OPENING: The meeting was called to order by D. Wade, Chair.

I. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Approval of the agenda with the additional of one item was moved by D. Wade; agenda approved.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Approval of Minutes

R. Blecksmith requested that the minutes be distributed electronically in text format in addition to MicroSoft Word format. E. Seaver indicated that this could begin this next month. **It was moved by D. Wade to approve the minutes; motion passed.**

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Undisclosed prerequisites

D. Wade referred to an email from D. Sinason of Accountancy indicating that he had received another story of a student in a Biology course who had completed all the listed prerequisites, but when she appeared for the class, the instructor added a course to that prerequisite list. The student subsequently dropped the course. D. Sinason said that this issue was discussed last spring at APASC and asked for an update on the status of this topic. D. Wade indicated that there were a couple of concerns here regarding implicit rather than explicit prerequisites. If, in fact, the instructor is providing a suggested prior course that might be helpful for students to have when taking the course it may be simply helpful information. But it may not be quite as helpful if the student doesn’t find out about it until the first class meeting. On the other hand, if the department is enforcing an undisclosed prerequisite as a department requirement without listing it in the catalog or submitting it for curricular review, that is another issue altogether. If the department is actually removing students from class or encouraging withdrawal, that is a very serious matter.
It was moved by J. Parker, seconded by R. Blecksmith to table this issue until the next APASC meeting so that previous minutes from last spring can be reviewed to see what discussion and action was taken at that time. Motion passed.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Degrees with Distinction

D. Wade referred the committee to a catalog change forwarded by the Advising Group to modify the criteria used for calculating Degrees with Distinction to be based on a GPA cutoff rather than based on class rank.

The rationale for this change was to suggest a policy that is more in line with what other Illinois public and MAC universities are using as their criteria. It would also allow for significantly more students to be eligible for Degrees with Distinction. For example in May 2004, 361 students would be eligible for Degrees with Distinction using a GPA cutoff as compared with 205 that were eligible under the current criteria. This change would also give students a GPA target to shoot for as the cutoffs would be available in advance instead of being calculated after the term was over.

It was clarified that the GPA that is used to calculate Degrees with Distinction is based on the terms including the last 60 hours.

Our current system means that there are fewer NIU Graduates with Distinction than there are from other universities of similar size and scope which is a disservice to NIU graduates.

It was moved by D. Wade, seconded by C. Rollman to make the following change in the undergraduate catalog. Under Degrees with Distinction:

A Degrees with Distinction are awarded as follows, dependant on a student=s Grade Point Average at the time of graduation: Summa Cum Laude, 3.90 through 4.00; Magna Cum Laude, 3.75 through 3.899; Cum Laude, 3.50 through 3.749. Motion passed.

B. Grade Change Policy

D. Wade reported that the request from the UCC to consider a change in the undergraduate grading scheme was referred back to APASC to decide whether to retain the current ABCDF system or to propose some variation on this scheme including pluses and/or minuses.

The goal at present is to determine what constituencies might need to be surveyed related to this issue: student groups such as the Student Association, Honors, and students campus wide. Polling might also include the faculty, graduate school and professional schools such as the Law School. This would help to determine if students are satisfied with the current system.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

§ We need to determine what types of grade schemes are possible given our computer systems. Any change to our current scheme would be dependant upon a new grade collection and processing system as the
current computer system cannot handle incremental grades. Any change would have to wait until we eliminated reliance upon grade roll scan sheets and implemented some sort of web-based submission of grades.

There are two functions of grades on the transcript. One is to determine the status of a student for a variety of internal decisions, such as scholarships or satisfactory academic progress. The other is for external purposes such as transfer to another institution or admission to a graduate or professional school, or for employment. We have to take external functions into account and not just the function of grades within the university itself.

There was a question as to why the faculty at NIU are interested in changing the grading system as all but one of the other schools in the state use an ABCDF system. This includes both the state universities and the community colleges. Since there is a lot of student mobility within Illinois, we must be aware of how the grades are treated in transfer.

Some faculty felt that an incremental system would give more shaded evaluation of student performance and may actually have an upward effect on GPA-s. It would provide more opportunities to reward students and would be more accurate.

Minus grades are problematic in that it would negatively effect a situation where a minimum grade of C or B is required. For example, one C- could make the difference between probation and good standing. A C- would be a problem for classes where a C or better is required. Some felt that a plus only system would have the same disadvantage in that an instructor might be encouraged to give a student a C+ rather than a B. One A- could also knock an Honors student out of a 4.00 Grade Point Average.

Incremental grading systems have resulted in substantially increased numbers of grade changes at other institutions as students feel that they are closer to the next level and are more dissatisfied with their grades as the increments become closer together.

The fundamental question is that any change must provide a significant benefit to students.

It was moved by D. Wade, seconded by K. Millis to table this item pending receipt of additional information from Registration and Records.

It was moved by R. Blecksmith, seconded by D. Wade to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned.

Minutes submitted by Don Larson.