

# The Higher Learning Commission Act on Project Directory

## Indiana University Northwest

Project Details	
<b>Title</b> Improve Academic Advising through an Online Degree Audit System	<b>Status</b> REVIEWED
<b>Category</b> 1-Helping Students Learn	<b>Updated</b> 09-10-2010
<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Reviewed</b> 10-04-2010
<b>Planned Project Kick off</b> 04-01-2010	<b>Created</b> 03-25-2010
<b>Target Completion</b> 05-31-2013	<b>Version</b> 1 of 1

### 1: Project Goal

**A:** The purpose of this project is to develop an online Degree Audit System for use by students attending IU Northwest. A degree audit system will significantly enhance academic advising and thus student retention and success by allowing students and advisors to track student progress towards individual degrees. It will also allow students and advisors to engage in "what if" scenarios related to changing majors and the impact on degree progression. Students transferring in from other IU campuses would be able to use this same utility in planning their degrees as they move from campus to campus within the IU system.

### 2: Reasons For Project

**A:** Based on Feedback from our original Systems Appraisal Feedback Report and our NSSE results we created an Advisors Council. Members include the main academic advisors from each academic unit on campus. With their help, we developed a lead Advisors list which has been shared with all Academic and Student Services employees. We also conducted a survey of advisors focused on what tools would enable them to enhance student advising and the most common request was a degree audit system. The Student Government Association (SGA) have collected qualitative student data on academic advising that indicates that the most frequent issue students have is related to delays in academic progress due to misunderstood requirements. Additionally, the state of Indiana (through the Indiana Commission on Higher Education) has indicated that an electronic degree audit system is essential to enhancing student transfers, degree progress and success.

### 3: Organizational Areas Affected

**A:** Academic Affairs, all academic units and departments, and student services

### 4: Key Organizational Process(es)

**A:** The key organizational process that this Action Project will improve is Academic Advising. The Degree Audit System will be a component of the Student Information System (SIS). SIS is a University-wide computing environment for student administration at IU. It is comprised of a) the PeopleSoft student administration software, b) PeopleSoft self-service modules, and c) the IU Information Environment (IUIE) for reporting. The PeopleSoft product includes a database, a Web interface, and software to process student data in an integrated way. The SIS addresses such key functions as student recruitment, admissions, records, registration, grades, transcripts, advising, financial aid, student accounts (bursar), and data analysis and reporting of student-related information. The key component relevant to this action project is academic advising. The following functions are potentially available to our campus through SIS: assign groups of students to academic advisors or faculty based on given criteria; saving and accessing stored "what-if" degree audits; and students and advisors will be able to create "what-if" scenarios for various programs or plans (i.e., schools and majors); tracking advising session information, notes and enrollment planning, and providing university-wide access to notes for advisors among other functions. However, these functions are only available after significant academic consultation and programming have been completed. Currently degree audits are done by hand by faculty advisors and verified during graduation checks with the recorders of individual academic units. It is our belief that moving to an electronic degree audit system will be beneficial to both students and advisors and should result in increased

student satisfaction with the advising process as well as impact persistence and time to graduation rates. This project will focus campus attention on the importance of creating a degree audit process. Significant campus resources will need to be committed to this project. A fulltime position entitled Degree Audit Specialist will be hired in the Fall of 2010 pending budget approval. This individual will work fulltime coordinating degree audits. Academic Affairs with the assistance of the Academic Units will select faculty representatives from each degree program to work with the Degree Audit Specialist to ensure that the degree requirements for their particular degree are accurately represented during program review. Once a particular degree audit has been programmed and debugged with the assistance of the academic unit and degree audit specialist, hands-on training will be provided to all academic advisors in that unit regarding the use of the program and information will be provided to students on how to access the degree audit component of SIS as well. How-to materials will be produced and available in hardcopy and on the web for students and advisors to utilize. Finally, updates will be required as new courses and curricula are developed and existing curricula is modified.

## 5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: The rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project is related to the amount of time needed to produce the Degree Audits for each academic degree (63 currently), provide training to advisors on how to use the system and produce educational materials on how to use the system. It has been estimated that producing a working degree audit system for a particular degree within the SIS system will take between 40 and 80 hours. If a degree audit specialist is hired and trained by fall 2010 we can expect approximately 20 completed degree audits per year. By the end of academic year 2013 we expect all degree audits to be complete and in use.

## 6: Project Success Monitoring

A: The Degree Audit Specialist will report to the Office of Academic Affairs. The Office of Academic Affairs, in consultation with the Deans of each Academic unit, will develop a development timeline and will seek out regular reports on progress and satisfaction from both the programmer and academic units in question. We will keep our institution's attention and energies focused on this Project and its goals by: providing funds for degree audit development; involving faculty from every degree program in the process of creating the individual degree audits; providing institutional/administrative support for the project.

## 7: Project Outcome Measures

A: The outcome measures will include the completion of each audit for the 63 current degrees at IU Northwest, satisfaction with the degree audits by academic advisors as well as students and an evaluation of use by both students and advisors.

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## Project Update

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### 1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The first step in the process of the action project remains hiring a degree audit specialist. Decisions as to where the position fit into the organizational structure, and where the funds would originate needed to precede a search to fill the position. It was decided that the position would work in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (OIER), and report to the Assistant Vice Chancellor (AVC) in charge of that office. Both the AVC and OIER were brand new to IU Northwest as of April 1, 2010. One of the first tasks of the new AVC was to write the job description for the degree audit specialist. The hiring process has been slowed because it is a new position, and the role of the degree audit specialist has been expanded to include other responsibilities within the OIER.

