



## SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
IUPUI

# Addressing the Decline in Liberal Arts Majors and Credit Hours

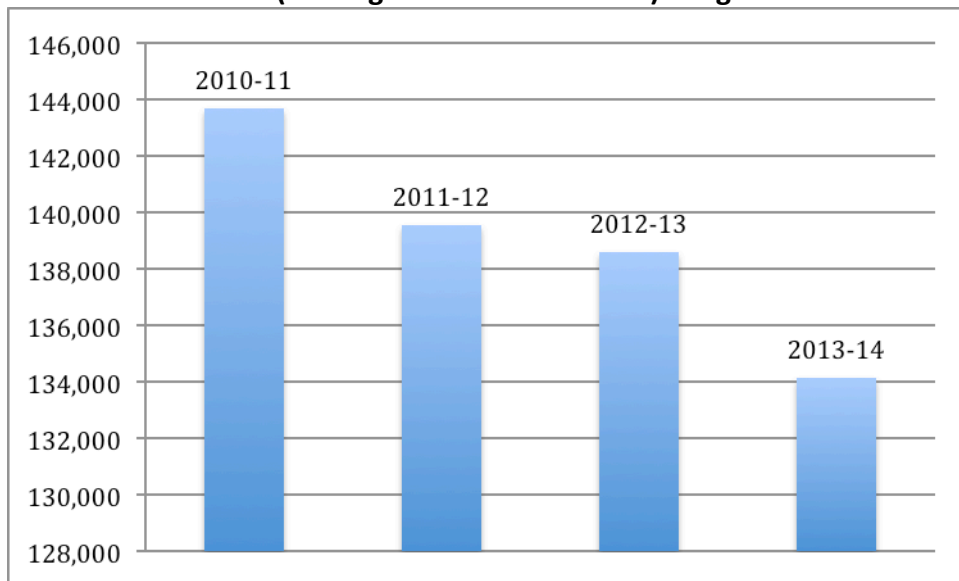
Final Report of the SLA Resources and Planning Committee for Academic Year 2014-15  
July 2015

The Resources and Planning Committee spent all of its meetings in 2014-15 analyzing the current decline in Liberal Arts majors and credit hours and brainstorming about possible solutions. The committee presented its initial findings to Faculty Assembly on March 6, 2015, and then solicited further input from the SLA community. What follows is the committee's assessment of the current situation and the reasons for the decline (sections 1 and 2), along with recommendations for addressing the problem (section 3). Sections 1 and 2 were part of the committee's report to Faculty Assembly in March; section 3 is presented here for the first time.

### 1. The Current Situation

As Dean William Blomquist explained in his 2014 State of the School presentation, our students fund the school. In FY 2014, tuition/fees accounted for about 77% of the school's revenue, with state appropriations accounting for only 20%. This means that any change in the total credit hours taught by the school can have a major impact on revenue. In the past four years, credit hours in the school have declined 7%, from 143,672 (in 2010-11) to 134,123 (in 2013-14).

