's inefficient for the students and the state, the report declares.

"We're not suggesting that everybody is going to graduate in four years, but we think that we can do better," Jones explains.

Ball State put forth a program a few years ago to allow students who know what they want to study to finish in three years. The school identified 30 majors for the Degree in Three program. (See more on three-year degrees, including a new Manchester College program, on Page 26).

That path may work for select motivated students, but taking more than four years to complete a degree is perfectly acceptable, university president Jo Ann Gora asserts.

"I think that the traditional four-year route certainly is appropriate for some students, but in all of higher education now, institutions all around the country talk about a six-year graduation rate because students transfer, they change their major, they choose to take double majors, they work – all of these make it more difficult to complete

the degree in four years," she explains. "In some cases, that's not their highest priority."

Indiana State's president sees students facing the same issues. More are working or have family responsibilities that require them to take longer to graduate. A closer look at year-round funding that would allow more summer programs and more distance learning opportunities could improve graduation rates, Benjamin contends.

### College preparation

At the other end of the spectrum is being college ready to begin with.

Of the 2004 graduating class, 26% of students who continued their education in Indiana enrolled in at least one remedial course, according to CHE data. Simply put, many high school graduates are not prepared for a university course load, making a successful transition and completion more difficult.

Remedial classes are offered at some of Indiana's four-year universities and the community college, which the commission wants changed. Instead, all remedial work should be provided at Ivy Tech and Vincennes University, the report says.

Remediation at IU and its regional campuses has declined in recent years and its use by students is more of an exception than a rule, president Michael McRobbie offers.

"I don't think it's realistic to ever completely eliminate remediation," he says. "I certainly expect us to significantly reduce the amount of remediation that we offer to levels well below what we offer at the moment."

The need for remediation courses stems back to how prepared students are when they graduate high school. The Core 40 high school diploma will be the minimum curriculum standard for public four-year universities starting with the 2011 high school class. The commission is recommending more stringent standards for Ball State, IU-Bloomington and Purdue-West Lafayette. The notion is these schools should move toward minimum admission standard of Core 40 with academic honors, but that has not been implemented into policy yet, CHE associate commissioner Jeff Stanley says.

There's a desire to improve K-12 schools so students graduate ready for college or the workforce, and that the higher education sector provide the educational rounding to enable our graduates to take on leadership positions when they graduate, Gora explains.

Ball State and other universities are already taking steps toward higher admission standards. "We were the first university in 1998 to make the Core 40 a minimum admissions requirement. And now our

## Affordability

Tuition and fees at Indiana colleges and universities

	1995-96 Rate	Increase	2005-06 Rate	Avg. Ann. Increase
Four-Year Public Institutions Only	\$2,841	113.1%	\$6,056	7.9%
Two-Year Public Institutions Only	\$1,842	53.2%	\$2,822	4.4%
Independent Institutions Only*	\$10,940	77.1%	\$19,369	5.9%
Consumer Price Index Higher Education	154.5	25.6%	194	2.3%
Price Index	173	43.5%	248.2	3.7%

\*Median tuition and mandatory fee rate used for Indiana independent institutions.

Source: Indiana Commission for Higher Education.

## 'Reaching Higher' Timeline

- The commission started putting together the plan in fall 2006 and then released it in June 2007
- After presenting the plan to universities and in public meetings, input was used to further develop recommendations in five white papers released from August 2007 to February 2008
- The commission expects to release a final implementation plan in April to coincide with the start of the higher education budget process

goal is to have 80% of the freshman class to complete the Core 40 with academic honors," Gora shares.

Meanwhile, at Bloomington, Core 40 will be a basic standard for admission to IU beginning with the 2010-11 academic year, McRobbie states. The decision to raise admission standards was made prior to the commission's report.

## More Research, More State Growth

When Indiana University inaugurated McRobbie as its president in October, he used the opportunity to reinforce what he describes as the university's fundamental missions – education and research.

The latter, in particular, needs to be the focus for IU-Bloomington and Purdue University-West Lafayette, according to the commission's recommendations. Both institutions "should develop strategies for them to be among the top public research universities in the country."

McRobbie says the commission is highlighting the right areas and IU is already concentrating on those same initiatives: "I'm delighted that they're understanding and (that) they're focused on the importance of research because the whole world realizes now that a key driver of economies in states and economies of nations are the innovations that come out of the great research universities."

## The trained workforce

The commission also wants to work with the Department of Workforce Development to address workforce needs of the

## Working Papers

The commission released five working papers based on these key topics from the *Reaching Higher* report:

- Improving college completion rates
- Making college affordable
- Taking the community college to the next level
- Embracing accountability
- Ensuring Indiana University and Purdue University are top-tier research universities

Each working paper and the complete *Reaching Higher: Strategic Directions for Higher Education in Indiana* report are available at [www.che.in.gov](http://www.che.in.gov)

state. Indiana ranks 44th (nationally) in the number of adults with associate and bachelor degrees. To be competitive in the world economy, the state must raise the skills of its current and future workers, the *Reaching Higher* report contends.

