

CAMPUS ACCELERATION

Purdue Adds 3-Year Liberal Arts Options

By **Crickett Gibbons**

Calls for innovation in higher education continue to escalate. While not new, three-year degree options are evolving.

These accelerated programs often benefit a student's bottom line by reducing postsecondary expenses and increasing earnings potential by joining the workforce a year earlier. *BizVoice*® previously reported on some of these options (see updates beginning below) as they rolled out, and in September 2017 Purdue University's College of Liberal Arts launched a Degree in 3 option for more than 20 majors.

The new Purdue initiative grew out of a three-year option for communication majors that was developed in 2014. At that time, the Brian Lamb School of Communication received a \$500,000 prize for creating the university's first three-year degree program as part of an institution-wide challenge by President Mitch Daniels.

David Reingold, dean of the College of Liberal Arts, took note of the program and its potential when he arrived in 2015. Along with the potential cost savings for students, he believes this will help differentiate Purdue's College of Liberal Arts from other institutions.

"I thought the innovation our friends and colleagues in communications had embarked on was novel," he explains, adding, "I wanted to figure out if there was a way to expand it and make it part of our identity, one of the reasons students would take notice of some unique opportunities here at Purdue in the humanities and social sciences and arts."

The schools and departments within the college offer at least one Degree in 3 major, with several having more than one. "So for the 504



Purdue University's College of Liberal Arts has greatly expanded its three-year bachelor's degree options, which previously were available only to communications majors.

Option Continues at Ball State

Ball State started offering a Degree in 3 option in 2005.

It hasn't seen huge interest from students, although some may finish in three years who don't declare it, says Marilyn Buck, interim provost and interim executive vice president for academic affairs.

"The most popular program continues to be nursing," she reports.

Buck mentions the difficulty of finishing 120 credits in three years and going to school year-round. Some students may need time off in the summer to earn money to pay for school or for the mental break, she notes. However, "it's an option ... we give to every student to pursue if interested."

She isn't aware of direct feedback from employers about the program, but cites a lack of overt response from the business community as a positive sign. "In this case, I believe no response from them is probably a good thing, because it means the students are doing well."

Manchester's Adam Hohman (see sidebar on Page 62) goes a step further, saying, "Employers, I think, are very supportive in the sense that they like Fast Forward (Manchester's initiative) because it is effectively a full-degree program. Our students are coming through with the same information, the same knowledge, the same experience someone would get in four years. So for them, it's something that shows someone has a bit of ambition. Someone who shows savvy in getting through a degree quickly. They are impressed with that."

RESOURCE: Marilyn Buck, Ball State University, at cms.bsu.edu/admissions/undergraduate-admissions/majors-and-special-programs



Accelerated degree options have helped attract students to Grace College & Seminary, says Cindy Sisson, vice president of enrollment management and marketing.

Enrollment Grows at Grace College

Grace College & Seminary, a private Christian liberal arts school with about 1,300 undergraduates, rolled out a four-year bachelor's plus master's option at the same time as its three-year bachelor's degrees in 2011.

"One group of students who really take advantage of it is our accounting students," shares Cindy Sisson, vice president of enrollment management and marketing. Graduates need 150 credit hours to take the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam, which they don't receive with a 120-credit hour bachelor's program. By adding a one-year master of business administration, they earn enough credits to sit for the exam. She says that Grace ranks among the top 10 programs in the nation for first-time CPA pass rates.

Sisson credits the accelerated degree options with helping to increase overall enrollment.

"In 2009, before we rolled this out, our incoming class was about 290 students. Last year we were at about 460, and we are between 400 and 500 students for our incoming classes now. That's pretty remarkable when schools are seeing declines in their incoming class enrollment. We are pretty pleased."

Students in an accelerated program don't pay tuition for online summer classes if they were enrolled full time the previous fall and spring, she offers.

"We think that's a true three-year model, where you can graduate in three years and only pay for three years."

Students also complete the institution-wide requirement of 12 hours of applied learning in which they work with an organization on or off campus.

About half of incoming freshmen indicate they'd like to finish in three years, Sisson says, with an average of 27% or 28% doing so.

"The remarkable number is about 67% finish in three and a half years, so some are just taking an extra semester," she emphasizes.

RESOURCE: Cindy Sisson, Grace College & Seminary, at www.grace.edu/reimagine

students who started here as freshmen students this (past) fall, over 80% of them are in a major that allows them to do a three-year option," Reingold says.