**Total Credit Hours (Undergraduate & Graduate) Taught in Liberal Arts**

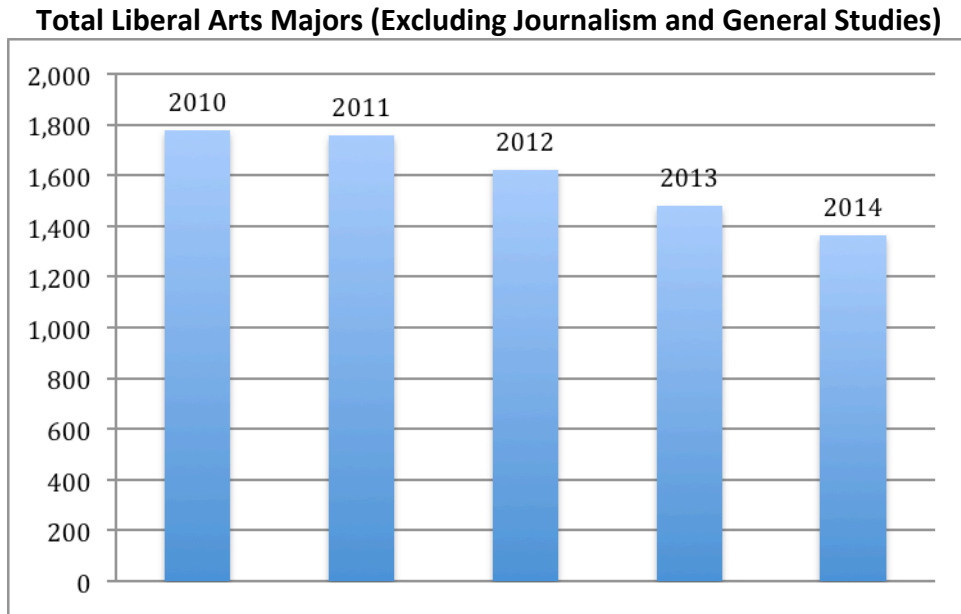


Source: IUPUI Budget Office

In the same four-year period, the total number of academic FTEs (faculty at all ranks) increased 7%, from 239 (in Fall 2010) to 256 (in Fall 2014). Since most of the school's budget goes toward salaries (94% in FY 2014), it was inevitable that a 7% decline in credit hours, coupled with a 7% increase in faculty FTEs, would impact the

school's fiscal health. The school reported a \$742,090 budget shortfall in FY 2014, and a shortfall of more than \$2 million is anticipated in FY 2015.

Total credit hours have fluctuated over the years in SLA, so if the downturn were only in this area, it might be less worrisome. Unfortunately, in the past several years, we have also seen a decline in the number of Liberal Arts majors. Prior to 2012, the school had enjoyed a steady upward trend in majors: from Fall 2001 to Fall 2010, total majors increased 41%, from 1,260 to 1,779. But the number leveled off in 2011 and then began a significant decline in 2012. Between Fall 2010 and Fall 2014, total majors dropped 23%, to 1,364, as the chart below illustrates:



Though the recent addition of General Studies and Journalism to Liberal Arts brought the actual Fall 2014 total of majors up to 2,234, this does not mitigate the concern about the downward headcount trend in most Liberal Arts programs. Moreover, between Fall 2012 and Fall 2014, enrollment in General Studies also declined sharply—down 25%, from 889 to 667. (Journalism bucked the trend, experiencing a 17% increase in the same period, from 173 to 203.)

The decline in Liberal Arts majors is made more worrisome by the fact that our own students are the school's second largest source of credit hours (after students from University College). In 2013-14, Liberal Arts majors accounted for nearly 30% of the school's credit hours.

## 2. Reasons for the Decline

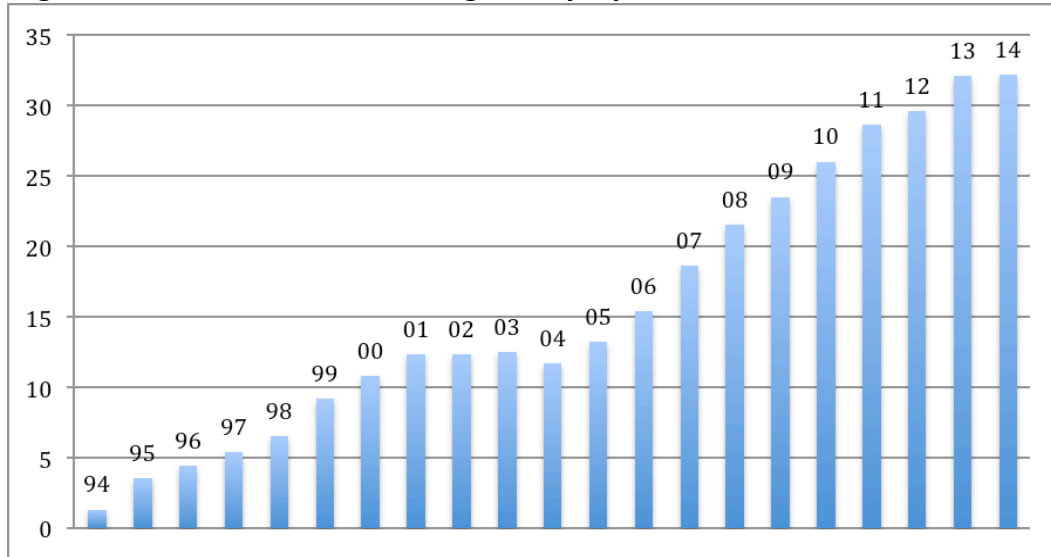
The Resources and Planning Committee has spent most of 2014-15 studying the decline in credit hours and majors and has identified at least six causes. More analysis is needed, but the following are the factors the committee has identified:

