

Chairs' Corner – November 2009
Husky Advantage Program

TO: UW Foundation, Deans/Chancellors, University Advancement Staff
FROM: Daniel J. Evans, Chair, UW Foundation
Lyn Grinstein, Vice Chair, UW Foundation
Orin C. Smith, Immediate Past Chair, UW Foundation

Dear Friends,

What does it mean to seek “efficiency” in higher education? This question is both increasingly urgent—you have all read Mark Emmert’s recent message about UW responses to the plunge in state funding—and perennially difficult. If efficiency is the opposite of waste (waste of time, waste of dollars), everyone is for it. As always, the devil is in the details. As Mark himself pointed out in earlier remarks, the most “efficient” way to teach large numbers of students might be to put them all in Hec Edmundson Pavilion with one professor and a microphone—but not even the strongest advocate of educational efficiency thinks that would be a good idea.

The search for ways to sustain good education with reduced state, University, and student resources is ongoing. We want to tell you here about one current initiative: the Husky Advantage program.

For more than 50 years now—longer than we realized—the national College Board has been offering Advanced Placement courses to high-school juniors and seniors. As you know, these extra-rigorous high-school courses earn college credit for students who pass the final exams with high scores. And in 1990, the state legislature created a program called “Running Start,” which gives any Washington 11th- or 12th-grader the right to enroll, tuition-free, in courses (up to 18 credits per quarter) at community colleges. These courses too earn both high-school and college credits.

Both these programs have multiple goals: to keep bright students challenged, to help prepare them early for college-level work, to get them into more-advanced courses when they do start college. But both programs also explicitly promise that they can give students a head start on their college careers and make it possible to finish faster—and therefore at less expense. (They are not, however, a guarantee of admission to the UW or any other college or university. Doing well in advanced work is obviously a plus on a college application, but AP and Running Start are not available to all high-school students, so other ways of demonstrating ambition and talent also count in a student’s favor.)

Today, about 500 UW freshmen—almost 10 percent of the entering class—arrive with 45 or more AP and/or Running Start credits. Technically, that makes them 2nd-year students, since those 45 credits equal a year’s worth of college work. And of course they are among the brightest, best-prepared UW undergraduates, typically excelling in their college work and staking out ambitious paths. But how many of these students actually graduate three years after they arrive?

“We don’t know,” says Dean of Arts and Sciences Ana Mari Cauce. “We haven’t tracked them that way. But we think the number is small.”

Since the economic crash, however, students and families are looking much harder at ways to reduce college costs. “We heard and responded,” says Dean Cauce, “to some real desire amongst

our constituents to get out in three years.” The result is the new Husky Advantage program, meant specifically for students who arrive with a year’s credits under their belts.

Partly this is just a new name for an opportunity that already existed. But naming things can make a difference. “The fact that students *know* about this is hugely motivating,” says Dean Cauce. “Now that the Admissions Office has started talking about the possibility of earning a bachelor’s degree in three years, high-school counselors and parents are calling us up. It may lead high-school students to take more advantage of AP and Running Start courses.”

Husky Advantage is not in any sense a contract. Students do not pledge to graduate in three years, and the University does not pledge to get them out in that time, nor does it pressure them in any way to do so. Rather, the program shines a light on a possibility and helps those who want to take advantage of it.

Dean Cauce makes it clear that the three-year degree is not for everyone, not even everyone who has the requisite credits. “It has to be a very special student,” she says, “someone who’s highly motivated and very self-directed.” It is also true that some majors will work better than others. The UW is developing templates for popular majors like biology and communications, to show prospective students how various AP and Running Start courses can fit together with UW coursework in an integrated and “efficient” way. Smaller majors, very competitive majors, and fields like design, for which there are no AP courses, will be a bigger challenge. But technically, no major is out of bounds, and UW academic counselors will be primed to help students plot a course.

The benefits of Husky Advantage are pretty clear. Students and their families can save 25 percent of the cost of a UW bachelor’s degree. A student who has a clear life goal, and who expects to spend many more years in graduate or professional school, can move toward the goal more quickly. And students who graduate in three years free up more space for entering students.

Dean Cauce is emphatic about how *not* to interpret Husky Advantage. It is not a good idea for most students. It is not an endorsement of rushing through college or short-circuiting general education. It is not a message that intellectual breadth doesn’t matter. And, as someone who herself earned a three-year bachelor’s degree (University of Miami, psychology), she concedes that it does cost something in terms of time for exploration: “I still wish I’d taken an art history course.”

But, she says, for the right students with the right preparation, “it is perfectly possible to get a good, full-range UW education in three years. Remember that we have a wide spectrum of undergraduates here—those who enter right from high school, those who transfer after two years of community college, Early Entrance students who come here very young. We’ve had great success with a variety of programs. I like to think of us as flexible and open, with a kind of pioneering, West-Coast attitude, willing to be accommodating and to experiment. We’ll see how this plays out over time.”

Postscript: In the larger national conversation about how to keep American higher education strong, there are some advocates for making three-year bachelor’s degrees the new norm. For a look at positions pro and con, and all the practical and philosophical issues involved, see the recent fascinating symposium in *Newsweek*:

<http://www.newsweek.com/id/218234>

Dan, Lyn, and Orin

Looking Back

- **Contributions July 1, 2009 through October 31, 2009 total \$100,540,973.**
- The **October 2009 Report of Contributions** is attached and contains fundraising details.

Looking Ahead

- **Friday, January 29, 2010.** Foundation Board Meeting, 8:30 a.m. coffee; 9:00-11:00 a.m. meeting.
- **Friday, April 23, 2010.** Foundation Board Meeting, 8:30 a.m. coffee; 9:00-11:00 a.m. meeting.
- **Friday, September 10, 2010.** Foundation Board Meeting, 8:00 a.m. coffee; 8:30-11:30 a.m. meeting.