

## The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

### Indiana University Northwest: Improving Academic Advising through an Online Degree Audit System v2

Project Details		
<b>Title</b>	Improving Academic Advising through an Online Degree Audit System v2	<b>Status</b> ACTIVE
<b>Category</b>	6-Supporting Institutional Operations	<b>Updated</b>
<b>Timeline</b>		<b>Reviewed</b>
<b>Planned Project Kickoff</b>	08-29-2011	<b>Created</b> 09-06-2011
<b>Target Completion</b>	08-25-2014	<b>Last Modified</b> 09-06-2011

**1: Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer:**

**A:** The online degree audit system utilized by IU provides students and advisors with a useful tool in evaluating a student's progress towards degree. The student or advisor may also run "what if" scenarios if the student wishes to change majors or declare a major after being undecided. The online system will cut down on advising errors, and the finished degree audit system should ultimately improve a student's ability to plan an academic career, which can improve the chances of students' achieving their goal of degree completion in a more timely manner.

**2: Describe briefly your institution's reasons for taking on this Action Project now -- why the project and its goals are high among your current priorities:**

**A:** Since having the ability to program the online degree audit system for our students, there has been widespread support to implement the advising tool. A survey of institution advisors most often indicated a degree audit system as a tool that would enhance student advising. The Student Government Association (SGA) collected qualitative data on academic advising that indicates the most frequent issue students face relates to delays in academic progress due to misunderstood degree requirements. Recommendations by the Indiana Commission on Higher Education (ICHE) promote the use of electronic degree audit systems as an essential component to improve degree progress and success. More recently the Indiana General Assembly passed legislation creating financial incentives that includes additional funding for public institutions that improve student progress and success

**3: List the organizational areas -- institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project:**

**A:** All of Academic Affairs, including the Office of the Registrar, all academic units and departments, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research, and all academic advisors, will be involved and affected by an improved degree audit system. Student services will also play a role indirectly in many areas, such as the role they may play as advisors to students, and the effect they may have on how transfer and test credit is administered. More specifically many students are being advised in Student Support Services and Student Retention Programs. In many cases, the students in these programs are considered to be "at risk" and therefore in even greater need of quality tools/interventions to enhance the quality of academic advising.

**4: Name and describe briefly the key organizational process(es) that you expect this Action Project to change or improve:**

**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: assigning 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 auditing process. Significant campus resources will need to be committed to this project. A fulltime Research/Programmer analyst position was created and filled in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research in February 2011. This individual will work half-time programming degree audits. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research, within Academic Affairs, will assist the Academic Units' faculty representatives from each degree program to work with the degree audit programmer to ensure that the degree requirements for their particular degree are accurately represented in the system.

Once a particular degree audit has been programmed and debugged with the assistance of the academic unit and degree audit programmer, one-on-one demonstrations will be provided to the academic advisors in that unit regarding the use of the degree audit system. As significant numbers of degree programs become live in the degree audit system, additional training will be provided to reinforce earlier demonstrations. 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: Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):**

**A:** Our original Degree Audit Action Project was posted in April 2010, updated in September of 2010, and reviewed in October 2010. A number of factors have created delays in the implementation of the degree audit system at IU Northwest. A new campus bulletin, changes in general education requirements, reorganization of offices responsible for the programming, and the state of Indiana's decision to shift some of the mission of IU Northwest away from Associate's degrees, all contributed to previous work done on the degree audit system to be outdated before it was widely used. We are starting from scratch, and we are playing catch-up. At the current rate, we expect to complete about two or three degree programs per month. Three years would allow time to finish all our degree programs, develop documentation and training for the system, and develop protocols and train additional personnel to maintain the system.

**6: Describe how you plan to monitor how successfully your efforts on this Action Project are progressing:**

**A:** Initially, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research will use process measures (described below) to monitor our progress. The number of programs online, and the number of students potentially impacted will guide our work. Direct feedback from the academic department heads and faculty advisors will allow our approach to be modified as we go. As the first year progresses, and greater numbers of people on campus are introduced to the system, broader feedback will be sought through the Academic Advisors Council at IU Northwest, as well as the Faculty Organization. At the end of the first year, a survey instrument will be employed to gather additional feedback from users of the system, as well as information to help maintain those degrees already online. In year two, we hope to expand our focus to students using the system, and new programs coming online.

**7: Describe the overall "outcome" measures or indicators that will tell you whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goals:**

**A:** The outcome measures that would indicate ultimate success in this project include improved retention rates, graduation rates, and time-to-degree measures for students that begin using the degree audit system. Other expected outcomes would be improved satisfaction with academic advising, measured through various formal and informal assessments. An additional outcome might include reported improvements in processing degree audits at the end of term by those responsible, including the Office of the Registrar.

Process measures would include the number of degree programs having been programmed into the degree audit system, and the number of enrolled students in those programs that would then have access to the degree audit system. The number of staff and faculty trained to use and help maintain the degree audit system could provide an additional measure of sustainability of the advising effort.