### (1) Transfer credits, Advanced Placement, and dual credit courses.

To be admitted to IUPUI, transfer students must have at least 26 hours of transferrable credits. Of the 20,798 undergraduates enrolled at IUPUI in Fall 2014, fully a third (6,860, or 33%) were transfer

students. Some of these students arrive having already fulfilled general education requirements, which cuts into credit hours they might have taken in SLA. Similarly, with the rise in IUPUI's admissions standards, students are now more likely to come in with Advanced Placement and dual credit courses (e.g., Ivy Tech courses that count toward both high school and college). As one measure of the dramatic increase in transfer credits, the chart below shows the average number of credits transferred in by Ivy Tech students over the past two decades. (Ivy Tech is by far the largest provider of IUPUI's transfer students, accounting for roughly 30%.) Between 1994 and 2014, the average number of credit hours transferred by Ivy Tech students increased from 1.3 to 32.2. The increase has been particularly rapid over the past decade, nearly tripling since 2004. Many of these credits presumably are ones that students otherwise would have taken in Liberal Arts.

**Average Number of Credit Hours Brought in by Ivy Tech Transfer Students, 1994-2014**



Source: IUPUI Office of Student Data, Analysis, and Evaluation

- (2) **The state-mandated push toward four-year degree completion, a statewide general education core, and degree mapping.**

Since 2003, when the Indiana Commission for Higher Education first adopted performance-based funding for Indiana's universities, state appropriations are now linked in part to factors such as numbers of degrees awarded and on-time completion of degrees. As part of this push toward four-year degree completion, the State of Indiana in 2012 required each state university to come up with a 30-credit-hour general education core that is fully transferrable within state campuses. Similarly, in 2013, the state required universities to devise degree maps for all undergraduate programs. Though all of these developments ostensibly benefit students, they can also act as a curricular straightjacket, reducing students' opportunities to explore new fields while in college. The transfer credit problem (see #1) only further reduces the opportunity for Liberal Arts to attract students who are still exploring possible majors.

- (3) **The state-mandated 120-credit-hour standard for bachelor's degrees.**

Prior to this change (enacted by the state in 2012), many of IUPUI's schools (including Liberal Arts) required more than 120 hours for graduation. The School of Nursing, for example, previously required 125 hours for the B.S.N.; 9 of these credits were for the Cultural Diversity (6) and Humanistic Appreciation (3) clusters that students often fulfilled with Liberal Arts courses. Under the new 120-credit-hour mandate, Nursing reduced the total number of humanities electives to 6 (3 Cultural

Understanding and 3 Arts and Humanities under IUPUI's new general education core). Presumably other schools have made similar changes. The inclusion of many Liberal Arts courses in the IUPUI Gen Ed Core may partially offset some of these losses, but the net effect of state-mandated curricular changes is not yet clear.

**(4) Enrollment declines in professional schools whose students (or prospective students) have traditionally taken Liberal Arts courses.**

Several professional schools at IUPUI have seen a precipitous downturn in headcounts in recent years due to a variety of factors both national and local. For example, in the past decade, undergraduate enrollment in IUPUI's School of Education has declined about 35% (from 1,105 in Fall 2005 to 720 in Fall 2014). Meanwhile, law school enrollments nationwide are at their lowest level since 1982 (in Fall 2014, IUPUI's McKinney School was down about 15%, to 926 students, from its most recent peak of 1,084 in Fall 2011). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the enrollment decline in Education has hurt several Liberal Arts departments; the effect of the Law School's decline is less clear.

