

## **VISIT TO IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY**

**OCTOBER 1-2, 2001**

### **CONTEXT**

The administration at ISU questions whether the current structure used to deliver continuing education (broadly defined) adequately addresses the needs of existing and potential local, statewide, and even regional constituencies. Are various populations either under-served or not served at all? And, could revenues generated by a more coherent and coordinated approach to these activities help offset any state “holdbacks” in the short run and indeed be used over time to fuel other institutional priorities, either centrally and/or at the college level?

### **CHARGE**

If the current structure can be improved upon, the administration desires advice on how best to reorganize the current decentralized structure to more efficiently and effectively capture a significantly greater share of the continuing education market.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Included a review of collateral material and budgets plus 2 full days of interviews with college deans, staff, and administrators.

### **INTRODUCTION**

On most college campuses today, continuing education, broadly defined, typically includes some combination of the following activities: summer and evening courses and programs for academic credit; non credit programs for enrichment and/or professional

development; conference services; graduate programs, particularly those that are multi-disciplinary in content or outside the norm; ESL programs; pre-college programs; off-campus centers/campuses; agricultural extension services; plus any number of activities focused on populations other than the traditional college student (not 18-24 and not attending school on a full-time basis). Many of these activities currently exist at ISU and most are decentralized in terms of design and delivery. Limited coordination of some non-credit courses and programs and of conference services is provided by the College of Technology but, for a variety of reasons, has not achieved the desired results.

ISU's recent history in this area runs somewhat counter to national trends. For example, summer programs on most campuses generate huge revenue surpluses. It is unclear at best whether or not summer school at ISU is a net revenue producer given current accounting practices. The lack of both information and central coordination suggests, at a minimum, that revenues are not being maximized. Further, non-traditional students (typically working adults attending college on a part-time basis) now comprise the majority of all college students, the number having tripled in the last two decades. Colleges and universities have responded to this expanding market by developing new types of programs (graduate certificate programs, for example); by expanding non-traditional means of delivering educational content (at night, on weekends, on-site, and online); and by offering necessary services (career development, financial aid, registration, advising, etc.) at times convenient to this population. Requirements for continuing professional development and training by employers, by governments, and by licensing authorities have fueled a significant and concomitant growth in programs to serve these client groups as well. And the continuously expanding community of aging, well-educated, and relatively affluent retirees has created tremendous opportunities for enrichment programming that bring an entirely new breed of students (and prospective donors) to college campuses. For example, some 1100 colleges and universities now sponsor institutes for learning in retirement in addition to those, including ISU, engaged in programs offered by Elderhostel.

Continuing education at ISU appears to have evolved as it has on many campuses across the country. That is, activity has been created “locally” at the college level to fulfill very specific needs, currently without central coordination or direction. Past attempts at centralization failed, apparently due to trust and turf concerns. In reviewing ISU’s continuing education portfolio, several implications of this approach are readily apparent. For example, not all degree programs nor even a comprehensive general education curriculum are available at night or in the summer. Opportunities to create new credit programs responsive to market demand are missed or slow in developing. Summer offerings are not carefully planned nor coordinated across the colleges and therefore summer revenues are not maximized. Non-credit professional development offerings abound in some colleges and are virtually non-existent in others. Non-credit enrichment programming is limited to programs like Elderhostel, which, while worthy, are high maintenance with little return on investment. Support for conferences, especially professional meetings, is hampered by staff, facility and parking limitations. And all of the activities that currently exist suffer from a lack of basic administrative supports, coordinated marketing efforts designed to build relationships with clients, and campus-wide advocacy efforts. Of these, the lack of effective campus-wide promotional efforts is perhaps the greatest shortcoming of the present structure and this weakness alone warrants consideration of a different approach.

The above is not meant as an indictment of current efforts but rather as a statement of fact related to limitations of time, energy, personnel and fiscal resources of those nominally charged with carrying out the continuing education function, which are in effect an add-on to normal operations. As a point of fact, an impressive array of programs currently exists across the campus given the limitations cited above. The missing piece appears to be a coordinating mechanism to support and enhance existing activities and to take the initiative in developing new programs and services to meet demand.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In general terms, the basic matrix upon which all continuing education units are organized includes a continuum between centralized and decentralized administration and between academic centralization and academic decentralization. Some units, typically larger, private universities, are completely centralized into free-standing schools with all continuing education functions performed by a single unit. At the opposite end of the matrix are universities in which each college or school assumes primary responsibility for carrying out the continuing education function. Most continuing education organizations, particularly in the public sector, are in fact hybrids, with some academic and some administrative responsibility managed centrally with the balance handled by the schools and colleges. ISU's structure most closely resembles a model of academic and administrative decentralization, although some centralized administrative support in the areas of non-credit continuing education and conferences is provided by a central unit housed in the College of Technology. It is important to acknowledge that no structure is intrinsically better than another. The key among successful operations is a consensus among the deans and the administration, both within and outside Academic Affairs, regarding the objective and then aligning personnel and financial resources to achieve that objective.

Given ISU's current situation, it is strongly recommended that ISU seek to centralize the administration of all continuing education functions into a separate division within Academic Affairs and headed by a dean, director or some other senior academic official (assistant/associate vice president). This division can choose a name from among the most commonly used, including continuing education, outreach, university programs, summer and special programs or some other title. More importantly, the division should include primary administrative responsibility for academic outreach centers, summer school, nontraditional credit and degree programs, particularly those offered at night or on weekends, non-credit training and enrichment programs, conferences, and perhaps even graduate programs. Authority should extend to coordination and management of

continuing education functions across the colleges, including the authority to initiate new credit and non-credit programs developed and delivered in collaboration with the colleges. In creating the division, separate revenue and expense budgets will need to be created for each unit comprising the division.

