The IUPUI Special Programs for Academic Nurturing (SPAN) Division, launched in 1984 and home to all accelerated college immersion programs at the Indianapolis campus, is one of the oldest accelerated college immersion programs in the United States. SPAN programs offer college course enrollment opportunities to pre-college students who are academically ready for the rigors of a genuine college experience. Through a variety of accelerated college immersion/access programs, SPAN offers innovative educational choices that respond to the unique interests and talents of high ability secondary students, celebrates cultural and ethnic diversity, and fosters student achievement. Thousands of high school students have demonstrated tremendous academic success at IUPUI through SPAN programming.

The SPAN Division mission and goal is threefold: to provide SPAN programming, Computer Information Technology, and Liberal Arts; and to facilitate the increase in the number of students from less-represented populations who enroll in and successfully complete courses in the STEM areas, as well as the health and life sciences.

SPAN attracts academically gifted and high ability secondary students whose scholastic development and accomplishments are noticeably more rapid than that of their peers, and who are academically ready for college-level course work at an atypical age. For most high-ability students, this usually results in enrollment in dual credit or Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings at the high school during their junior and senior years. However, there are many occasions when students will meet Indiana graduation requirements, exhaust AP offerings, and become ready to transition to a college-learning environment at an early age. Thus, there is a clear need and a growing demand for high quality accelerated college immersion opportunities.

The growth of programs for gifted elementary and high school students such as the regional talent searches have resulted in many gifted students taking advanced classes early and completing the high school curriculum prior to the twelfth grade. These gifted students need and desire early access to college-level work.

Russell knows those roadblocks and challenges first-hand. At 14, he was in high school, but found “my high school just did not know what to do with me.”

“I found it frustrating being a student,” he said. “I advanced only because I demonstrated strength. I saw so many resources for remedia tion but so little for accelerating.”

His needs for acceleration eventually were addressed at the Accelerated Christian Education Academy, where he was able to take college courses and complete his high school curriculum in two years at the age of 16. However, at the time there was not a provision for early high school graduation. As a result, he transferred to and later graduated from Eminence Consolidated School in Eminence, Indiana, for his “senior year” since the school administration would at least allow him to attend just one semester rather than another whole year.

Russell and his wife Cathy have three sons, ages 10 to 13, who are straight “A” students at Eminence, the state’s smallest consolidated school with four hundred students in kindergarten through grade 12. The Russells supplement their sons’ learning with home-schooling materials.

Russell sees many families who struggle to find scholastic opportunities for their gifted and high ability children. He cited a family in Manitoba, Canada, who is considering moving to Indianapolis so their 13-year-old son can take college courses in math and physics. Additionally, he has been speaking with a Fort Wayne family who has resorted to home education for their 13-year-old son who has exhausted his high school math courses. The family is interested in driving to Indianapolis twice a week to participate in SPAN at IUPUI.

Russell’s passion for providing an outlet for high ability students reaches beyond classrooms and borrows from his experience as a bored and sometimes terrified police officer in South Carolina. Russell says that too often, gifted and high ability students are targets for bullies, so after hours, Russell teaches self-defense aimed at conflict resolution and neutralizing situations that could get out of hand.

Don’t Just Prepare for College – Immerse Yourself in It!

By Harriett Bennett

The SPAN Division follows the “Immersion Model” in which academically eligible high school students enroll in regular IUPUI courses taught by full-time faculty alongside regular IUPUI full-time students for full college credit, thus providing the student not only uncompromised college coursework, but also the genuine college experience. Through this model, high school students are able to undergo a genuine college course experience while supported and nurtured at a high level of student support.

The SPAN Division has developed a collaborative initiative that makes a significant difference by impacting the student academic success rate in subsequent college courses, and will facilitate the increase in the number of students from less-represented populations who enroll in and successfully complete courses in the STEM areas as well as liberal arts at IUPUI. The faculties of our area high school associates and IUPUI have become partners in inquiry by impacting teaching and learning in secondary education while offering experiences, internships, and mentoring for high school students. This collaboration has created a solid pathway for students to matriculate to IUPUI and for parent support through information about college and college readiness.

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