Higher Learning Commission
A commission of the North Central Association

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Academy for Student Persistence and Completion

Application Packet

This packet provides the materials needed for an institution to file an application to participate in the Commission's Academy for Student Persistence and Completion. The institution completes this application whether participating in the Academy for its own purposes, as its Open Pathway Quality Initiative, or as an AQIP action project. For institutions that propose to participate in the Academy as their Quality Initiative, the application review process for the Academy replaces the review process for the Quality Initiative Proposal.

This packet includes:

- instructions for the Academy Application;
- the 2014-15 Academy Application;
- the Institutional Contact Information form;
- the Academy Application Affirmation, which requires the signature of the institution's CEO;
- the Criteria for Selection to the Academy.

Eligibility to Participate in the Academy

Institutions seeking status with the Commission are not eligible to participate in the Academy.

Instructions for the Academy Application

The purpose of the application is to: (a) clarify why the institution wishes to participate in the Academy, (b) ensure that the investment in the Academy will benefit the institution, (c) to focus the institution on specific goals and results for the Academy, and (d) affirm the institutional and leadership commitment necessary for a successful Academy experience. Given that the Academy provides a forum for experimentation and challenge in a low-risk, high-benefit environment, the institution should take the opportunity to aim high, defining challenging goals and results it aspires to achieve.

Application Timeline

Academy applications for Cohort 3 are due May 16, 2014. Academy applications for Cohort 4 are due October 24, 2014.

Application Submission

An interested institution should submit its application to academy@hlcommission.org (paper applications are not accepted). Applications should:

- be submitted in PDF format,
- be no longer than eight pages, with standard margins and 10-point or larger type, and
- include the Application Affirmation, which requires the CEO's signature. If necessary, the Application Affirmation can be faxed to the Commission to the attention of the Academy at 312.263.7462.

Selection Process

Commission staff and Academy mentors will conduct a three-step process for reviewing institutional applications.

1. Staff affirm that the application is complete.
2. Commission staff and Academy mentors evaluate each application and make initial recommendations on Cohort, timing, and track A or B of the Academy.
3. Commission staff review the application in relationship to: a) availability and types of institutions that have applied for the same entry date, b) probable Academy Track (A or B), c) time constraints in terms of accrediting process (Academy as Open Pathway Quality Initiative) or Commission decision process, and d) submission date of application (space is filled on a first-come, first-served basis).

Possible outcomes: Acceptance to the Academy on one of the preferred point of entry dates, acceptance to the Academy on a different point of entry date, denial of admission to the Academy, or request for resubmission if application is determined to be incomplete.

Letter of Agreement

The institution signs a Letter of Agreement within 30 days of acceptance to the Academy. This letter, which is customized to reflect each institution's context, identifies understandings of participation, and addresses any expectations pertaining to the accrediting relationship. If changes occur in the institution's accrediting relationship with the Commission during its Academy participation, the Letter of Agreement will be amended to reflect those changes. The letter also outlines the Commission's commitments to the institution.

Questions and Additional Information

Claire Berkley**,** Academy Process Administrator, cberkley@hlcommission.org, 312.263.0456, x145 can respond to general questions about the Academy, the admissions timetable, and application materials. For specific curricular or program questions, contact Amber Holloway, Associate Vice President for Quality Services, aholloway@hlcommission.org, 312.263.0456, x149.

Academy Application
2014-15

Name of Institution | City, State | Application Date

Points of Academy Entry

Please identify Cohort dates in order of preference.

__1__ Cohort 3: July 9, 2014, required Information and Planning Workshop
(Roundtable October 8-10, 2014)

__2__ Cohort 4: March 5-6, 2015, required Information and Planning Workshop
(Roundtable June 24-26, 2015)

Note: The Commission determines Academy entry point based on the selection process, which includes the process of constructing cohorts based on needs, goals, institutional types, mission, size, and other factors.