### 2: Institutional Involvement

A: From the first day of the AVC's time at IU Northwest, the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Dr. David Malik, has made certain that this remained a top priority for the new OIER. The message has been reiterated by

the other leadership on campus and further reinforced by the discussions around the institution's System Portfolio and continuous improvement projects. The next tasks regarding the degree audit project remain a permanent agenda item for the AVC's regular meetings with Dr. Malik.

### 3: Next Steps

**A:** The Position has been classified, and the job ad has been posted to accept resumes over the next month. The AVC will need to form a search committee for the position and follow proper HR protocols for a new hire. The AVC hopes to have a new hire in place by the start of the spring term in 2011, if not sooner. The AVC designed the new position to serve as a technical and research specialist, and carry the title of Research/Programmer Analyst. With the new hire in place, the Analyst would dedicate 50 percent of his/her time to developing the degree audit system for IU Northwest. The initial work would consist of reviewing the work already done on the project by former part-time employees, and attending training in Indianapolis or Bloomington on how to develop the degree audit system within the existing Indiana University enterprise information systems. Once the training is complete the work on the degree audit system will be in earnest as described in the initial submission.

### 4: Resulting Effective Practices

**A:** The true value of the project will come from the improved academic advising that will take place once the degree audit system begins being used. Being able to communicate effectively to our students what milestones they are expected to pass on their way to complete a degree will improve the student experience. Having an efficient system that includes transfer credits, so there is little ambiguity to the status of students within our institution will also improve progress towards a degree. There remain a number of steps between where the project stands and the intended end which include: 1) Proper communication established between the academic departments and the OIER on the degree audit system, 2) detailed and accurate programming of any contingency imaginable for all academic programs, and 3) training of the academic advisors to utilize the system to best effect. At this point, those responsible need to focus on the next objective that will move IU Northwest closer to completing the tasks.

### 5: Project Challenges

**A:** Challenges facing this action project include a rigid and slow hiring process, particularly for new positions, and assigning the primary responsibility to a new office at the institution. There also remains the issue of training needed to move ahead with the degree audit programming occurring infrequently throughout the year (twice per year), and it is only offered on the Bloomington or Indianapolis campuses of Indiana University. None of the challenges will stand in the way of IU Northwest completing the degree audit system. The additional steps of hiring, learning curves of new employees, and training on-the-job will produce delays in completing the work. In order to remain on track to meet the deadlines of the action project, we will need to remain focused and productive. The new Analyst hire will likely need to spend more than half the time on this project. The AVC also intends to go through the same training as the Analyst, so it is easier to collaborate and remain productive towards our goals. The AVC also intends to explore the idea of hiring an intern or graduate assistant that might take on some of the more routine tasks of the project.

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## Update Review

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### 1: Project Accomplishments and Status

**A:** First, congratulations to the institution for choosing such an important and daunting AQIP project. This project spans multiple categories of AQIP. Along with Helping Students Learn, this project speaks to Supporting Institutional Operations and Planning Continuous Improvement. Successful completion of this project will be highly beneficial to students, faculty and staff.

The institution has embraced daunting tasks in hiring a new Assistant Vice Chancellor, hiring a new Institutional Effectiveness and Research officer, and hiring a new degree audit specialist to will report to OIER. One of the principles of high performing institutions is collaboration and involvement and both of these areas will need to be

the focus moving forward with this project. Given that all the players are new to the institution it will be important to rely heavily on the constituencies already closely associated and invested in this project. It will also be important to accomplish the aggressive timeline given the project's constraints to dedicate time and resources within the office of OIER. As a new office it is possible that they will have multiple priorities and the AVC will need to keep the focus on this project.

## 2: Institution Involvement

A: In building a sense of collaboration and involvement for this project across the campus it will be important that this project move from being a regular agenda item to be talked about and promoted across the campus. This can be accomplished even prior to hiring the research analyst that will be charged with its creation. A committee made of faculty and staff can be in the process of identifying key components and challenges associated with building an effective electronic degree audit. When the new person is hired this will provide him/her with important groundwork to take to the training at the main campus. For this system to be successful there need to be champions of the project beyond the office of OIER. Building those champions now can be important to the long term viability of the project.

## 3: Next Steps

A: Given the abbreviated timeline that will be inherited by the research analyst, it will be important to acknowledge that early in his/her career at the institution it is going to be necessary to commit more than 50 percent of his/her time and resources in meeting the project's goals. As noted above the initial work of the project can be in prior to hiring the position. Identifying unique features of the campus advising and degree programs and the impact of those features on advising would be helpful to the future analyst. The new hire will also need to contend with the stated and unstated expectations of offices across campus. Enacting these offices now in defining their expectations of the degree audit will be an important step in ensuring long term success and accomplishing outcomes that are supported by multiple offices. One hallmark of high performing colleges is valuing its people. Enacting people at the institution now will demonstrate the institution's commitment to its people.

## 4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The effective practices noted by the institution will be the outcomes that should be expected from this project. The items 1-3 noted by the college are indeed key to achieving both short-term and long-term success with this project. The benefits of the project are across both your internal and external constituencies. How institutions handle and disseminate information is a benchmark of a high performing institution. The implementation of this degree audit system will be an important step for the institution in supporting the dissemination of data to its students, faculty and staff. At the end of the project I look forward to seeing you at the Annual meeting to share the successes and challenges of this project.

## 5: Project Challenges

A: The project has significant challenges but the campus has obviously given serious consideration on how to overcome these issues. While I applaud the AVC's dedication to the project and his/her desire to attend the training, in terms of building in additional support for the project it might be more effective to send another staff member from the office of institutional effectiveness.