ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL
Minutes of March 7, 2011
3 p.m., Holmes Student Center – 505

Present: Alden, Baumgartner, Cassidy, Dawson, Falkoff, Gordon, Gorman, Jung, Koren, Marcellus, Matuszewich, Novak, Otieno, Simpson, Ye

Guests: Donna Askins, Research Associate, Office of the Provost; Carolinda Douglass, Director, Office of Assessment Services

The meeting was called to order at 3:10 p.m. The APC spring meeting schedule was distributed to the APC members.

APC members were asked to provide recommendations for changes in the program review guidelines. The latest version of the guidelines will be sent via email, and council members will be asked to provide recommendations electronically.

The Illinois General Assembly Appropriations Committee budget shows less revenues than those upon which the governor based his budget. Pension reform will probably be something that is part of the budget process, and there is a group working on pension issues. Pension reform has been discussed at the University Benefits Committee (UBC) meetings, and the UBC has created a new webpage that has information regarding pension and benefit issues. The pension code is part of the State of Illinois Constitution and it would take an electoral referendum to overrule the Constitution. Another item being discussed is the tax free status portion of health care that retirees receive.

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of November 8, 2010, and the motion passed unanimously.

The next item on the agenda is to elect a representative to the University Assessment Panel (UAP). The APC has two representatives on the UAP; one is elected, and one is appointed by the provost. The UAP meets twice a month on the first and third Fridays from 10 a.m. until noon. In the fall, the primary work of the UAP is to review updated assessment plans, and in the spring the primary work of the UAP is to review assessment plans from academic and student support units. Marc Simpson volunteered to serve as the APC elected member on the UAP.

The 2010 First Year Composition Assessment Report is the next item on the agenda. This report is an analysis of first year students’ writing abilities, and this is the third year that this information has been compiled. There were 46 students selected at random from English 103 and 104 courses, and the project looked at how students’ writing improved over time. The rubric that was used for the University Writing Project was also used for this project. Most students met or exceeded expectations. This year the scores for 103 and 104 were almost the same. There continues to be issues with presentation (grammar, sentence structure, etc.), which was also reported in the University Writing Project analysis. Also students in 103 and 104 struggled with critical thinking. The writing presence declined between 103 and 104. It is hard to interpret what this means. These are consistent results; when students are learning how to write better, they usually do worse before
they improve. It means we have areas for improvement, and students have issues that remain issues after completing 103. All of the faculty have a role in improving these scores. We are looking for ways to use this feedback, so please contact Carolinda Douglass if you have any recommendations.

The APC turned to the 2009-2010 Annual Assessment Update Report. Academic programs are asked every year to provide data on two assessment methods and how the feedback is used. For the past four years there has been 100 percent compliance in reporting. For the past two years we have been implementing an online process to report these data. This year all departments will be asked to complete the report online using Blackboard, and the Office of Assessment Services is working with the colleges’ Senates to help facilitate online training for this process. There is also a tutorial available on the website for individuals to use. When the feedback from the Office of Assessment Services is completed, it will be put into the Blackboard system. Table 3 reports the percentage of academic programs meeting the criteria. We still have a way to go in meeting all the criteria; 72 percent of all the academic programs meet all the criteria. We need to do better at identify targets. The evidence section was problematic for quite awhile, but this has improved. The data in the report are also broken down by college. If there are ideas on how the university could use these results, please contact the Office of Assessment Services. The office would also like feedback on how we could help people meet the criteria.

The next item on the agenda is the College Portrait that is an initiative by four-year public universities that are members of APLU and AASCU to supply basic, comparable information on the undergraduate experience. NIU has been participating in the College Portrait since 2009. This initiative came out of the Spellings Commission in order to make information available to perspective college students and their parents. The objectives are to provide a useful tool for students during the college search process; to provide information that is transparent, comparable, and understandable; to demonstrate accountability and stewardship to the public, and to measure educational outcomes to identify and enhance effective educational practices. The College Portrait was developed to provide a common web template to share information with the public. There are several standard data elements within the College Portrait, and there are also unique data elements that NIU was allowed to select. NIU is using the National Survey on Student Engagement to provide data for the student experiences/perceptions. We are now moving into the next phase of the project, which is adding information on student learning outcomes. One requirement for this piece is a standardized test must be used, and NIU will be using the College Learning Assessment (CLA) test that measures communication, analytical reasoning, and critical thinking. Scores can demonstrate “value added” to the students’ learning experiences from freshman to senior years. We’re proposing to have this test course embedded. Having something noted on students’ transcripts might also be helpful. Community colleges are also involved in a similar process, and we are trying to learn more about this process and how we can work together on these processes.

The last item on the agenda is the IBHE Public Agenda 2010 Accountability Report. The public agenda is the statewide master plan for higher education. The IBHE is trying to function in a way that all of their efforts and initiatives tie into this master plan. There are four goals and the IBHE will report out information on each on the goals periodically. This report reports on goal 1: educational attainment. It is important for us to see the kind of reporting that the IBHE is doing. NIU will be asked to set targets to work towards, and then we will be asked about the progress we have made in reaching our targets. There will be more and more of this type of reporting for us in the future.
On another related budget issue, pay for productivity is getting a lot of attention at the state level, and 24 other states have this type of structure. Things are changing dramatically in the way we are being looked at at the state and federal levels. We have a lot of changes ahead.

The meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Cradduck