Conceptually, the model is a hybrid in which administrative functions are centralized but academic programming is integrated across the institution. In other words, the division must work with the colleges in scheduling, developing programs, and hiring faculty.

When programs extend beyond the interest of any college or cut across multiple colleges, then the division needs to be able to create a response, perhaps even under a separate university-wide course designation.

Experience at other campuses suggests that there will be myriad benefits associated with adopting this approach.

- Programmatically, the centralized unit can coordinate offerings across colleges to insure that student and client needs are being met. Further, the division can serve as a catalyst for program development to serve new and changing demands.
- Administratively and once properly staffed and organized, economies of scale will accrue, ranging from cost containment, particularly in terms of marketing costs, to the avoidance of staff duplication. Further, centralization allows the provision of support for college initiatives beyond the scope of current capabilities. Ultimately and over time, these changes are likely to result in significantly enhanced revenues that can be used to support other institutional priorities.
- In terms of service, centralization provides a single point of entry and an advocate for enhanced student services as well as a neutral “broker” capable of responding to client demand.

In short, centralizing the administration of continuing education at ISU should result in a more coherent program array, more efficient and cost-effective marketing, a more flexible and nimble means to respond to ever-changing demand, and more powerful and focused advocacy for the needs of students and clients outside the norm. In virtually every case and on virtually every campus where this model is employed, the results are better services and significantly enhanced revenues.

### **IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES**

It is obvious that ISU needs to initiate some significant organizational change in order to meet the administration's objectives. Theoretically and equally obvious are the advantages to ISU of moving toward a more centralized administration of the continuing education function. Unfortunately, there is not a simple formulaic way to achieve this goal. Moreover, ISU's complexity, its current decentralized structure with significant activity occurring in some colleges, and a past negative experience with centralization all mitigate against an easy fix. It is therefore recommended that ISU focus on the action steps outlined below.

1. First and foremost, consensus must be achieved around the goals of reorganization, both within and outside Academic Affairs. The most common goals generally and the most obvious goals for ISU include revenue enhancement (including perhaps some objectives for using excess revenues generated) and enhanced service to students and clients.
2. This should be followed by an examination of the current programmatic array with decisions made about programs that will be supported centrally and programs that ought to remain the province of the colleges.
3. Third, serious attention needs to be paid to the current money flow. The primary objective is to have all current revenue and expense budgets related to the programs and services that will be managed centrally "captured" by the central division. Summer programs will likely be the easiest fix. More problematic will be getting your arms around non-credit activity. The analysis

completed in step #2 above will be your principal guide in this regard. Ultimately, the central division will need to create distinct revenue and expense budgets for each unit within the division, both as a means of assessment as well as helping to insure an entrepreneurial spirit to the enterprise.

4. An examination of current staffing in the colleges will be necessary, with a focus on re-assigning existing staff deployed in the colleges to the central division. The analysis in steps #2 and #3 above should guide that decision making process.
5. After determining what stays and what gets reallocated programmatically and in terms of staff, decisions will then need to be made regarding staff additions to the central division. In this regard, staffing the division ought to be viewed as an incremental process with new staff added to the division as net revenues warrant. Some initial investment in staff, however, will likely be necessary.

The balance of time during the initial stages of reorganization should be focused on developing the organizational climate and culture of the division, including efforts related to professional development with other continuing educators; establishing boundaries of activity and relationships with college faculty and staff; market research; and the development of an initial coordinated marketing campaign. Subsequent years can then focus on the development of new products and services.

## **CONCLUSION**

A review of ISU's current structure to deliver continuing education points to serious deficiencies in the management of programs and services to meet market demand. Moreover, there is a significant lack of coherence in the way these programs are managed along with an absence of any institution-wide advocacy to move beyond and outside the norm. This runs counter to current trends in higher education nationally and among peer institutions and suggests that there are opportunities for growth and expansion.

Centralization of the administration of continuing education while leaving the brunt of

academic oversight to the colleges appears to be the most viable option available to achieve ISU's objectives.

### **PROGRAMMATIC ADDENDUM**

While there is no “magic bullet” in terms of programs and what will develop at ISU must be grounded in significant market research, there are a number of broad categories that ISU ought to consider.

1. Graduate/post-baccalaureate certificates represent the fastest growing trend in continuing higher education over the past few years. ISU is ideally positioned to capitalize on this trend given its diverse colleges and curricula and opportunities therefore abound in terms of developing multidisciplinary programs that cut across the colleges.
2. Professional development non-credit programs, particularly in the areas of technology certifications and executive/management development represent lucrative opportunities for ISU to consider.
3. Pre-college programs are popular ways to serve the local community and they can be either for high school students and ultimately used for admissions recruitment purposes or for younger children and merely serving as enrichment opportunities.
4. Programs targeted to retirees and older adults represent another significant opportunity to build linkages with the community and to develop a new cadre of loyal supporters. ISU has begun to move down this path but the effort will be better served if it engages the campus more fully in building these linkages and serving this clientele. In particular, the Development Office needs to be a partner in this program.

There are obviously numerous other possibilities. Those listed above are either lacking or underdeveloped at ISU and have successful and extensive track records at other institutions.