Some majors don't align well with a three-year format, he adds, such as the bachelor's in fine arts programs or ones with a small number of students where it may not be economical to offer courses they would need during the summer.

Pivotal time

Because the program was announced in the fall, current freshmen didn't know about it when they were making their college decisions, although they could opt in and sign their commitment in the spring. Students can later switch to a four-year progression, but the commitment allows the college to ensure classes are available when students need them.

"The big test for us will be with this incoming class that starts here in the fall, after we've had a year of marketing and when students are actually coming, in part, because we have it," Reingold notes.

The previously available three-year communications option has attracted "a handful" of students according to Reingold, stressing that marketing and recruitment will benefit from a broader-based effort.

The college also is launching a Degree in 3 Learning Community, and students will benefit from priority registration and special advisers.

To finish the degree in three years, students complete 18 hours most fall and spring semesters (with 15 hours the first fall and last spring), plus two summers with nine hours each to meet 120 credit hours.

Students can take summer classes at other institutions that have been approved for credit and online. This helped three-year communications major Gabby Gary stay on track to graduate this May while enjoying her summers and running a retail business, Dawson & Daisy Boutique. She entered the program with college credit from high school classes, but stresses it is achievable without them.

Gary says the faster schedule "lets students use that 'typical' fourth year to gain real-world experience, which is what future employers are always looking for and can be hard to gain for some



Gabby Gary took advantage of the three-year communications major that has been available at Purdue since 2014. In addition to the extra year of "real-world experience," she appreciates the financial savings.

Fast Forward Evolving at Manchester

Manchester University has generally seen reduced interest for its Fast Forward three-year undergraduate program since it started about 10 years ago, according to Adam Hohman, assistant vice president for enrollment and marketing.

Fast Forward students follow a fairly rigid, linear progression of classes that is outlined from the start. He says more students are entering with “complex credit profiles,” with college credits from AP classes or dual enrollment, and they want more flexibility. Other students are interested in a traditional four-year experience, perhaps to participate in activities such as athletics or a music program.

“We still believe that it’s a viable program,” he stresses. “The students who want it love it.”

Hohman is looking to capitalize on Fast Forward to differentiate Manchester to a broader market beyond the approximately 90-mile radius the university traditionally draws from. “We think in some ways we have to market it differently, and perhaps to new geographic regions or even international students.”

Manchester also is moving toward packaging Fast Forward bachelor’s programs with advanced degrees.

“For us, Fast Forward was about getting a bachelor’s degree in a shorter amount of time and for less money. The evolution now is for what we would call ‘plus degrees,’ so a three-plus-one program or a three-plus-two program where you get a bachelor’s and a master’s degree” in a shorter period, he explains.

One option combines a Fast Forward degree in biology/chemistry with a one-year master’s degree in pharmacogenomics, which looks at the intersection of a person’s DNA and how drugs work.

The athletic training program at Manchester – which will require a master’s degree – also is “on the front edge here in Indiana because the credentials are changing to be a certified athletic trainer.” The three-plus-two is “three years in exercise science and two years in athletic training.”

RESOURCE: Adam Hohman, Manchester University, at www.manchester.edu/admissions/degrees-and-academics/opportunities/fast-forward



Purdue University students pursuing a history major (top) or studying English can now choose to complete their degrees in three years. History and English are two of the 10 departments in the College of Liberal Arts offering the new Degree in 3 program.



professions.” She adds, “As a bonus, a student can save on tuition (and housing). Taking summer classes is a less expensive alternative.”

Additional benefits

Lori Sparger, chief operating officer and chief innovation officer for Purdue Liberal Arts, believes Degree in 3 will also benefit students when they apply for jobs.

“It becomes an inherent proof point for the student, because the student who comes in and is focused enough and task oriented enough to work through a Purdue degree in three years is going to carry a lot of weight in terms of those things going into the workplace,” she outlines. Employers “are going to know what kind of student this person is and how they’ve differentiated themselves already from other students on campus.”

Although the expanded Purdue program is just getting started, she expects it may be especially attractive to students who are interested in a professional degree, such as law school.

“Rather than spending seven years going through school – four years undergraduate and three years of law school – they can cut it down to six. And that crosses a lot of our majors,” she notes.

Reingold adds, “We are also exploring the idea of trying to pair the three-year degree with what would be a co-op model, like in engineering, with a year of structured work experience. So those are the things we think are potential and additional innovations we can add to continue to differentiate us here.”

RESOURCE: David Reingold and Lori Sparger, Purdue College of Liberal Arts, at www.cla.purdue.edu/undergradci/3year