Purdue trimester plan will accelerate time-to-degree, enhance educational opportunities

INDIANAPOLIS - Purdue University is rolling out the first initiative of its decadal funding plan with the announcement on Wednesday (Jan. 11) that it will proceed with the first steps toward a balanced trimester. The trimester is an effort designed to enhance students' academic opportunities as well as help them move more quickly toward graduation.

President France A. Córdova, during the announcement at the Lumina Foundation headquarters, said that the balanced trimester initiative is one of several to be unveiled over the next few months in the decadal planning process.

Purdue's decadal funding plan is a long-term commitment to help offset declining state appropriations and reduce tuition increases.

"We have spent a lot of time thinking through the various elements of the 10-year funding plan," she said. "Now that we better understand the costs and returns involved, it's time to put these initiatives in motion."

Beginning this summer, the university will expand its summer program offerings as a first step toward implementing a full-summer trimester.

"Purdue has moved boldly to become more productive, affordable and supportive of students more quickly completing their degrees," said Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels. "This is how leaders act."

Offering a third semester each year will help some students complete a nominal four-year degree in as little as three years, saving them time and money, and it will give others the chance to take advantage of study-abroad and internship opportunities. When fully implemented, the trimester initiative could mean $40 million in additional revenue for the university and would make better use of classrooms, residence halls and other campus facilities during the summer months.

"This initiative will make a Purdue education more affordable because a greater array of summer course and program offerings, combined with discounted summer tuition, will result in a faster time to completion for some students," said Tim Sands, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs.

Purdue's fall and spring tuition schedule for the main campus in West Lafayette is already designed to encourage full course loads by offering credits above eight for no additional charge. In...
addition, students taking from eight to 16 credits in the summer receive a discount relative to fall and spring rates; that discount is as high as 50 percent for students who take eight or nine credits in the summer. In embarking on this more aggressive efficiency and opportunity initiative, Purdue is exploring ideas for further incentives, course packages and scholarships, along with financial models that encourage departments to implement summer academic programs to jump-start the trimester initiative.

"Purdue's decision to move toward a full-summer trimester offers students expanded opportunities to accelerate graduation and save money and is aligned with the commission's goals of increasing completion and ensuring affordability," said Teresa Lubbers, Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education.

Jamie Merisotis, Lumina Foundation president and CEO, said, "Lumina Foundation is honored to host the announcement of Purdue's new trimester effort. We applaud Purdue University and President Córdova's plan to accelerate the time-to-degree. This is an innovative approach and reflects a strong commitment to serving students and the state of Indiana."

The project is a key part of the decadal funding plan to increase sources of revenue beyond tuition and state appropriations - the traditional sources for public university funding - by doubling revenue capacity through continued cost-cutting, expanding online degree and professional education offerings, encouraging more robust use of campus facilities through summer teaching and learning, and ramping up research commercialization.

Purdue trustee JoAnn Brouillette said the trimester effort was attractive to trustees because it would benefit students and the university's bottom line.

"The advantages for students are several, and it helps the university financially while making better use of buildings and equipment," she said. "The additional revenue will help cut our cost per credit hour."

Córdova said, "We've made a commitment to students and the state Legislature that Purdue will do everything possible to keep tuition affordable and still deliver an exceptional education and a valuable degree."

Currently, 6,000 students take summer classes at Purdue's main campus for an average of four to five credit hours each. The goal is to grow the summer trimester to more than 20,000 students with each taking a 14-credit-hour load by 2022.

Although savings for students and the institution would accrue from year-round utilization of facilities, expenses also would grow, with additional pay needed for professors and support staff. Financial aid also would need attention since most programs typically cover only two semesters in an academic year.

One option for additional Indiana student support will be Purdue's Indiana Challenge scholarship program. Córdova announced this summer that $7 million earned through university
investments would be used to boost private donations for student support, with $300,000 dedicated to support veterans and their dependents and $6.7 million for the scholarship-matching program.

The Purdue Indiana Challenge Match will contribute to the Access and Success student scholarship and programming campaign. The campaign brought in $42.6 million in 2010-2011, for a four-year campaign total of $170.6 million towards the $304 million goal by 2014. The campaign supports the Presidential and Trustees Scholarships, Marquis Scholarships for middle-income students, and the Emerging Urban Leaders Scholarships for students from targeted urban areas.

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