

On the Fast Track

Manchester Option: Graduate in 3 Years

By **Matt L. Ottinger**

Manchester College offers more than 55 areas of study for a student body of just over 1,000. Among its many facilities is the Success Center (bottom), where many pupils go to study, receive professional assistance and congregate.



In an era in which a dramatically low number of young people earn their diplomas in six years, Manchester College is offering the opportunity for all students to complete their undergraduate education in half that time.

“Some other schools have done this, but we’re fairly certain we’re the first in the Midwest to offer a program (termed Fast Forward) like this for every major,” says Jeri Kornegay, director of media and public relations for the North Manchester (Wabash County) school.

While Manchester has more than 55 areas of study to offer its student body of just over 1,000 (from 24 states and 23 countries, although 85% are from Indiana), the college is best known for its accounting, pre-med and education programs, according to Kornegay. The school also boasts the oldest peace studies program in the nation.

Dave McFadden, Manchester College executive vice president, says the new program was adopted to help students in a variety of ways.

“Not only will the student get into the workforce faster, but affordability is now a big issue in college,” he explains. “In that fourth year, a student could be making \$25,000 at a job instead of spending \$25,000 on education. That’s a savings of \$50,000 in that year.”

Tuition at Manchester is \$21,000 per year, although 100% of students receive financial aid in some form, according to the school’s web site.

McFadden also believes the expedited program is beneficial for Manchester students because of their penchant for graduating on time.

“Most colleges don’t have a large percentage of students who actually graduate in four years, whereas 80% of ours do,” he contends. “This makes a program like this realistic for us.”

Why doesn’t everyone participate?

McFadden anticipates the program could attract 25-50 additional students to Manchester, noting that’s hardly an inconsequential increase based on the school’s size. However, he believes Fast Forward is only relevant for a particular niche of students.

“This certainly isn’t for everybody,” he comments. “Students need to be focused and know their major from the start. There’s less flexibility with this, and it can be a more intensive program.”

McFadden explains that some students want to experience four years of college for various reasons, including athletic participation and other factors.

“I know I wanted to spend four years away from home when I went to college,” Kornegay concurs. “This is designed for highly motivated and bright students. Also, some students may have multiple international opportunities and might not want to be a part of this (although many Fast Forward students can study abroad depending on their major).”

Cardinals can also leave the nest early

As documented in the March/April 2005 edition of *BizVoice*, Ball State University implemented a three-year program in the fall of 2005 that was compatible with over 30 of the school’s majors. According to Marilyn Buck, Ball State’s University College dean and associate provost, more than 50 students have participated in the Degree in Three program and its first graduates will be collecting diplomas this year. She notes the feedback from students has been overwhelmingly positive.

“The students really appreciate it,” Buck says. “Some were doing

extracurricular activities, pursuing minors, and we had a couple taking on double majors. They could do what everyone else is doing; they just have to be focused because of the heavier workloads during the year and in the summer.”

Buck also touts the practicality of an accelerated program.

“There aren’t a lot of students involved, but it benefits the ones who are,” she notes. “The kids are out in the workforce earlier and that benefits economic development. We also had political science students who are now able to get done in time to work during the 2008 elections, so it was very helpful for them.”

McFadden echoes the sentiment on aiding local economies, stating the response he received when he proposed the idea.

“There’s been enthusiasm about this from a business perspective,” he says. “They said if they saw a student from the Fast Forward program, they would know (the student was) motivated and focused. That’s something that can be hard for a potential employer to find evidence of.”

John Snider, vice president of retail logistics at Do it Best Corp. in Fort Wayne and a member of Manchester’s Presidential Leadership Council, explains the program is a boon for both parents and businesses.

“The initiative and discipline it takes for the student to participate in this program would be very attractive to me as a hiring manager,” he says. “But I also look at this from the perspective of a parent, since I have four kids in their 20s. For several years, I was paying room and board for three of them at once, so I know this is a great way to cut back on costs for parents.”

Snider adds that since Manchester College attracts students based on the strength of its programs (e.g. biology and accounting), it would benefit students looking to advance to additional higher education.

