Roadblocks and Opportunities

Going from a small town in South Dakota to the very large University of Minnesota created both roadblocks and opportunities for Bantz.

A large roadblock for Bantz was learning a foreign language. “I’m very bad in language, and that shaped my final choice [of major],” Bantz said.

Some of Bantz’s classmates struggled with the large class sizes. At this potential roadblock to success, Bantz managed to be adaptive, and he “always figured out how to take away something that [he] liked.”

Another roadblock – and the hardest part about such a large university – was the lack of “personal touch.” The need to find and create some sort of “neighborhood” or sense of community was essential for Bantz.

While at Arizona State University as vice provost, Bantz was told by the head of student life that the best predictor of success in students is attachment. Bantz regularly encourages students to get involved in something, whether intramurals, sports, music, student government, academic or social clubs – anything to create neighborhood and attachment for themselves.

The University of Minnesota had outgrown its resources which left many students without much guidance or academic support as they started their college experience. At the end of his first quarter, Bantz was offered the opportunity to participate in the honors program. Bantz said he accepted “because you got a faculty advisor.”

“I changed goals [and majors], which sometimes is the right thing to do,” said Bantz. While some people might argue he made a mistake in choosing the first major, he never regretted taking some of the prerequisites for previously pursed majors as it taught him he could do things he didn’t know he could do.

Though he did not have a close mentorship experience, Bantz states that the university “gave me opportunity, gave me discipline, gave me access, taught me that I could do the work, and introduced me to some faculty,” Bantz said.

Hard Work

Due to the lack of academic support, Bantz bolstered his academics with hard work – and Bantz is a strong believer in hard work. He attributes his ability to “ace” his calculus course in college, not to the fact that he was great at math, but because every night he sat down and did the homework. “A lot of people really have to push themselves, and they achieve astonishing things,” Bantz stated.

Although achieving educational success is more likely with the help of academic programs, Bantz stresses that students must be willing to commit the time and energy to hard work.

“Drive matters, commitment matters, and hard work matters,” Bantz emphasizes. “It helps to be bright, obviously, but if you don’t work hard, it doesn’t have the same impact.”

Campus Programs

Because of his own undergraduate experience, it is no surprise that Bantz embraces structured academic guidance for students such as the programs found at University College.

Bantz sees University College as essential to the success of students, adding that “it is essential to teach all our units how they can help students succeed.” According to Bantz, creating opportunities and attachment for undergraduates at IUPUI has been possible due to the interventions of University College through the Bridge Program, academic advising, career planning, and other student support efforts it offers.

Community Support

In addition to hard work and campus programs fostering student success, Bantz feels that success for the university is attainable because of support from the community. If it weren’t for the community and city of Indianapolis, IUPUI would not exist. “People think IUPUI is only two partners [Indiana University and Purdue University], but…Indianapolis is [also] a partner,” Bantz commented. And Bantz believes that IUPUI is one of the most “connected-to-the-community” campuses in the country.

Because decisions made at IUPUI affect the community, Bantz meets with community leaders on a regular basis to give them information about IUPUI and start discussions between the city and the school. “They always ask what…my biggest concerns and challenges [are] and where…they [can] be helpful, and they are very helpful,” Bantz stated.

Not only does the community offer philanthropic support that funds building projects and underwrites faculty work and student support, the community volunteers its time in the classroom. One example of this is that lawyers from downtown have taught classes, and judges have given lectures to classes on campus. “The relationship is essential,” Bantz said, “…and it’s amazing when you start looking at the interaction and the way the community helps us.”

The partnership, however, goes beyond asking what the community can do for the campus, but also asking what the campus can do for the community. According to Bantz, the school is an “enormous contributor to the city both in terms of employment and in business development by virtue of our faculty and staff creating businesses.” IUPUI also gives to the community through its extensive translational research; that is, translating research into practice. And while students at IUPUI complete their degrees and go out and work in the community, there are also community members who come to IUPUI to get degrees. “We go back and forth, and so whenever we create degree programs, it is creating opportunity for our students to work in our community and for students to come back,” Bantz said.

One of Bantz’s goals is to “increase the number of baccalaureate-degree-holding adults.” According to Bantz, the education level of adults is the single biggest predictor of economic success for a community. “Indianapolis has to succeed in increasing our educational attainment which will have lots of ripple points – it’s part of the whole package of building the quality of life here in Central Indiana.”

Helping students overcome roadblocks can come in various forms, says Bantz, whether it be through support services, adaptive education, academic and personal counseling services, financial crisis services, or even health services. And while students need to push themselves, not every student comes with the same set of skills. Therefore, advisors/mentors, attachment, and programs are often critical components to student success. All students have “a bump somewhere – that is the rule of education,” believes Bantz, “and we…need to make sure we have that safety net for them.”