Cohort Groups in the Academy

Institutions will join the Academy in cohorts of 24 institutions. Within these cohorts, the Commission plans to group institutions by general type, by Academy Track (A or B), and if possible, by size. Some institutions have indicated interest in participation based on the student group that is the focus of the work. Other institutions have indicated interest in joining with one or more institution(s) to work collaboratively on shared issues while in the Academy. **In these cases, the institution should indicate such interest in the email message submission of its application to the Academy. While efforts will be made to group cohorts accordingly, applying in conjunction with one or more institutions does not guarantee admission to the Academy.**

Purpose for Academy Participation

Institutions in the AQIP, Standard, and Open Pathways may join the Academy at any time. For institutions on the Open Pathway, the Academy may serve as the Quality Initiative if engaged at the appropriate time in the accreditation cycle. For institutions in AQIP, the Academy may serve as an Action Project.

Check the applicable purpose below.

_____ Open Pathway Quality Initiative (Institutions must begin participation no later than June of Year 5 and complete no later than June of Year 9. Institutions may join in Year 4 at the completion of their Year 4 review and decision process, if applicable.)

_____ AQIP Action Project

__x__ Other institutional purposes

Application Questions

Recent Efforts

Student Overview

The Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) enrolls just under 3000 (n=2926) degree-seeking undergraduate students, and just under 5000 (n=4924) graduate and professional (i.e., law) students. The vast majority of our undergraduate students (93%) are full-time, and slightly more than half (58%) live on campus. A large majority (70%) of the undergraduate students are male; about half are from Illinois; 23 percent are American from out of state, and 24 percent are international. Twenty-one percent of undergraduates are underrepresented minorities and about a quarter of all undergraduate students receive Pell grants. The most popular undergraduate majors are Architecture, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and Computer Science. Incoming students' SAT math scores average in the high 600's (around 660); ACT Composite scores average 27. First-to-second year retention rates have averaged 87 percent over the last five entering cohorts and six-year graduation rates, for the cohorts who entered from 2003 to 2007, have averaged 65 percent.

Recent Efforts to Improve Student Persistence and Completion

One of IIT's most successful efforts to improve student persistence and completion is the *Kedge Program*. The word, "kedge" refers to a small anchor that is used to straighten a ship that is listing to one side. IIT's Kedge program has been running for a total of 16 semesters. All first-year students who are on academic probation at the end of their first term are advised to register for Psychology 180, which teaches study, time-management and communication skills. Students who continue to experience academic difficulties are invited to take Psychology 227. The course instructor for Psychology 227 is a clinical psychologist who is also an adjunct faculty member of IIT's Psychology department. She works with students on an individual basis to identify and try to resolve the issues that are preventing these students from focusing on their academic work. Among students who entered in Fall 2008 or earlier, 37 percent of those who completed Psychology 180 have graduated compared with only 13 percent of those who registered for but did not complete Psychology 180. The results for Psychology 227 are even more dramatic, with 51 percent of those who completed the course graduating compared with none of the students who registered for but did not complete the course.

Another one of IIT's recent efforts is the *Student Success Committee*. This is an eight-member committee that has been meeting weekly for nearly four years to identify and help students who have issues that are preventing them from persisting at or graduating from IIT. This committee is comprised of staff from Undergraduate Academic Affairs, the Registrar's Office, Student Accounting, the One Stop, the International Center, Student Housing, the Office of Student Access and Diversity and the Director of the Academic Resource Center (ARC). At-risk students come to the attention of the Student Success Committee in one of two ways: students either appear on a report generated from the student information system, Banner, that lists students who have failed either to register for the next term or apply for graduation, or students self-identify by approaching a staff or faculty member for help. The report contains information about each student, such as the student's cohort and class level, any unpaid balances for tuition and fees or housing, and any holds that are preventing the student from registering. The committee collects additional information from these students through an online survey conducted two to three weeks before the start of classes. This survey consists of a checklist of reasons for not registering and an open-ended field in which students may list any other reasons for not registering. Additionally, the Director of the Academic Resource Center, Tayyab Arshad, sends an e-mail and sometimes a text message to those students who have no financial holds and an unpaid balance of less than one thousand dollars, asking them why they have not registered. If the student has

other types (i.e., non-financial) of holds, Tayyab helps the student resolve these by working with the various offices that comprise the Student Success Committee.

