

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of the IUPUI Home Stretch program on on-time graduation rates. In an effort to understand the effects of the Home Stretch funds on outcomes, a matched comparison group was formed by selecting students with the same eligibility requirements in the year prior to the introduction of the pilot program.

In an effort to understand if a graduation coaching intervention coupled with Home Stretch funds produced better outcomes compared to Home Stretch funds without coaching support, students were randomly assigned to a coaching intervention per an Institutional Research Board (IRB) approved study. This randomized experiment tested the effectiveness of individualized student coaching for Home Stretch participants. A stratified random sampling technique was employed using student major and gender to stratify the sample.

The coaching intervention was conducted by trained IUPUI academic advisors who embraced a coaching philosophy that included an adaptive approach to help students attain their academic goals and sustain their momentum toward graduation. The approach was not intended to replace academic advising that the students were receiving in degree-granting schools. Over the course of two semesters, the coaches worked with the students to help them set clear visions of their goals, guide them in connecting their daily activities to their long-term goals, and to support them in pursuing their individual goals.

### Background on the IUPUI Home Stretch Program

The IUPUI Home Stretch Program was piloted in the 13-14 academic year to provide an incentive towards graduation for students in their fifth or sixth year of study at the Indianapolis campus. The purpose of the program was to provide direct financial support through the awarding of institutional loan funds to students to facilitate their completion of their first bachelor's degree by August 31, 2014.

Some of these students had exhausted their federal and state grant eligibility. The initial funds were provided to the students through an institutional loan; once it was confirmed that the Home Stretch loan recipient completed the bachelor's degree, the loan amount borrowed through the program was repaid on behalf of the student by the IUPUI Home Stretch grant award. The additional need-based funding for selected students provided a financial incentive for the students to remain focused on completing a degree in a timely manner instead of delaying graduation due to working more and attending school part-time. The funding helped to fill the unmet need "gap" that impacts student persistence toward graduation.

### Research highlights and conclusions

- 149 students participated in the Home Stretch 2013-2014 pilot program.
- Students who participated in the 2013-2014 pilot Home Stretch program were significantly more likely to graduate on time (75%) compared to a matched comparison group (52%).
- Graduating students who participated in the 2013- 2014 pilot program graduated in significantly fewer terms compared to graduating students in the matched comparison group (66% graduated in the spring 2014 term compared to 53%, respectively).
- 88% of Home Stretch reported that "the Home Stretch funds enabled me to complete my degree" ("Strongly Agree" or "Agree" based on a survey question).
- Home Stretch students who were randomly assigned to a coaching intervention had higher on-time graduation rates (79%) compared to the control group (71%).
- Students who actually participated in coaching by responding to contacts and meeting with their coaches in-person (38) were more likely to graduate on-time (87%) compared to students who were not randomly assigned or who were randomly assigned, but did not respond to coaching contacts (71%). This positive outcome may be due to selection bias. As such, the positive outcome may be due to factors associated with this group of students being receptive to coaching rather than the coaching intervention per se.

### Eligibility requirements included the following:

- Indiana resident
- Admitted to IUPUI in 2009 or 2010
- Demonstrate financial need
- Completed at least 80 credits towards the degree
- Minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA
- Appears to be able to obtain first bachelor's degree by August 31, 2014.

Results of a logistical multiple regression analysis suggested that Home Stretch students were significantly more likely to graduate on-time (within one year or by the end of summer term 2014) compared to students meeting the same eligibility requirements even when cumulative GPAs, credit hours, Federal Pell Grant eligibility, and First-Generation status were entered into the first step in the regression model (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .134$  for Step 1: Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .208$  for Step 2). On-time graduation rates are shown in Figure 1. The odds of graduating on time for students in the Home Stretch program were 3.15 times greater than students not in the Homes Stretch program (or about 215% greater based on the odd ratio in the logistic regression model).

ANCOVA results suggested that graduating Home Stretch students graduated in fewer terms/semesters compared to graduating students in the matched comparison group. Covariates included in the model were cumulative GPAs, credit hours, Federal Pell Grant eligibility, and First-Generation status (adjusted semesters taken to graduate Home Stretch = 1.39 and Comparison Group = 1.71). Results are shown in Figure 2.

Students in the Home Stretch program were more likely to graduate in the same term or spring term following the fall 2013 introduction of the pilot program compared to students in the comparison group (2%, 66% and 0%, 53%, respectively).

There were 72 students randomly assigned to the graduation coaching intervention and 77 in the control group. The coached students had higher on-time graduation rates (79% within one year) compared to the comparison group (71% within one year). See Figure 4. Please note that the differences were not significant based on an independent samples t-test ( $p = .276$ )

It is important to note that students who did graduate ( $n=59$ ) in the coached group did so in significantly fewer terms (1.17) compared to students in the control group ( $n= 66$ , 1.61 terms). Based on an independent samples t-test ( $p=.001$ ). Results are shown in Figure 5.

