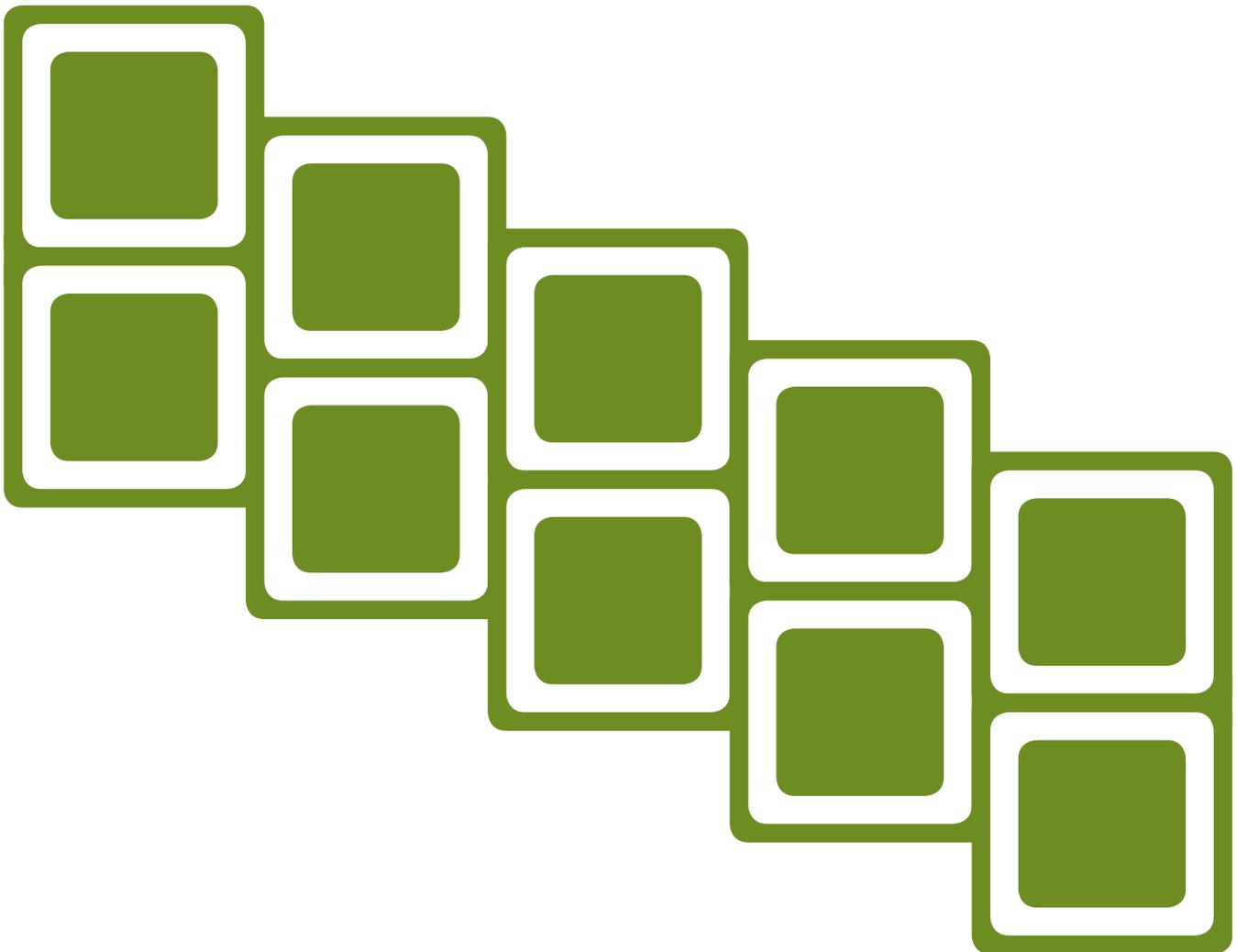


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# *The Instructional Grant Program of the Summer Session: A Vehicle for Curricular Variety and Innovation?*