At their weekly meetings, the Student Success Committee reviews the student information on a case-by-case basis, takes action to help the student whenever possible, and documents their decisions and actions in Banner. Financial issues are the most common reason that students have not registered or applied for graduation. Often the committee is able to increase the student's discount or scholarship to help the student afford to return to or graduate from IIT. Because students' financial worries often affect their academic performance, the committee has observed that helping students financially also allows those students with academic issues to be able to improve academically. Other times, a student may have a personal issue involving a family member, or may just be having difficulty scheduling a meeting with his or her advisor. The committee refers advising issues to the Director of Undergraduate Advising, Matt Bauer, who then follows up with the student's advisor to facilitate a meeting of the advisor with the student. To help a student deal with a personal issue, a member of the Committee may meet with the student to counsel the student regarding his or her options, such as taking a leave of absence.

The Student Success Committee also analyzes retention data in the aggregate, by student cohort and class level, to identify more general factors that may be affecting a group of students. In a separate, but related effort, the Director of the Student One-Stop office, Melisa Lopez, contacts students whose leaves of absence are expiring to notify them of this fact and ask them about their plans for returning to IIT. Based on experience, the initial contact is made via email. Students who fail to respond to the email are mailed a flyer encouraging them to contact Melisa Lopez for help re-enrolling.

To further improve student persistence and completion, IIT joined the *Education Advisory Board's Student Success Collaborative* at the beginning of the 2013-14 academic year. The Education Advisory Board (EAB) provides best practice research and practical advice to academic leaders across North America. Their teams of consultants and analysts work to uncover the best ideas from across higher education, and share these with all member institutions. The EAB's Student Success Collaborative combines technology, research, and predictive analytics to help institutions improve degree completion outcomes for at-risk students. Their advising dashboard identifies at-risk students based on performance in certain courses that correlate highly with students' chances of graduating on time (called "success markers"). The dashboard also provides a concise picture of each student's credit accumulation and grade point average over time. Advisors can also drill down to the course level to see the grade the student earned in each course taken. Finally, the dashboard shows how the student is doing compared to other students in the same major and provides predictive analytics showing how the student is likely to do in other majors offered at the university. IIT will be pilot testing the advising dashboard during the Spring 2014 academic term with plans to implement it university-wide starting in Fall 2014.

Data Sets Related to Persistence, Retention and Completion

The Illinois Institute of Technology maintains a stand-alone Retention Database that was created in 1996 and holds student retention and graduation data from 1996 to the present. The Retention Database was designed to support the generation of the university's Retention Report which tracks undergraduate persistence and completion by student cohort (i.e., first-time/first-year and transfer cohorts), and by race/ethnicity, gender, department and Federal financial aid status (i.e., Pell Grant recipients, subsidized Stafford Loan recipients, or neither). The database is incrementally updated with data from the Banner Operational Data Store (ODS) each Fall. The report is generated by the Office of

Institutional Information. However, the office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs is responsible for entering student cohort and leave of absence information into Banner.

The Retention Database contains five data tables and a number of code tables. The data tables are the following:

- *Cohort_Master*: as the name implies, this table is the master table for all cohorts. It contains one record per student, for each student ever designated as a member of a First-year or Transfer cohort, even if the student was subsequently removed from the cohort.
- *Cohort_Initital_Population*: this table is designed to establish the initial cohort that is designated by Undergraduate Affairs, and therefore, this table should be used to determine current cohort membership. The data values in this table represent the Fall term in which the student entered. In addition to Cohort ID and student ID, this table contains financial aid indicators (i.e., Pell Recipient, Stafford Loan Recipient, Neither), and an indicator for whether the student received an athletic scholarship his or her first semester at IIT. This table contains one record per student.
- *Cohort_Periods_Students*: this table contains the status (i.e., enrolled, graduated, on leave, or lost) of a student in subsequent years. The table contains one record per student per subsequent year.
- *Cohort_Student_Departments*: this table is designed to track the movement of students to different departments during their enrollment at IIT. It also contains student major. There is one record per student per academic year.
- *Person_Sports*: This table contains sport participation data for the students in the First-year and Transfer cohorts, regardless of whether the student received athletically-related financial aid. It contains one record per student per year. If a student participates in more than one sport during the year, only the sport with the lowest activity number is captured.

