Evaluating the Impact of the Intensive English Program on Student Success at IU

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Abstract

This study will evaluate the impact of the Intensive English Program (IEP), an academic English language preparation program for pre-matriculated international students, on students’ future academic success using external measures such as University/College admission rates and student progress through their programs of study at Indiana University – GPAs, retention rates, and graduation rates. In the short term, the goal of the project is to identify factors that contribute to the variability of success among students, including, but not limited to student demographics and progression data through the IEP. In the long term, the results will be used for targeted curriculum improvement, and programmatic initiatives to maximize the impact of the IEP on admission rates, retention, and graduation at IU.

Project Description

1. Purpose and Objectives

   The IEP is a full-time academic English preparatory program (20-25 hours per week of classes plus extra-curricular activities) consisting of 7-levels of instruction offered every 8 weeks (6 times per year). The IEP serves non-matriculated international students who wish to improve their academic English skills, with enrollments in the last 5 years ranging from approximately 75-175 students every 8 weeks. Exit from the program does not guarantee admission to IU or any other University/community college degree program. While many students go on to apply to a college/university in the US, others may enroll for other reasons. Therefore, the first question this study addresses (in order to eventually determine whether students achieve their goals) is where students go upon exit from the IEP. In order to determine this, the study will analyze data from SUNAPSIS that includes departure plan e-docs and Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) records. Particularly important will be determining the IEP “yield” to IU: the percentage of our students who gain admission to IU degree programs.

   Of the students that do gain admission to IU, the study will examine the impact the IEP has had on students’ future academic achievement by looking for correlations between enrollment and performance in the IEP and students’ IU measures of success, such as overall GPAs, GPAs in specific areas of study, and GPAs in specific classes (such as W 131).

2. Significance and Impact

   This study may have a significant impact for undergraduate learning at IU, since International students are a large part of this population and their “readiness” for studies includes extra demands in terms of language and academic culture. The IEP’s purpose is to help them meet those demands. Determining the success of IEP students and identifying factors that help them succeed is a step in maximizing international student academic achievement and integration into IU and Bloomington communities. In the long term, the study can help to increase the number of students who get admitted to IU.

3. Anticipated Outcomes

   First, from exit data, it is anticipated that we will be able to identify populations that can be targeted for special interventions in order to maximize admission to IU programs of study. From correlations
between students’ IEP enrollment and performance and students’ performance at IU, we anticipate to find factors that significantly contribute to measures of success in their IU program of study. Since the IEP focuses on language skills, it may be that we will find that the program has more impact on social science and humanities classes, (particularly classes that address these specific skills, such as W131) than on STEM courses and majors.

4. Research Methodology

The data for this study will come from 3 data sets:

SUNAPSIS data (with the help of the SUNAPSIS team) including student intentions upon exit from the IEP and actual SEVIS records indicating transfers to other programs/institutions and termination of records (the assumption being that these students have gone back to their country). This data will allow us to determine the percentage of our students that go on to pursue academic studies in the US, and in particular the percentage of students that gain admission to IU.

IEP program data set indicating student performance and progression through the IEP. This dataset can be linked to students IU records through IEP’s dedicated course numbers (with the help of Bloomington Assessment and Research). The IEP began using dedicated course numbers distinguishing among courses and levels in 2012. Therefore, we will examine data for the last four years, from 2012-2016. Data points from IEP records will include demographic information, overall GPAs, GPAS in specific courses and levels. Data points from IU student records will include, overall GPA, GPA in courses by field of study (including Major GPA), GPA in special skill classes, such as W131, and retention and graduation rates. Data analysis and visualization will be conducted with the aid of the Tableau software, made available through this grant.

5. Measuring Success

Since this is an exploratory study, any findings will give us a better picture of IEP students’ academic achievement and will constitute success. Any relationship we may find between IEP courses and students’ future academic success will be used to improve curriculum, strengthening and emphasizing positive findings and designing interventions for negative findings. If we find that, overall, the IEP has a significant positive impact on admission, retention, GPA, and/or graduation, then we can share this information with prospective and current students, increasing trust in the program and attracting international students to the IEP and to IU.

6. Previous Research

The IEP regularly analyzes student achievement data in IEP courses to determine the effectiveness of the program. From this data it was found that a sizable proportion of our students evidenced low achievement in their final session at the IEP. It was further found through focus groups that many of these students “give up” in their final session either because they are “too busy” with the admission application process, including taking English tests required for admission, or because they have already
gained admission to US universities/colleges. In order to get a more complete picture of student achievement and areas of intervention it becomes necessary to examine what happens to our students after they leave the program. The present study will be the first to relate IEP course data with external measures of success.