### Home Stretch Students More Likely to Graduate On-Time

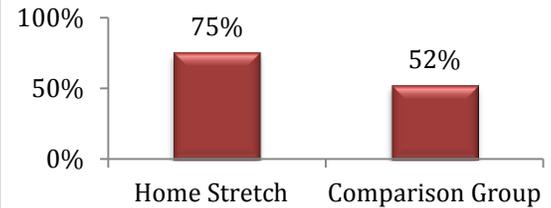


Figure 1. On-Time Graduation Rates Home Stretch and Comparison Group

### Home Stretch Students Fewer Terms to Graduate

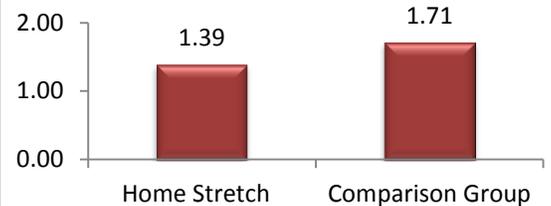


Figure 2. Terms/Semesters To Graduate Home Stretch and Comparison Group

### Home Stretch Students Graduate Sooner

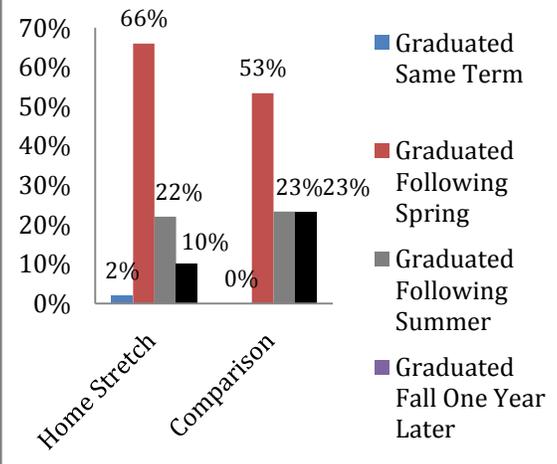


Figure 3. Percent of Students and Term Graduated Home Stretch and Comparison Group

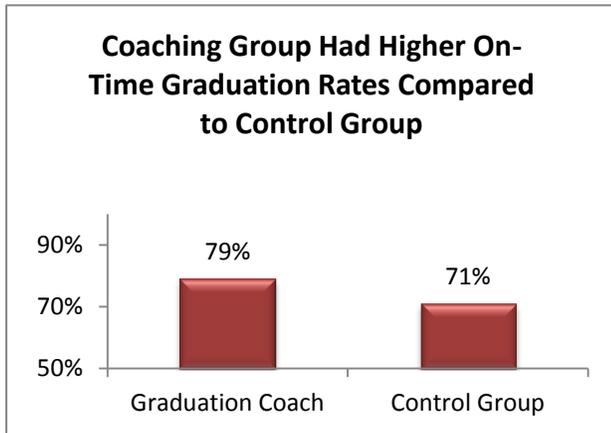


Figure 4. On-Time Graduation Rates Graduation Coaching Group and Control Group

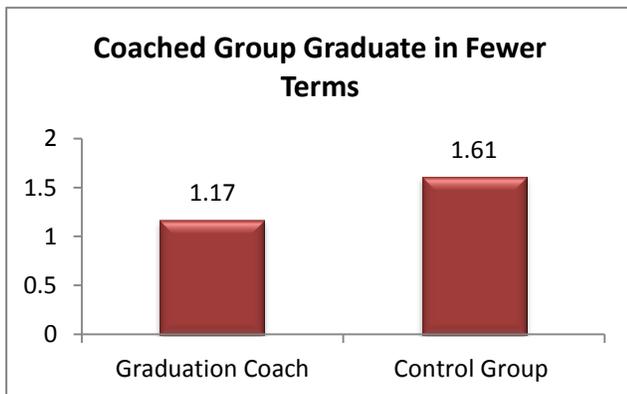


Figure 5. Terms to Graduate for Graduating Students in Graduation Coaching Group and Control Group

There were 38 students who were randomly assigned to coaching and actually responded to the coaching intervention (responded to texts, emails, phone calls, and met with their coach in person) and 111 who were either not randomly assigned or were randomly assigned and did not respond to any contacts. The one-time graduation rate for the participants was significantly higher 87% compared to nonparticipants (71%; based on chi-square results,  $p = .029$ ). This positive result may be due to selection bias rather than the coaching interventions. As such, the students who were likely to be receptive to coaching may have been different than students who were not receptive and these factors may have contributed to the positive outcomes rather than the graduation coaching intervention it and of itself.

Home Stretch students who participated in graduation coaching seemed to find the coaching valuable in providing them with pathways and strategies for attaining their goals. For example, students reported that coaching gave them resources, provides the opportunity for them to talk about their goals, and in the words of one student “pushed me to my potential.”

Shown in Table 1 are actual comments from students who participated in graduation coaching.

Responses to Question, “Please describe the aspects of the coaching experience that you found the most valuable.”

#### Understanding how coaching worked

“...told me...”  
 “...someone to report to...”  
 “...very patient...”  
 “...gave me many resources...” “...enabled me...”  
 “...helped me...”  
 “...verify steps...”  
 “...talk about my goals...” “...would check in...”  
 “Put me in contact...”  
 “...advice”

#### Understanding why coaching worked

“... there when I needed...”  
 “...didn’t want to report badly to my couch [sic]...”  
 “...pushed me to my potential.”  
 “...I didn’t want to let anyone down.”  
 “...nice having someone... rather than going in blind.”  
 “...felt like [coach] wanted to help me achieve my goals.”  
 “...knowing I had someone...”  
 “...necessity was there...”  
 “...otherwise, I would not have known the steps to graduating (paperwork, etc).”

Table 1. Benefits of Graduation Coaching in the Words of Home Stretch Student