The code tables include:

- dbo_Codes_Ethnicity
- Sports_Codes
- *Department_Master*: this table is designed to provide a crosswalk between legacy department names and the current department name. The "Student Dept" field contains the legacy department code, and the "Real_Dept" field contains the current department code.

Because cohort identifiers are available in Banner from 2003 to the present, the Banner ODS may also be used to study undergraduate student retention, persistence, and graduation. The Student Cohort table in the Banner ODS contains one row per person per academic period per cohort. In addition to First-time/First-year and Transfer cohorts, IIT assigns students to a number of other cohorts, including tuition cohorts. Data in the Student Cohort table may be linked to personal, registration, course, GPA, and outcome (i.e., graduation) data contained in other ODS tables for analysis and reporting.

IIT uses the information in the Retention Database to monitor retention, persistence, and graduation rates by race, gender, department, athletic participation and Federal financial aid status. Additionally, the Student Success Committee uses Banner data to compare retention, persistence, and graduation rates for student cohorts and classes with past rates for these groups of students. When a current rate is found to be lagging behind past rates, the committee digs deeper into the data to try to identify a reason for the change.

Scope and Significance

Significance and Relevance of Issues to be Addressed

Analyzing student data related to persistence and graduation, as part of our participation in the HLC Academy for Student Persistence and Completion (henceforth referred to as the Academy), will no doubt reveal additional issues that IIT can begin to address. At the present time, we believe that an issue for IIT is providing a natural progression in the learning experience of incoming undergraduate students in order to engage students in advancing their education. We recognize that students' first- and second-year experiences at IIT are crucial to their decision about whether to persist at IIT. Additionally, the expectations of incoming undergraduate students are shaped by the learning experiences these students had in elementary and high school. Finally, we recognize that students' primary and secondary school learning experiences increasingly involve project- and inquiry-based learning and the use of technology for learning both within and outside the classroom. Therefore, IIT needs to examine its approach to teaching and learning in order to ensure a natural progression in the learning experiences that today's students have had in order to attract top students and engage them in advancing their education to the next level.

Goals of Academy Participation

Our overarching goal is to enhance the first- and second-year undergraduate student experience, both in the classroom and in the student advising process, to better engage students in the learning process and help them build paths to a career. Specifically, we want to move toward a more inquiry-based experiential learning environment in the classroom, enhancing faculty development in both teaching and advising, and leveraging technology to support improved teaching, learning, and advising.

How Our Goals Align with IIT's Strategic Priorities

Through an inclusive process, led by the University Steering Committee, and involving the academic deans, faculty, staff, students, Trustees, and alumni, IIT has identified six university-wide priorities as areas of focus over the next five years:

1. Growth and development of the student body
2. Promotion of innovative thinking and excellence throughout the university
3. Elevation of IIT's visibility and reputation
4. Enhancement of IIT's facilities, infrastructure, and environments
5. Development of resources to enable progress
6. Strengthening of all IIT's schools and colleges

Our goals for Academy participation align with IIT's strategic priorities as follows. First, giving students more opportunity to explore their interests will expose them to a broader range of disciplines which in turn will help fuel innovative thinking. Likewise, the focus on project- and inquiry-based learning will encourage students to engage in creative problem-solving. The combination of these experiences will enhance students' first- and second-year academic experience, while the advisor training and advising tools will improve their advising experience. Together, these are expected to increase students' attachment to the university, which will result in increased student persistence, and growth of the student body. We also hope that IIT's re-invention of the first-year experience will elevate the university's visibility and reputation.

Purposes and Outcomes

The strategies we undertake to improve student persistence and completion at IIT will depend in large part on the results of our data analyses. Currently, there are a number of strategies we are considering to improve the academic and advising experiences of our first-year students:

1. **Leverage best practices in teaching.** Examine how best practices and current trends in first-

and second-year undergraduate education can best be applied at IIT. Some possible scenarios are listed below--others will develop during of our participation in the Academy:

a. Develop new experiential learning classes designed to help students transition from high school to college and bond with both the university and the city of Chicago.
b. Experiment with innovative teaching techniques in selected first-year classes, such as "classroom flipping" and inquiry-based learning, as well as increasing the use of technology as a learning tool.
c. Create a teaching and learning center, to promote, enhance, and assess effective pedagogy, and provide professional development for faculty and teaching assistants.