**(5) The campus's (and IU's) marketing of IUPUI as a hub for life sciences and STEM.**

The campus's web site identifies IUPUI as "Indiana's urban research and academic health sciences campus" <<http://www.iupui.edu/about/vision-mission.html>>. Indiana's high school students aren't getting the message that IUPUI is also a place for the liberal arts (and, indeed, that many faculty in the School of Liberal Arts are internationally recognized experts in their fields).

**(6) The post-recession downturn in humanities majors nationwide.**

Since the Great Recession of 2007-09, there has been much debate about the state of the humanities in higher education. The American Academy of Arts & Sciences reports that the number of B.A. degrees conferred in core humanities disciplines fell 2.4% from 2012 to 2013, the third decline in four years <<http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=34>>. Locally, for example, the College of Arts and Sciences at IU Bloomington is facing a budget shortfall of \$4-\$8 million in 2015-16 because of a downturn in credit hours and majors (*Indianapolis Star*, May 19, 2015). Though the number of humanities degrees awarded nationwide is still closer to the postwar high of the 1960s than to the low of the 1940s (when data sets begin), the statistical picture is complicated by the larger share of Americans attending college today than in the 1940s <[http://www.aacu.org/aacu\\_news/aacunews13/august13/facts\\_figures](http://www.aacu.org/aacu_news/aacunews13/august13/facts_figures)>.

### 3. Addressing the Decline

Just as there is no single cause for the current decline in majors and credit hours, there is no single solution. Indeed, the committee believes that the school must aggressively pursue multiple strategies in 2015-16 if the current downturn is to be reversed. We believe these strategies should include the following:

**(1) Greater vigilance about the effects of campus-level curricular changes on SLA enrollments.**

Traditionally, the liberal arts provided the bulk of the courses, as well as the philosophical foundation, for general education curricula in American universities. Indeed, when the State of Indiana mandated in 2012 that each campus come up with a new general education core, the School of Liberal Arts and University College were key players in the task force charged with vetting courses for the new requirements. More recently, however, the task force has been folded into the campus-level Undergraduate Affairs Committee, in which each IUPUI school has one representative (and one vote),

with the dean of University College serving as a nonvoting member. Our concern is that this structure may exacerbate a new curricular “arms race” as schools vie to create new core courses, many of which would have traditionally been taught by the School of Liberal Arts. IUPUI’s budgetary model, Responsibility Centered Management (RCM), incentivizes schools to keep credit hours in-house since schools are responsible for generating most of their own revenue. Given this situation, it is essential for SLA to (1) maintain active lines of communication with other IUPUI schools, articulating the importance of foundational liberal arts skills for their students and seeking ways to build complementary rather than adversarial relationships, and (2) push IUPUI’s central administration to empower a curricular “traffic cop” (the Executive Vice Chancellor?) to minimize destructive competition among schools for general education credit hours.

**(2) More aggressive recruitment of liberal arts majors.**

Because the bulk of SLA’s credit hour decline comes from a decline in our own majors, the school’s fiscal health depends on enhancing our recruitment of new majors. For years, Amy Jones Richardson (Assistant Director of Recruitment, Retention, and Academic Services) has worked tirelessly on recruitment as part of her several responsibilities, but the current situation, in which students increasingly are embarking on non-liberal arts majors as soon as they arrive at IUPUI, demands greater staff resources devoted to both internal recruitment (especially within University College) and external recruitment. The school recently took a positive step with hiring of a full-time recruiter whose job will include building relationships with feeder high schools in metro Indianapolis and beyond. The school also needs to develop a system for incentivizing faculty to speak in area high schools about their passion for their disciplines. The area’s public schools regularly feature “STEM” days that showcase careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The liberal arts need a similar strategy. Dean Bill Blomquist once proposed “LEAF” (Liberal Education for All Fields), which the committee believes would provide a clever complement to STEM. We need to find new ways to convince students that a stem is barren without leaves!