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## **Abstract**

The Instructional Grant Program (IGP) at the University of Colorado Boulder has been established to diversify curriculum in Summer Session. The IGP provides funding for courses defined as “new” to Summer Session: (1) courses that are part of regular curriculum but have never been offered in Summer Session or have been offered in summer for less than three years, (2) established courses featuring new pedagogy, and (3) innovative or brand new courses. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of the IGP and its impact upon curriculum, participating faculty, and departments. The study examined whether the IGP resulted in greater curricular innovation and variety in Summer Session and whether it served as a course incubator. The results of the study indicated that the IGP had been successful in providing courses that would have not otherwise been offered in Summer Session, therefore expanding the variety of Summer Session offerings. The study also found that the IGP currently falls short in meeting its goal of fostering greater curricular innovation because the vast majority of IGP courses were part of regular curriculum and only a few were incubated in Summer Session.

Summer Session programming is a vital part of many higher education institution offerings. No longer remedial in nature, summer sessions offer class work to benefit both degree and non-degree students. As Bailey Dev pointed out, summer session “offers higher education institutions an opportunity to take advantage of their strengths and resources to generate revenue and further their mission” (2005, p. 56). The mission of Summer Session at the University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) is to provide high-quality, innovative courses and programs to a diverse student population. Summer Session is an integral part of campus academic planning, and every school and college participates. The Summer Session mission is aligned with the guiding principle of the Association of University Summer Sessions: “to provide a setting for curricular experimentation, innovation and change” (1995).

Summer Session at CU-Boulder began in 1904 as an outgrowth of the Chautauqua movement, which provided general-interest classes and events near the campus. Over the last more than 100 years, CU’s summer program has grown to serve about 8,000 students each year. As is the case at many institutions, Summer Session at CU-Boulder serves primarily degree students, with 65% of classes taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty. The standard of high-quality classes that reflect the scholarly and creative interests and academic standards of the faculty informs all class selections. The goal of enhancing the quality of the summer session experience is to meet students’ needs, expand student and faculty participation, and increase revenues for the campus. CU-Boulder uses a revenue-sharing model that returns Summer Session profits to the schools and colleges. Curriculum enhancements and financial incentives have resulted in growing awareness of the importance of Summer Session to the campus generally.

Curriculum enrichment efforts have included the establishment of Maymester (2000); the FIRST (Faculty-in-Residence Summer Term) program, which brings nationally and internationally recognized scholars to teach on campus (2002); and the offering of online courses featuring tenured or tenure-track faculty (2009). The longest-standing summer curricular enhancement program is the Instructional Grant Program (IGP), which was established in 1997 to provide additional classroom opportunities as well as innovative or new classes. The IGP is designed to expand and diversify course offerings, to encourage curricular innovation, and to incubate new courses for the summer and regular curricula. It also provides an additional opportunity for tenured or tenure-track faculty to teach in summer. The IGP provides funding for courses defined as “new” to Summer Session: (1) courses that are part of regular curriculum but have never been offered in summer session or have been offered in summer for less than three years, (2) established courses featuring new pedagogy, and (3) innovative or brand new courses.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of the IGP and its impact upon curriculum, participating faculty, and departments. The study examined whether the IGP resulted in greater curricular innovation and variety in summer session and whether it served as a course incubator.

## Research Methodology

The case study method used investigated the role of the IGP and its impact upon curriculum, participating faculty, and departments. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Quantitative data about specific courses were extracted from university databases and included enrollments and faculty course questionnaires (FCQs). These quantitative data resulted from manually checking each course enrollment and FCQ results.

Qualitative data were obtained through unstructured interviews with summer session deans, department chairs, and faculty. Interviewed faculty and deans had been participants in the IGP program, whereas chairs were selected from both participating and nonparticipating departments.

