



THREE'S A CHARM

Manchester University Picks Up Pace With 'Degree in 3'

By Matt Ottinger

Dr. Stacy Young is not only the president of Manchester University, she's also a passionate alum. She touts the school's smaller size – almost 1,300 students between its North Manchester and Fort Wayne locations – as providing an abundance of opportunities for its student body.

“Even as an accounting major, I was a radio disc jockey and I taught aerobics and all of those fun things, but students today can start their own clubs if we don't have one,” she beams. “And at a school this size, you can have leadership positions where maybe at a larger school you couldn't do that as easily or as quickly.”

Perhaps it's also that size that allows the school to be nimble and innovative, qualities showcased in its new “Degree in 3” offering for students.

Starting line

Its three-year degree is now offered in pre-athletic training and applied pre-physical therapy, and is the first applied program of its kind in the state. Manchester's website touts to students: “Earn your

applied undergraduate degree within six semesters from Manchester University. With 90 or more credits in three years, you'll be stepping confidently into a master's program or the workforce.”

The process started when the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), a regional accreditor for colleges and universities in the U.S., recently approved 90-credit bachelor's degrees and Manchester's leadership wished to take advantage of the opportunity.

“It took about (four to six months) from start to finish to redesign our programs and then submit them to the HLC,” Young recalls. “They do a site visit and then they have to take it through their committee for a full approval ... they only let you do a couple programs at a time. So, we've submitted two more and we have pre-approval; we're waiting on approval for the next two.”

Dr. Jeff Beer, department chair and professor of exercise science, was instrumental in pushing for the new degree offering.

“I'm just a big believer in spearheading a lot of things and being ahead of the curve instead of behind the curve,” he shares. “It's a big deal for me, and I think it's a big deal for our university.”

Three-year and fast-tracked degrees are certainly part of a trend that's gaining momentum, and educational leaders benefit by consulting peers around the country.

“Utah has been exploring this quite a bit and there have been some other states, so there are some other places that are doing this,” Young highlights.

Focused direction

She suggests the target market for this particular option is “the adult market or students who are non-traditional.”

While any student can pursue the option, “These degrees are really designed for people who know exactly what they want to do and they want to get in and get out and get working,” she adds.

“Essentially, the first 30 credits are our general ed core curriculum that every student at Manchester takes,” Young clarifies. “The next 60 credits are courses for your major.”

Since it removes some electives, she imparts it may not be ideal for the undergraduate still exploring potential career paths.

“Sometimes that’s just as important when you’re in college, but for somebody who really needs to get in and get out and get done, this is an opportunity for them,” Young remarks, adding that academic integrity remains paramount, despite the abbreviated timespan.

“I always give the example of a single mom out there who maybe would like to finish up a bachelor’s degree; maybe she started a long time ago, but this would allow her to shave off about a year’s time and really just focus on the classes she needs to get her degree and not take those elective classes.”

And with the first two offerings being in exercise science, they segue well into Manchester’s Doctor of Physical Therapy and Master of Athletic Training degrees.

“Students in those programs really are at an advantage, shaving off an entire year of getting those two degrees,” Young notes.

Debt prevention

The convenience in starting a career more quickly is an obvious plus. One key factor is the reduced debt incurred by the student.

“Less debt is really good for students, and if people can get out and get jobs quicker, we may be able to get our students out into the market earlier than other students that are taking your traditional four-year pathway,” Beer posits.

He adds, “The (high school) counselors around us are excited about it as well. I met with local counselors for my kids’ schools, and they think this is great. . . . They’re still getting all the prerequisites that they need for (physical therapy) school. They’re still getting our entire core curriculum and general education.”

Establishing such a pathway takes planning, although it was not as daunting as



Manchester University boasts a well-respected exercise science program, now bolstered by new three-year applied degrees.



some might think, Beer believes.

“Building the curriculum was not hard, to be honest with you, because the prerequisites have been set for (Doctor of Physical Therapy) programs for quite some time; we have every class the students can take to be prepared for those programs,” he notes.

Real-life work experience will also be a critical feature of these degrees and remains a general focus at the school.

“Our goal is that every student will work while they’re here at Manchester,” Young explains. “Let’s say you’re in marketing and you’re working at a nonprofit or a company locally and doing hands-on learning in marketing. When you come back to the classroom, you have a deeper knowledge base and you can ask different kinds of questions.”

What’s more, that work will allow students to earn money and gain résumé-building experiences.

“My goal is that students graduate from Manchester with little to no debt. They have this great résumé and then of course, the Manchester University diploma, really setting them apart from others.”

In the field

The applied degrees tie into Manchester’s broader efforts to engage employers and the community in its work as well.

Beer points to Parkview Health as the school’s most prominent employer partnership in the exercise science area.

“(This program includes) collaboration between a lot of different areas, but I know

Three-Year College Pathways Gain Popularity in State

While Manchester University's three-year pathway is the first applied degree of its kind in Indiana, the concept of accelerated programs has been in the state for some time.

Among those with such offerings include Purdue University, Butler University, Indiana Tech and the University of Evansville.

Purdue, for instance, has offerings through its College of Liberal Arts and the College of Health and Human Sciences. Purdue's Degree-in-3 programs allow students to complete their degree in three years, saving up to \$19,000 in tuition and living expenses. Students can complete the three-year option with or without advanced placement or summer session credits.

Evansville's program encompasses 15 different majors, including accounting, logistics and supply chain management, mechanical engineering and nursing.

In Fort Wayne, Indiana Tech's 3 to Degree program includes accounting, business administration, communication, criminal justice, psychology and recreation therapy. Furthermore, Indiana Tech couples this with its "4 to More" offering, allowing students to earn a master's degree in just one additional year in total.

Similarly, Butler offers the 3+1 program, letting students in an abundance of majors earn an undergraduate and master's degree in four years.

Jay Howard, Butler's dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, states on the school's website: "Students who are enterprising, organized and on top of it have been able to graduate in three years for a long time and we felt it was important to support those students – provide greater guidance, a little more structure and better advice along the way to help them achieve this goal."

Another twist on the idea comes from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College (SMWC) near Terre Haute and Marian University in Indianapolis, which have partnered to offer a 3+2 dual-degree engineering program. It allows students to begin their studies at SMWC, and after three years, qualified students will be granted admission to Marian University for their final two years in engineering. During their five years of study, students will earn both a degree in mathematics from SMWC and a degree in engineering from Marian University.

The program is "designed for students who wish to engage with two different campus communities and gain access to state-of-the-art facilities and collaborative learning spaces," according to Marian's website.



With employer partners like Parkview Health, Manchester is focused on getting its students into the workforce via experiential learning.



with respect to Parkview and their athletic training, we have athletic trainers at our university from (that hospital network)," he relays. "So, we get our students into our master's programs, and they're affiliated with them already, and they're hiring a lot of our students."

All told, students and parents are taking notice of the opportunities provided.

"There's a lot of excitement about it with the prospective students I've seen," Beer offers. "The parents that come just appreciate a university that's trying to save them some money and (for the student to) get a quality degree they would've gotten in four years as well, because they're not missing anything they need to move on to their professional careers, which is why we really wanted to streamline this."

For Young, it's part of the school's broader mission to attract Hoosier students looking for a smaller school that pays big dividends.

"Our big message at Manchester is we're trying to change the way people get their education in Indiana."

RESOURCES: Dr. Jeff Beer and Dr. Stacy Young, Manchester University, at www.manchester.edu