This will be implemented over several years. Specific mile markers will be:

a. After one year, at least one service course in each pilot department will be redesigned to use best practices in teaching and develop methodologies. Student outcomes from these courses will be assessed and compared with outcomes from traditional courses offered.
b. During the second year, we plan to use assessment data to redesign at least one additional course in each pilot department.

2. **Implement two new technology tools for undergraduate advisors,** namely the DegreeWorks Planner and the Education Advisory Board's (EAB) Student Success Collaborative Advising Dashboard. The DegreeWorks Planner will allow students and their advisor to work together to create a four-year plan for the student, and provide timely feedback on the implications of changes to the plan. The EAB Student Success Collaborative Advising Dashboard will alert advisors in a timely way to adverse academic events that are likely to have a deleterious effect on the student's probability of graduating. Specific interim goals for student participation in DegreeWorks are:
    a. After one year, at least 50% of students will have a plan in DegreeWorks
    b. After two years, the number of students with plans in DegreeWorks will increase to 75%.
    c. Full student participation in DegreeWorks by the end of the third year.

3. **Develop and implement a training course for faculty advisors** that will establish the university's expectations and standards for undergraduate advising, and teach advisors how to make the best use of technological tools for advising. Specific interim goals are:
    a. During the first year, develop and deliver training for pilot advisors and a methodology for tracking student success and satisfaction with the pilot program.
    b. During the second and subsequent years, revise training based on prior outcomes and train additional advisors.

Specific Outcomes

By executing the above strategies we hope to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Increased student engagement in the learning process.
2. Increased student satisfaction with their first- and second-year academic experience.
3. Increased student satisfaction with their advising experience in their first and subsequent years at IIT.

Ultimately, we hope that increasing student engagement in the learning process and student satisfaction with their first- and second-year academic and advising experiences will help us to achieve and

maintain a first-to-second year student retention rate of 90 percent or higher and a six-year graduation rate of 70 percent or higher.

Potential Challenges

Although we are confident that we can ultimately accomplish the strategies described in the previous section, we recognize the following challenges:

- **Dataset development and analysis:** the challenge will be combining historical data related to student persistence and completion that is stored in a separate, legacy database, with data from the Banner Operational Data Store (ODS), which is not configured for historical analysis.
- **Best Practices in Teaching**: the challenges will include engaging faculty in testing different techniques, and doing so in a way that allows us to draw meaningful conclusions about the efficacy of each. Another challenge will be to create an effective teaching and learning center with very limited resources.
- **EAB SSC Advising Dashboard:** the challenge will be user acceptance of this new technology.
- **DegreeWorks Planner:** this is a new product for the vendor, so the challenge we anticipate is working with the vendor to identify and fix any remaining "bugs" in the system.
- **Advisor Training:** the challenge will be motivating faculty advisors to participate in the training.

Commitment and Capacity

Internal Support for Planned Work

Each of the five projects that comprise this initiative has the support of one or more groups of stakeholders:

1. **Best Practices in Teaching:** IIT's Provost Alan Cramb is a strong advocate for improving undergraduate teaching at IIT and has already tasked the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Christopher White, with creating a Teaching and Learning Center at IIT.
2. **DegreeWorks Planner:** this project has the support of the Provost, the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, the academic deans, and those faculty advisors who are already using the degree-audit capabilities of DegreeWorks in their student advising sessions.
3. **EAB SSC Advising Dashboard:** this project has the support of the Provost, the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, the project Value Leaders, and the advisors who have already agreed to participate in the Pilot Test.
4. **Advisor Training:** this project has the support of many faculty advisors.

