

# INDIVIDUALIZED MAJOR PROGRAMS: BEST PRACTICES AND BESETTING CHALLENGES

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## Report of a conference held at Indiana University March 5-6, 2009

Conference Organizers: *Daniel Gordon, University of Massachusetts Amherst; Ray Hedin, Indiana University Bloomington; Margaret Lamb, University of Connecticut, Storrs.*

This was the first conference for directors and advisors in individualized major programs (IMPs). 14 programs were represented by 29 representatives.

Panel 1 was on Institutional Arrangements—how IMPs are housed in larger academic units. IMPs do not fit neatly into any deanship or college because student concentrations are so interdisciplinary and diverse. Discussion revealed IMPs that are housed in honors colleges, colleges of arts and sciences, and continuing education. The Gallatin program at NYU is a school in its own right. The basic challenge facing IMPs is to preserve their cross-disciplinary character and to question the conventional organization of modern universities into discrete knowledge areas.

Panel 2 was on Program Relationships—specifically with other departments across campus. Some panelists reported excellent relations, including good relations with business and other professional schools. Other panelists reported that a competitive spirit characterized their campuses. Strategies for cultivating good relations with other departments were developed through discussion in this panel.

Panel 3 was on Encouraging Interdisciplinary and Integrative Learning. Program leaders outlined their curricular requirements. Discussion also focused on the important distinction between individualized majors and interdisciplinary majors that are pre-set by faculty.

Panel 4 was on Advising. Faculty and professional advisors in IMPs discussed how individualized concentrations are constructed and approved. Advisors discussed the unique challenges and rewards of advising students across many disciplines.

Panel 5 was on Building, Sustaining, and Evaluating IMPs. Discussion ranged widely and included the challenge of building a sense of community among students whose majors are highly individualized. There was general agreement on the need for developing new tools for assessment of IMPs—tools that will reveal the unique strengths of these programs: their tendency to increase student motivation, to integrate liberal and professional education, etc.

At the end of the conference, the participants agreed to hold another conference, and to work toward the creation of a national consortium of individualized major programs.

A fuller transcript of the conference, totaling 20 pages, is available on request. Contact Professor Margaret Lamb, [margaret.lamb@uconn.edu](mailto:margaret.lamb@uconn.edu).