NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

ADMISSIONS POLICIES AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE
(APASC)

Minutes of Meeting #170
May 4, 2011

Approved

Present: A. Radasanu (LAS); S. Arnett (HHS); J. Wolfskill (LAS/MATH); P. Hartman (EDUC/TLRN); E. Klonoski (VPA); D. Zinger (EET/TECH); M. Pritchard (Council of Adv. Deans); D. Wade (BUS/MGMT)

Ex Officio: S. Eaton (EDUC SERV & PROG); D. Changnon (VICE PROVOST); E. Seaver (VICE PROVOST)

Absent: M. Gillis (TRANSFER CENTER); B. Hemphill (STUDENT AFFAIRS); B. Goldenberg (UCC)

Visitors: S. Warber (REGISTRATION AND RECORDS); L. Allison (REGISTRATION AND RECORDS); D. Smith (CATALOG/ CURRICULUM COORDINATOR); A. Rosenbaum (FACULTY SENATE)

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

I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

   It was moved by D. Wade, seconded by P. Hartman to adopt the agenda. Motion passed.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

   A. Electronic Approval of Minutes (04/13/11)

   B. Report from Advising Deans

       M. Pritchard indicated that there was no report from the advising deans.

III. OLD BUSINESS

   A. Appeal of Plus/Minus Grading

       D. Wade stated that APASC voted 9 to 1 to make no change to NIU’s current grading system. He instructed the members of APASC that to reconsider this matter they would have to bring it back to the table. The floor was then opened to Alan Rosenbaum (chair of the faculty senate committee).
A. Rosenbaum stated that the faculty senate was told it would not be a financial burden to change the current grading system to the plus/minus system and that the software was already in place and being used by the School of Law. He indicated that he was informed that the issues of a “C” or better to enter or continue in a limited admission or limited retention program could be handled.

He stated that the vote taken by the faculty senate represented the will of the faculty at large. He also stated that the faculty senate members went back to their respective departments and polled their departments and the vote was 36 departments (yes), 3 (no) and 4 (abstentions).

He stated that there was concern that the faculty senate did not tell faculty members that the switch to plus/minus grading was not mandatory. He explained that this is an academic freedom issue and faculty members can chose whether or not to use the plus/minus grading system.

D. Wade indicated that it was the lack of mandatory that was a concern to faculty not the inclusion of mandatory. Those in favor of the plus/minus grading system preferred that it be mandatory.

M. Pritchard indicated that the faculty senate’s motion said “to allow faculty…” which was interpreted as optional.

A. Rosenbaum stated that the faculty senate feels strongly that the faculty should have the authority to establish or change the grading system and that the vote represents the voice of the faculty. He also stated that the faculty senate were upset that APASC did not adopt the plus/minus grading system.

A. Rosenbaum heard from Western Illinois University that the change for them was seamless. He stated that the faculty senate asked the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign how they dealt with the issue of “C” or better requirement and when the grade of a “C-” was received. He stated that Urbana-Champaign allowed students to repeat any course. He said that this would be a minor change in our catalog language where it says a student can repeat a course in which they receive a “D” or “F”. He suggested that it read, “a student may repeat a course in which a grade lower than a “C” was received”. Another option that he suggested which UIC uses was that a student be able to repeat any course with the rule that the student receive the repeated course grade.

A. Rosenbaum stated that Urbana-Champaign has what is called a replacement policy which is university wide. He stated that typically the original grade and the new grade are averaged and calculated into the GPA. The replacement policy would mean only counting the new grade. At Urbana-Champaign a student can only do this with 10 credits or 4 courses whichever is smaller. He indicated that this would solve the “C-” problem. He also stated that the plus/minus grading system works fine if you make a few changes.
E. Seaver indicated that the “C” or better issue would have to go to the faculty governance system. He also indicated that the faculty would have to decide if a “C-” was a “C”.

A. Rosenbaum stated that the faculty senate would like APASC to reconsider their decision regarding the plus/minus grading system.

P. Hartman stated that there is a new financial aid rule which will only pay for one repeat of a passing course. This starts in July 2011.

M. Pritchard stated that teacher certification is not the only one with a “C” or better requirement. She stated there are a huge number of limited admissions and limited retention programs that have that requirement also. She indicated that she did a catalog search for “C” or better and it appears 125 times. She said that there is a significant cost to such a change.

M. Pritchard also stated concerns of one of their competitive programs where the cut off line for being admitted or not is finer tuned than a tenth of a point. She said that the difference of one student receiving an “A-” and another a “B+” in the same course could mean one getting in the program and the other not.

J. Wolfskill indicated that there are many limited admission/retention programs which among other things require a GPA requirement. He stated that without some kind of evidence on how the GPA would be impacted under a new grading system, departments would be left groping in the dark. He stated that this has implications of staffing courses because in most cases that is why they justify limited admissions and retention programs. He also stated that there was potential for imbalance if there is a shift in GPAs that may or may not be predictable and would not have to be all that large.

J. Wolfskill asked about students qualifying for university honors with their GPA cut. He asked if there is evidence how the overall GPA would be affected if at all. He asked if a reasonable prediction could be made whether the honors student going forward has the same rate as the honor student going backward. He said he feels there are some serious equity issues.

A. Rosenbaum stated that the plus/minus grading system is a very common grading system. He stated that universities using the plus/minus system made the adjustment rather quickly.

A. Rosenbaum stated that the system we have now may be leading to an inflation of grades. He indicated that professors are more likely to dip down lower to give the A’s and B’s with our current system.

A. Rosenbaum stated the faculty feel that their voice is not heard. He stated that the faculty senate would like to think their voice is heard by their own faculty. He stated that the faculty senate feel that by APASC ignoring or not supporting the faculty senate’s vote for the plus/minus grading system the power of the faculty is diminished.
D. Wade stated that when faculty were informed about these other issues, they weighed in unanimously against the plus/minus grading system.

A. Rosenbaum asked who were the faculty against this and if they were teaching faculty. D. Wade indicated that these faculty were on the curriculum committee and not only were they teaching faculty, but these faculty members were involved in service activities on working committees.

J. Wolfskill stated that his objection was that there was no evidence that the faculty senate or academic affairs community considered in detail the implications of a change in the grading system.

J. Wolfskill stated that he would like to see these details put into policy recommendations. He stated there needed to be a policy for “C-” grades recommended and evidence provided to support that recommendation. He asked what kind of impact the plus/minus grading system would have on the GPA requirement of dozens of limited admission programs and if it would be necessary to raise or lower the GPA requirement by .05. He also stated that recommendations that included financial aid implications needed to be presented.

E. Klonoski asked what faculty support would have been like if they fully understood all of the ramifications.

M. Pritchard stated that APASC and the curriculum committee would have to change grading policy language in the undergraduate catalog if the plus/minus grading system was implemented.

J. Wolfskill stated that the official definition of current grades would have to be revised and new definitions would be needed for the plus/minus grading system.

There was no motion made to bring the plus/minus grading back to the table.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Selection of Faculty Chair for 2011-2012

D. Wade volunteered to serve as faculty chair for another year.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Minutes submitted by Lisa Allison.