“If a biology student wants to move on to medical school, this is also a great way to accelerate their progress,” he notes.

Extra expenditures required?

Buck explains the only staff change was adding a special counselor to meet with Ball State’s fast track students. McFadden notes that while Manchester won’t be adding more staff, Fast Forward will force the school to expedite updating its online capabilities.

“Since a lot of the summer courses are going to be online, we’ll need to upgrade the technology so teachers can conduct classes that way (beginning in 2009),” he says. “But we were going to do that anyway; it’s just an extra investment up front.”

Manchester has spent some money on marketing the Fast Forward program, although much of the promotion has been via earned media.

“We held a press conference, and we received commitments of coverage from television stations in Evansville, Louisville and Fort Wayne,” Kornegay explains. “The Associated Press then picked up the story and every daily newspaper in the state ran a version of the story. It also became viral, getting mentioned on blogs because it was offered for every major.”

Fast Forward feedback

According to McFadden, Manchester’s program has received a great deal of support from the school’s staff, although some are concerned about depriving students of a traditional experience.

“There are some who have expressed concern this encourages students to move too fast, and we shouldn’t discourage a full experience,” he says. “My response to that is they can still live on campus and even study abroad; it’s not like they’re segregated from the rest of the students.”

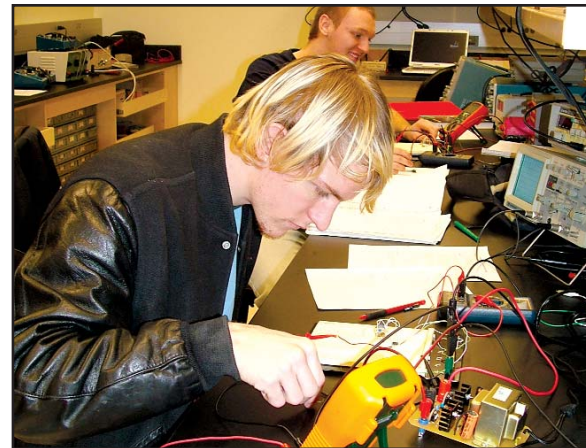
Governor Mitch Daniels also expressed his support for Fast Forward in a letter to Manchester President Jo Young Switzer, stating, “At a time when colleges are measuring themselves on their six-year graduation rates, I am especially pleased that Manchester has introduced this innovative program giving students the opportunity to graduate in three years as opposed to four.”

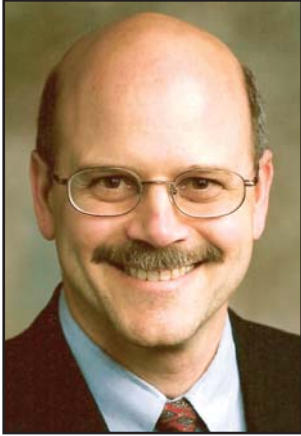
Another Fast Forward supporter is a former Manchester student who was unable to benefit from the program, since she graduated in May 2007 and it won’t begin until



Manchester grad Andrea Numbers is an advocate of Fast Forward, saying the program would have been ideal for her.

Students involved in Manchester’s science programs would be prime candidates for Fast Forward since it would allow them to head into medical or graduate school in less time and with less debt.





Manchester College executive vice president Dave McFadden has been facilitating the development of the Fast Forward program since its inception.

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fall 2008. Andrea Numbers, a native of Woodburn who now lives in Columbia City, is a proponent of the program for the sake of future students.

“This would have helped me get a jump start on my career and save money for med school,” she comments.

Numbers graduated with a dual major in biology-chemistry and Spanish and currently works as an international specialist in regulatory affairs while saving money to attend dental school.

“I’m thinking about grad school, but by the time I’m done I could be \$100,000 to \$200,000 in debt depending on where I go,” she surmises.

Numbers states she benefited from studying abroad in Ecuador for a semester and participating in a program in Nicaragua, and is delighted to know Fast Forward students can enjoy international experiences as well.

“Studying abroad was an interesting experience for me, and I’m glad these students could still do that,” she says.

INFORMATION LINK

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