Staffing

IIT Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Dr. Christopher White, will have overall responsibility for this endeavor. Dr. White and the Undergraduate Studies Committee will focus on pedagogical aspects of the proposal. They will be assisted by the faculty generally. Members of Dr. White's staff will have responsibility for other aspects of this initiative. Dr. Carol Emmons, Director of Assessment and former Director of Institutional Research will have responsibility for developing the data sets and analyzing the data used to understand and improve student persistence and completion. She will also continue to lead the deployment of the EAB Student Success Collaborative Advising Dashboard. On this project, she is supported by Scott Spyrison, Manager of Emerging Technologies in IIT's Office of Technology Services, a group of "Value Leaders" comprised of Associate Deans and other champions for undergraduate advising, and a group of "Pilot Advisors" from the three largest of IIT's six undergraduate colleges. Dr. Emmons will also work with the same group of Pilot Advisors to design

training for faculty advisors. Carole Orze, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, will manage the deployment of the DegreeWorks Planner. Applications Developer, John Leever, will provide technical assistance to Ms Orze. Both of these individuals were instrumental in the original deployment of the DegreeWorks system at IIT.

Resource Commitment

The table below lists the human, technological and financial resources that IIT is committing to this endeavor.

Resource	Project(s)	Level of Commitment
Christopher White	Teaching Best Practices	10% for 4 years
Carol Emmons	Dataset development and data analysis, EAB SSC Advising Dashboard, Advisor Training	30% for 4 years
Carole Orze	DegreeWorks Planner	15% for 4 years
John Leever	DegreeWorks Planner	20% for 4 years

Institutional Contact Information

Primary Institutional Contact Person for Academy Participation:

Siva K. Balasubramanian
Name

Associate Vice Provost for University Accreditation
Position title

Illinois Institution of Technology
Institution name

10 West 35th Street, 18th floor
Office address

Chicago, IL 60616
City, State, Zip

312-906-6516	312-906-6549	sivakbalas@stuart.iit.edu
Office phone(s) and extension(s)	Office fax	Email address

Name and address to which the Commission should send invoices for Academy participation:

Alan Cramb
Name

Provost
Position title

Illinois Institute of Technology
Institution name

10 West 35th Street, 19th floor
Office address

Chicago, 60616
City, State, Zip

cramb@iit.edu
Email address

Academy for Student Persistence and Completion

Before emailing the *Academy Application* to academy@hlcommission.org, make certain it has been reviewed and approved by the institution's CEO. See Affirmation page.

Academy Application Affirmation

I affirm that the application emailed to academy@hlcommission.org presents the institution accurately, and that the institution agrees, if admitted, to commit to meaningful and productive participation in the Academy for Student Persistence and Completion.

Signature of Institutional CEO Date

John Anderson, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Illinois Institute of Technology

Institution name

10 West 35th Street, 19th floor

Institution Address

Chicago, IL 60616

Institution City, State, Zip

Include the affirmation in the electronic delivery of the application
or fax it to the Commission, attention Academy: 312.263.7462.

Criteria for Selection to the Academy

The following selection criteria are effective for institutions applying for the Academy in 2014-15.

Evidence of Need and Benefit

- Need prompted by current opportunities, challenges, or barriers in student persistence and completion
- Need prompted by institutional goals or strategic priorities
- Benefit by integrating institutional goals or strategic priorities with accreditation efforts
- Other needs that can be met through Academy participation

Commitment and Focus

- Clear and succinct statements of needs and goals
- Reasonable and realistic goals appropriate to the institution's history and to participation in the Academy
- Expectations, commitment level, and desired results appropriate to the purposes and intent of the Academy
- Senior leadership commitment for the full cycle, and for genuine effort and participation
- Assurance that key people and groups will be involved to maximize the benefits of the Academy
- Assurance of effective team membership for Academy activities (CAO and appropriate cross-representation of faculty, administrators, and others from across the institution as appropriate; students may be involved)

Potential Impact

- Clear expectations for what will be gained via the Academy, particularly the anticipated impact on student persistence and completion
- Evidence that Academy participation is significant and challenging to the institution and will result in broad, meaningful impact on student persistence and completion

Cohort Mix

- Balance of institutional types making up the cohort entering the Academy
- Cross-section or mix of institutions that best promotes inter-institutional learning