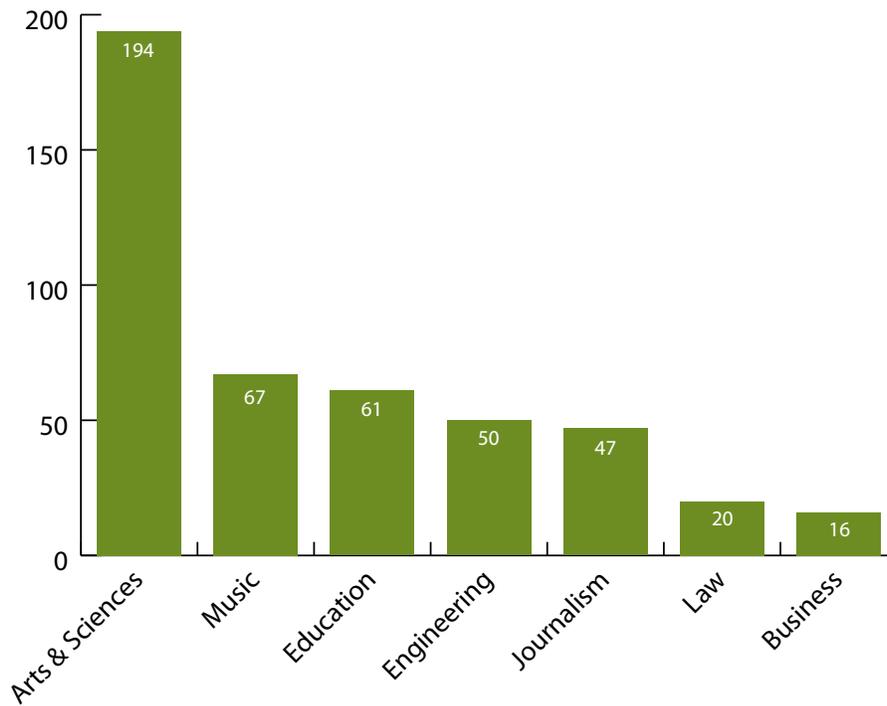
Students who had taken IGP courses were not interviewed. CU-Boulder Summer Session serves primarily juniors and seniors, and consequently most of the students who participated are no longer on campus. For future research, we recommend surveying students immediately after their classes are completed to better understand their reasons for registering in particular IGP classes, challenges that students might encounter while selecting summer session courses, and other factors.

## General Program Analysis and Recommendations

Each September, the IGP call for proposals is sent to the summer session deans and the department chairs. Verbal announcements are made at the campus-wide “chairs’ breakfast” and at many individual school and college faculty meetings. Announcements stress the opportunity for resident faculty to develop or add a new class to the summer course offerings. Faculty and department chairs submit proposals to their respective summer session deans, who rank the proposals across departments according to college needs. Summer session administration reviews each proposal, relying heavily upon the recommendations of the summer session deans, before making final decisions on grant recipients. Summer session has funded most proposals that meet the IGP criteria, with the annual budget of \$100,000 to \$125,000.

From 1997 through 2009, all schools and colleges participated in the IGP, and 455 courses were offered—an average of 35 courses funded each year. Figure 1 presents IGP enrollments by individual college/school.

Forty percent of the IGP classes were taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty, a lower rate than the 65% in summer session generally. Increasing the participation of tenured or tenure-track faculty in Summer Session has been a long-standing goal at CU-Boulder, and the IGP can assist by funding only tenured and tenure-track faculty proposals rather than the present practice of funding non-tenure-track faculty as well. For this strategy to work, however, a more robust internal marketing campaign will need to be implemented to increase awareness of the IGP among faculty and also to clearly communicate the advantages of the program. Other benefits to tenured or tenure-track faculty could be implemented in partnership with the departments. The Department of German and Slavic Languages, for example, incentivizes its tenured and tenure-track faculty’s



**Figure 1:** IGP Enrollments by College/School, 1997–2009

participation in the IGP by returning any revenue share funds generated by IGP courses to the teaching faculty's travel accounts. Future research should include interviews with faculty to determine whether incentives would encourage participation in the IGP.

The program has funded primarily undergraduate classes, with only 31% graduate courses offered. Most of the graduate courses are cross-listed and offered at both 4000 (senior) and 5000 (graduate) levels. The smaller number of graduate courses funded by the program reflects the limited number of graduate courses offered in summer session overall.

Analysis of the standard FCQ results (evaluation of course and faculty by students) indicates that IGP courses are evaluated well by students and that the rating of IGP courses and instructors corresponds to overall summer session rankings. Enrollment management criteria for the IGP mimic those for summer session. Over the course of 13 years, approximately 10% (46) of IGP courses were cancelled because of low enrollment, which is similar to the overall summer session cancellation rate.

