

FIRST YEAR REPORT ON THE
STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM PROGRAM
OF THE
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
INDIANA UNIVERSITY
BLOOMINGTON

AUGUST 1996

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the Spring Semester 1996, it was necessary to place an unusually large number of students on notice that they would be terminated from Indiana University for academic reasons unless their academic record improved dramatically during the Semester. The number of students experiencing academic difficulty was large enough to raise concern among selected administrators that funding to address the issue was provided for one semester. A recent Master's Degree student was employed as a graduate assistant and a second GA with a background in Counseling Psychology was assigned general oversight of the developing effort.

The first task of the newly formed "team" was to develop a working plan to guide their efforts over the course of the Spring Semester. A copy of this plan was distributed to all administrators and department chairs as well as all student service personnel. Secondly, the team conducted a needs assessment of the resources available to students having academic difficulty. In most cases, the team actually visited and interviewed the providers of these services and shared with them the objectives of the new initiative of the School of Education.

The team agreed to call the program the *Student Support Team Program* (SSTP). Initially, the team identified the students to be invited to participate in the SSTP as those who were placed on a "termination contract" with the School of Education. This means that the terms of the contract must be fulfilled or the student will be terminated for academic reasons from the School of Education and possibly from Indiana University - Bloomington. The team was presented a list of 67 students who were on "contract." Upon their investigation it was discovered that 12 of the students had already transferred to other majors on campus or had left the University entirely when they did not return for the Spring 1996 semester. Thus, the SSTP staff were given a list of 55 students as possible candidates for the program.

PROCESS

The SSTP staff developed a program design to guide their efforts during the semester. Each student was contacted by letter, by telephone, and by E-Mail. As a matter of fact, non-responding students were contacted many times by the staff and invited to participate in the program. The students were each invited to come to the office of the staff member to meet with the team and to initiate the building of a supportive relationship.

FINDINGS

Of the 55 students invited to participate, only one refused to meet with the team. There were 33 students who scheduled individual conferences with a team member. An additional 15 students indicated that while they were appreciative of the concern expressed for them by the School, they felt that it was not necessary to schedule an appointment with a team member.

At the end of the semester it was necessary to terminate 17 of the 55 students for failing to demonstrate academic progress and for failing to meet the terms of their contract with the School. Another six students decided to transfer to another unit or to a regional campus.

The SSTP staff appraised their first effort at retention as follows:

1. The staff expected all students to participate fully in the program. Thus, the staff noted that the level of participation was less than expected since some students participated only minimally and others spent considerable time with staff members.
2. Following the initial meeting with the student, the staff felt it was difficult to maintain weekly contact with each student.
3. The staff noted that all correspondence with these students needs to be quite directive initially and less so after a relationship is established. This is particularly true with the correspondence sent to participating students.
4. The staff noted that they needed to become better acquainted with academic programs in the School of Education and with the particular courses giving students the most difficulty. They noted that they needed to interact more with the School's academic advisors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are provided for consideration for future activities of the SSTP:

1. The program should be continued. A final evaluation from one student gives insight into the value of the program.
2. All students in the program should be required to participate in a time management seminar.
3. All students in the program should be required to attend at least an introductory session which should be structured as an orientation/intake combined session.

4. All students should be given a date by which they must schedule their first session with a team member. Subsequent sessions could be conducted over the telephone, by E-Mail, or in person in the office or at another suitable location.

COMMENT FROM ONE STUDENT

I felt that BBBB provided me important information and support which helped me attain a higher grade point average than I thought possible. Several of her recommendations proved to be informative and useful. They helped me to focus and resolve some of my academic and personal problems. She was very supportive of me and gave me several possibilities for improvement and motivation each time we met.

I would suggest that a weekly E-Mail message of encouragement be sent to students in academic trouble like myself. This would help to reduce the student's feelings of stress and non-motivation to study.

The program is worth continuing! Very much so!!!

Thanks for caring, School of Education.