"The Indiana Chamber and other business organizations have a perfectly legitimate seat at the table when it comes to talking about quality of life, sustainability (and) long-term competitiveness in terms of how Hoosiers develop their students and their workforce in preparation for economic and social competition," Smith explains. "Nobody has a higher stake in the success of our system of higher education than those who aspire to do business successfully in our state."

That's an area in which the University of Southern Indiana excels, president H. Ray Hoops says. And he hopes that doesn't change.

"In our case, the University of Southern Indiana is an institution that is highly committed to service in this region. We think we are doing what we should be doing here. I don't think it would be in the best interest of anyone to modify the ways in which we provide service to southwestern Indiana because I think the region is very pleased with what we are doing," Hoops, who has served as USI president for 14 years, announced in January he will retire in June 2009.

## Responsible Spending

Another key component of *Reaching Higher* is the need for an accountability system that would provide "various transparent and widely reported mechanisms and measures that not only advance the system as a whole, but also support and build upon the strengths of specific universities."

This would give more information to the public and make the colleges and universities more accountable for tax dollars spent. One way the commission wants to ensure this is by continuing to shift the funding model itself – from money received for how many students walk in the door to how many students are walking out with a diploma.

"But to do that we also need the help of the General Assembly, so they will certainly be a part of these discussions as well," Jones states.

Some higher education associations are already promoting accountability by the universities because they would rather they do it than the federal government put it on them, Jones explains.

"They're worried that they will see No Child Left Behind extended to higher education. Last year, there was the Spellings Commission report that focused on higher education (and) called for a whole series of accountability practices. So several of (the universities) are moving pretty rapidly to say, 'Wait a minute; we'd rather do accountability ourselves.'"

Indiana State is embracing accountability and is joining the Voluntary System of Accountability, a project endorsed by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

The university wants to be certain it is maximizing its resources and demonstrating to taxpayers they are getting value on their investment. For example, in the past few years, the university has been doing program reviews to reveal those that

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## Higher Education

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are not meeting potential. If not enough students are enrolled in a particular program or major, the university is asking the various colleges to consider deleting those programs or find resources so they can be as productive as they should be, Benjamin explains. Also, Indiana State is expanding its life sciences program to meet the increasing demand for nurses.

“Being accountable, I think, means that we are trying to address the contemporary needs of the state. We’re trying to do it in a responsible way, and we’re trying to do it in a way that’s enhancing opportunities or access for more Hoosiers to go to college,” Benjamin offers.

### What’s next?

Once a final report is issued by the commission, the process is not over. CHE expects the Legislature and governor will review the recommendations, some of which will warrant legislative actions while others could become statements of public priority or public process. Exactly how that plays out is beyond the scope of the commission, Smith notes.

Even though the process of establishing the recommendations continues, some universities independently have similar goals in place – prior to the *Reaching Higher* report and since it was released.

The hope is to create a shared vision and common goals that all parties will embrace, while acknowledging that each institution operates independently, Smith relates.

“It hasn’t all been rosy. We’re not walking hand in hand with the institutions on all of these areas,” Stanley reveals. “There’s

been some tension in certain parts, but in many ways that tension is good because it helps us to get to a better resolve in what we are doing as we begin to listen to one another and take that tension and build it into a cooperative manner of looking at what is best for the state.”

For his part, USI’s Hoops wants to wait and see the final recommendations of the commission before throwing all of his support behind it. “I think the commission is dealing with the kind of issues it ought to be dealing with. The problem is with most of these things, the devil is in the details – not within the overall,” he explains.

Smith says Gora publicly took Ball State’s plan and “made it an overlay to our *Reaching Higher* document to show the intersection and the congruity of the goals.” That’s precisely the type of understanding the commission hopes it can reach with all universities.

### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** Stan Jones, Jeff Stanley and Mike Smith, Indiana Commission for Higher Education, at [www.che.state.in.us](http://www.che.state.in.us)

Lloyd Benjamin III, Indiana State University, at [www.indstate.edu](http://www.indstate.edu)

Jo Ann Gora, Ball State University, at [www.bsu.edu](http://www.bsu.edu)

H. Ray Hoops, University of Southern Indiana, at [www.usi.edu](http://www.usi.edu)

Michael McRobbie, Indiana University, at [www.iu.edu](http://www.iu.edu)

Tom Snyder, Ivy Tech Community College, at [www.ivytech.edu](http://www.ivytech.edu)