Of the 455 courses offered through the IGP, the vast majority (72%) had been previously offered in the fall and spring semesters before they received IGP funds; these courses met the criteria of having been offered as "new" to Summer Session but not "new" to the curriculum. These courses have provided students greater choice in the summer session offerings. Examples are Introduction to Studio Art (Fine Arts), Economics in Action (Economics), Introduction to Islam

(History), and World Music (Music). These courses meet student needs for major, minor, and core requirements and help to meet fluctuations in student enrollment patterns. They enable departments to offer appointments to faculty interested in teaching during a specific summer session and in general to offer courses that they would otherwise not be able to schedule because of limited budgets. Furthermore, the IGP courses previously offered in the fall and spring semesters provide departments with the opportunity to increase their student credit hour production and to increase their revenue share.

Sixty-five IGP courses (14%) have been offered again only in summer session. These repeated IGP offerings expanded total summer session annual offerings of both large and small departments and include such varied courses as Intensive Beginning German (German), Topics in Popular Culture (English), US Race and Ethnic Relations (Ethnic Studies), Language and Literacy across the Curriculum (Education), Spanish for Family Practice (Law), and Thermodynamics for Engineers (Engineering). The last two courses were completely new and were “incubated” in summer session before becoming a part of the regular curriculum.

The first incubated course, Spanish for Family Practice (Law), represented an opportunity to work with a small, targeted group of students. The class was pioneered by the assistant dean of the School of Law at the time, to meet student requests and needs. The course was originally faculty-specific; however, the School of Law now plans to offer this course during the regular academic year with a different faculty member.

The second incubated course, Thermodynamics for Engineers (Engineering), was pioneered as an IGP course in summer 2004 and has since been offered consistently each summer in an intensive, smaller class format as part of the regular college curriculum. While the subject matter is now also offered in the fall and spring semesters, the pedagogy and projects are different in summer because of the smaller class size and intensive format. As the examples above illustrate, Summer Session and the IGP specifically can provide an environment and funds for innovation. Unfortunately, only a very few IGP courses have been truly innovative or new, leading to their incorporation into the regular curricula. A more robust marketing campaign, as proposed earlier, that clearly communicates the benefits of creating a new course, such as testing ideas for a book or research, might increase faculty participation. The IGP should consider developing a partnership with departmental and college curriculum oversight committees to create an informal mechanism for piloting new courses and to explore other ways of fostering greater innovation.

Eight percent of the 455 IGP courses were not offered in summer session again. No discernible patterns were found, with one exception: courses targeted to a narrow niche audience (such as band teachers). These courses had less success in meeting enrollment minimums, most likely because of the difficulty of promotion and making the target audience aware of the class. When a course is offered for a niche audience, Summer Session should develop marketing campaigns specific to these audiences to help increase course awareness. Given the potentially experimental nature of some IGP courses, student demand may be unknown before a course is offered, which may also contribute to cancellation. Closer coordination with the chairs and the enrollment management team in each department may be necessary to identify proposals that better meet departmental and student needs based upon fluctuations in the number of majors/minors, changes in curriculum requirements, and faculty leaves.

## Motivations of Schools and Colleges for Participation in the IGP

The summer session deans were interviewed to gain an understanding of the role of the IGP and its impact on each school and college and for recommendations on improvements to the program. The motivation for IGP participation is consistent across the schools and colleges and includes the opportunity to offer classes new to the curriculum, to meet student needs for required classes or for new subject matter, to provide faculty an opportunity to experiment with pedagogy, and to generally broaden the class offerings. The summer session deans made these comments:

- “The program allows small colleges to expand their summer offerings.”
- “This program allows our department to satisfy demand by students.”
- “This is money on the table to enhance my summer offerings. Why wouldn’t we participate?”
- “This is a great program—a way to provide new classes and to help students.”

Summer session deans evaluate the IGP proposals against the need to balance core, major, and general education classes within the overall summer course offerings. They monitor enrollment in the fall and spring and carefully weigh students’ demand for summer classes and faculty’s desire to teach. The summer session deans encourage the addition of new classes reflecting faculty and student interest. The following comments express the importance of the IGP to individual schools/colleges and departments:

- “I participate to take advantage of an opportunity!”
- “The summer session incentive plan is hugely important to us. We have to participate.”
- “This is a way to help students take specific new classes that are outside the catalog.”
- “Without this opportunity we would have fewer classes, less enrollment and fewer students. Summer session would suffer.”