**(3) More intentional framing of liberal arts skills in all of the school’s courses.**

The challenge of marketing the liberal arts begins at home—in our own courses. How do we talk with students about what they can do with a liberal arts degree? Dean Tom Davis has suggested that we need to be much more intentional in our courses about framing liberal arts skills—reading, analyzing, summarizing, presenting—and showing students why these skills are essential in a wide variety of careers. These and other liberal arts skills, such as understanding society and culture, are already articulated in IUPUI’s Principles of Undergraduate Learning (PULs), but we sometimes fail to use the PULs to our advantage. Moreover, we need to give students a vocabulary for explaining to their peers and their parents the importance of the liberal arts, not only for the job market but also for overall job satisfaction. A 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index study revealed that college graduates who majored in the arts, humanities, or social sciences feel more engaged with their careers than science or business majors. The study also revealed that if employed graduates recalled having a professor who cared about them as a person, mentored them, and made them excited about learning, the graduates’ odds of being engaged at work more than doubled (*Great Jobs, Great Lives*, p. 9). This sort of close mentoring is a built-in strength of the School of Liberal Arts, with its relatively small classes, but we often fail to take advantage of this asset. Faculty need to be trained—through workshops, communities of practice, or other means—in how to make the liberal arts perspective on the world more explicit in their courses.

**(4) Development of new dual-degree or certificate programs as well as new pre-professional degree tracks.**

The school needs to open up new pathways for students to follow their passions in liberal arts fields even while pursuing degrees outside of SLA or preparing for admission to professional degree programs. A

major untapped way of doing this is through more dual-degree or certificate programs in partnership with other schools. SLA is currently developing, with the Kelley School of Business, the Liberal Arts and Management Program (LAMP), and more such programs have been suggested. The school should also develop degree maps that could serve as pre-professional degree tracks—e.g., pre-medicine or pre-law. Doing this will require keeping the basic SLA degree requirements as flexible as possible, which is one virtue of the school's new B.A. degree sheet (implemented in compliance with the state's 120-credit-hour mandate). Any future change to the SLA requirements that would make it harder for students to pursue dual degrees, certificates, or pre-professional tracks should be resisted. Related to this, there is potential demand, especially among high-achieving students, for a three-year B.A. option or for five-year B.A./M.A. programs. The latter are already common at many universities and would address the growing need nationwide for higher-level training than the B.A. can provide.

**(5) More attention to the issue of transfer credits and the needs of transfer students.**

The transfer articulation tsunami of the past few years has occupied a great deal of staff time—much of it, unfortunately, in giving away credits to students who never go on to become our majors. How might we turn the transfer credit phenomenon more to our advantage? Answering this question will require the smarter use of staff time—e.g., in analyzing which courses students are transferring, whether this has changed over time, and how this relates to students' eventual choice of major. We also need to revisit current articulation agreements with Ivy Tech (IUPUI's largest feeder of transfer students) to see if revisions are needed. Finally, the school needs to find ways to be more welcoming of transfer students generally. What hurdles do transfer students face, and how can we make it easier for them to become liberal arts majors?

**(6) More systematic and detailed analysis of enrollment trends.**

In order to pursue the strategies described above, the school will first need better data, especially on enrollment trends. The school may well need to invest in a full-time data manager/analyst, or at least make better use of analysts at the campus level (e.g., Michele Hansen and her staff in IUPUI's Office of Student Data, Analysis, and Evaluation). A perennial challenge has been obtaining accurate data on students in other schools who declare a double major in a liberal arts field, since second majors typically do not show up in data sets used by the campus. The school also needs better data on the many variables that affect enrollment in particular courses, including the day/time when a class is offered. Recent conventional wisdom in SLA is that evening course enrollments have declined as IUPUI's student population has become more traditional. Is this really true, or might there be untapped potential for evening enrollments? Answering such questions may require qualitative, as well as quantitative, data collection; hence the need for more staff support dedicated to data collection and analysis.

#### **4. Acknowledgments**

The chair of the 2014-15 Resources and Planning Committee, Peter Thuesen (Religious Studies), would like to thank the other members of the committee: Bill Blomquist (SLA Administration), Rick Hanson (SLA Administration), Kate Miller (French), Robert Rebein (English), Charles Reyes (Communication Studies), Shah Towfighi (Economics), and Elee Wood (Museum Studies). The committee would also like to thank Amy Jones Richardson and Tom Davis, who met with us during the year and provided valuable input. The committee is also grateful to the other members of the SLA community who took the time to share their ideas.