In addition to the shared reasons for participation, schools/colleges, and departments have specific motivations.

Within Arts and Sciences, departments want to meet student demand and serve the needs of the major, minor, and general education students. They use the IGP program to add classes that would not be possible under the current university financial model and to meet increases in demand for classes:

- “It is a struggle to offer all the classes we need for students in the fall and spring and with our summer budget. This is a way to expand our offerings.”

Many departments use the program to provide funding for tenured or tenure-track and instructor faculty:

- “I understood that my funding was from a different source but the chair did all the work.”

- “As the chair, the IGP provides a way to guarantee an additional teaching opportunity to our tenured faculty.”
- “The number of faculty that want to participate in summer session has increased dramatically; this is one way for me to meet that need.”

The School of Education and the College of Music share similar motivations in participating in the program. Both provide classes for their majors, as service classes for other colleges, and for practicing teachers and educators in the summer. Both have used the IGP program to develop classes for all three segments of their population. The program allows faculty to develop classes that meet the changing needs of practitioners and to explore new subjects and new pedagogies. These are some of the comments:

- “This program is a godsend and has helped launch new classes to meet student and faculty needs.”
- “We offer most of our classes in cohorts on a regular schedule. Summer is the only time to add something new.”

The summer session dean of the School of Education maintains a two-year calendar to ensure that students have the opportunity to meet their graduation requirements. The IGP grants provide an opportunity to augment the classes routinely scheduled and to enrich class options.

The College of Engineering (COE) participates in order to expand class offerings and to meet student demand or interest. The COE actively encourages students near completion of the doctorate to participate as instructors. College classes have included oversubscribed courses such as the Humanities for Engineers writing class (topics include *Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*) and Introduction to Computer Science, which utilizes a smaller format and expanded lab hours. The following comments sum up the COE participation:

- “Faculty take responsibility for helping students graduate. Offering a needed class is one way to aid students.”
- “Offer classes that are need driven—students need to take the classes but have a new topic or twist.”

The summer session dean of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SOJ) expressed support for the program and frustration that he hasn’t been able to offer successful IGP graduate classes. He has actively sought faculty who want to teach graduate classes in the summer. While graduate classes require enrollment of only seven students, many offered don’t reach that threshold. He attributes the lack of graduate enrollment to the lack of available summer graduate appointments with tuition remission. The SOJ also used the IGP classes to feature visiting practitioners; such classes included Special Topics: War and Reporting, and Images of Africa in the American Media. The challenge of expanded graduate offerings was expressed:

- “To expand graduate offerings requires a broader conversation about the role of graduate students in the summer and their degree progress.”

## Motivations of Faculty for Participation in the IGP

Several themes emerged from faculty about their motivations to offer summer session courses. Many were motivated by the additional income that teaching in summer session brings, especially during the past few years, when salaries have remained constant. One faculty member said, “The IGP program is a lifeline for faculty who need the additional money offered by summer teaching.” One of the nonfinancial reasons to offer a summer class was faculty’s passionate interest in the course subject matter. Not only did faculty have the opportunity to teach classes that were not part of their fall/spring assignments, but they also tested ideas for a book, received feedback from students, and “brought teaching together with what [they] write about and research.”

Other faculty teach in summer to provide service: they “want to be valuable to people.” Faculty design classes based upon interest and requests from students, who are often practicing teachers needing to expand their knowledge; they receive credits toward reaccreditation and/or meet criteria for a salary increase.

Some faculty simply love to teach and view summer session as another opportunity to teach a course because of curricular limitations in the fall and spring semesters. For these faculty, “teaching is almost like a ministry; [they] love students and see them at their best.” One faculty member shared his longing to create a community of students who are engaged with their interests.

A few faculty mentioned that the IGP provides an opportunity to try something new or unique, which includes not only a new topic but also a different structure of classes. Two- or three-week intensive classes are exciting because they allow for a concentrated learning community. Because students usually take only one or two courses during summer, they have time to stay after class and take advantage of office hours that provide the one-on-one consultation that makes for most effective learning. Since the structure of summer session courses is more flexible, faculty have the opportunity to get to know students better and work with them in a smaller setting and a more relaxed atmosphere. There is more time for innovation, and it is easier to get immersed in the class.

## Reasons for Non-Participation in the IGP

Several Arts and Sciences departments have never participated in the program while others participate intermittently. Surprisingly, given almost 2,000 majors, the Department of Psychology has not participated regularly. The chair assumed responsibility for not providing more information to the faculty and encouraging participation. This was echoed by other chairs. The timing of the request for proposals at the beginning of the school year may result in less emphasis by chairs. Because faculty may not be aware of the opportunity, they do not actively seek to participate:

- “We should participate. I’ll need to make more of an effort.”
- “To tell you the truth, as a new chair, I was overwhelmed. I just wasn’t paying attention.”

- “You need to find a way to inform the faculty, not just the chairs. They are the ones making personal decisions about teaching.”
- “Not part of the culture of our department to do this—but it could be.”

Other departments that have not yet participated cite similar reasons, including faculty research, lack of awareness or interest, and chairs’ inaction in encouraging faculty participation. The department chairs or summer session deans gave these reasons:

- “My faculty are involved in research during the summer session.”
- “This is an attractive opportunity but I don’t know how to sell it to faculty who don’t want to teach.”
- “I accept full responsibility. I knew about the program but it comes at the beginning of the school year and I’m not thinking about summer.”
- “We have not been active participants in the program and the responsibility lies with us. We have not done enough to promote the program and to actively involve the faculty.”

The Leeds School of Business has not actively participated in the IGP program. Reasons for nonparticipation include a fairly regulated curriculum, a consistent need for summer session students to take “regular” classes, and a lack of interest from faculty who may spend the summer doing research or consulting. A lack of administrative support and consistency by summer session deans and department chairs may also have contributed to their low participation.

The role of the chair in making faculty aware of the program is the key. Several departments have participated in the past but are not currently participating. Former chairs more actively informed and recruited faculty to submit proposals or to teach classes. When asked why there was a change of role, the chairs gave these responses:

- “It was one more thing on my plate and I didn’t follow through.”
- “This is something that would help our students. I don’t know why we haven’t participated. We used to.”
- “We have become more research oriented, with tenured faculty using the summer for their work. But we could take advantage of this during Maymester.”

## Conclusion

The Instructional Grant Program at CU-Boulder was created to provide a greater variety of courses in summer session, to foster greater curricular innovation, and to serve as a course incubator. The results of the present study indicate that the IGP has been successful in providing courses that would not otherwise have been offered in summer session, thereby expanding the variety of summer session offerings. The IGP added an average of 35 courses per summer session, which represents nearly 7% of all courses offered. There is a potential for increasing the number of IGP courses offered; however, the study has found that greater involvement by department chairs is key to greater faculty participation. Several chairs who were interviewed admitted that

communication regarding the IGP gets lost in the vast amount of other information they receive and process, and sometimes the IGP simply is not on top of their priority lists. Therefore, the opportunities that the IGP provides may not be clear to the faculty, who are the essential participants in the success of IGP. Direct communication with faculty in addition to communication with chairs may result in better dissemination of information and consequently an increased interest by faculty to participate in the IGP.

In addition to testing whether the IGP increases course variety, the study also examined whether the IGP fosters greater curricular innovation. The results are somewhat disappointing, because the vast majority of IGP courses were part of the regular curriculum. Summer session administrators should develop a document and/or video explaining the advantages of the program, and innovation in particular. This may allow faculty to imagine how truly new courses might benefit their teaching and research. A partnership with departmental and college curriculum oversight committees could provide a mechanism for piloting new courses, resulting in benefits to the faculty, departments, and summer session students. Further research needs to be conducted to identify other actions for encouraging innovation among faculty. Greater efforts to increase innovation would allow the Summer Session, with the assistance of IGP grants, to become a course incubator.

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## Biographies

After earning her MS in marketing from the University of Colorado at Denver in 2008, Silvie Kilworth worked as a marketing research manager for three years at the University of Colorado Boulder's Division of Continuing Education. She currently manages the Extraordinary Program at the division.

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