ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL
Minutes of October 4, 2010
3 p.m., Holmes Student Center – 505

Present: Alden, Baumgartner, Cassidy, Dawson, Falkoff, Gordon, Gorman, Jung, Koren, Marcellus, Matuszewich, Mini, Prawitz

Guests: Donna Askins, Research Associate, Office of the Provost; Betty Birner, Director, Graduate Studies, Department of English; Brad Bond, Acting Dean, Graduate School; Dave Changnon, Acting Associate Vice Provost, Office of the Provost; Carolinda Douglass, Director, Office of Assessment Services; Philip Eubanks, Chair, Department of English; Gail Jacky, Director, University Writing Center; Christopher McCord, Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Kathleen Renk, Director, Undergraduate Studies, Department of English; Jeff Reynolds, Assistant to the Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m. It was announced that the next meeting (November 1) will begin at 3:30 p.m.

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of September 20, 2010, and the motion passed unanimously.

Christopher McCord, dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Jeff Reynolds, assistant to the dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Philip Eubanks, chair, Department of English; Betty Birner, director of graduate studies, Department of English; Kathleen Renk, director of undergraduate studies, Department of English; and Gail Jacky, director, University Writing Center were introduced.

The dean and the director provided an overview of the University Writing Center (UWC). The UWC has done a remarkable job, particularly when you take into account the resources it has available. Recently, the center received additional resources from the strategic planning initiative. The center is housed within the college, but it is a university resource. It is a challenge for the college to find an appropriate way to provide resources for this center.

The dean and the chair provided an overview of the Department of English. The Department of English is a full spectrum department. The freshman writing program is an innovative part of the program, and the department serves students in this program while also serving its own majors. There are a large number of students seeking teacher certification; the faculty are dedicated to English education. The department is looking at interdisciplinary opportunities too and has a very complex mission. The technical writing program is a distinctive strength, and the department is looking for ways to provide engaged learning opportunities for students.

Marc Falkoff will present the APC subcommittee report. The members of the subcommittee were thanked for their hard work and assistance in writing the subcommittee report. The UWC report was well written.
The center has many strengths. It serves a tremendous number of students on a very tight budget and has a dedicated staff. Students report excellent results with the assistance provided by the UWC staff. Graduate and undergraduate students are involved as tutors and receive valuable teaching experience. It is remarkable how many activities the center has engaged in.

There are a few discussion points. Clearly there is a need for more resources. The biggest issue mentioned in the UWC’s report was that it was difficult to assess the center. How do you measure improvement in student writing? It is important to figure this out so you can see where you are now and where you want to be in the future. The center relies on undergraduates to serve as tutors and states that this is cost effective. Is this good? How do you know this is the appropriate number of undergraduates to hire? The center can hire two and a half FTE undergraduate tutors for the same amount as one FTE graduate tutor. This also allows the center a chance to disperse its staff. Students bring skills from their discipline, and there is a rigorous application process in place for selecting tutors. The center also provides a nine-week training course for our tutors where they are required to observe experienced tutors multiple times, and each new tutor has a mentor for the first semester. The tutor and mentor meet on a weekly basis. Tutors are trained to be effective readers. We have found that the undergraduate tutors are very reliable. At the end of the semester there is a staff meeting held to discuss strengths and weaknesses. The director of the center will be attending a workshop next spring on writing center assessment. It is clear that the center has limited resources coupled with high demand. Maybe the center is stretching itself too thin.

The number of ESL students utilizing the center has increased tremendously. The ESL center is only open part-time and has a much smaller staff. The ESL students are a very important part of the UWC’s clientele. The center staff devotes a great deal of time and effort to outreach. This is done so people know where the center is. The center also wants to support the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. Undergraduate and graduate students are involved in the outreach activities as part of their professional development. Is the center staff adequate? The staffing is not adequate; there is a potential clientele base of 30,000 people. The center staff will probably never be enough.

Approximately 150 to 160 students have been served using online sessions; this is a relatively small number of students. Does the center assess if this service is worthwhile? The center is monitoring this, and more and more of our students are non-traditional students. There is not a process in place to assess this initiative, but we are working on a student survey. The center is rethinking its benchmarks. Writing centers don’t do things that are quantifiable. The center is working with students in a mechanical engineering course too. The information gathered in this process will provide feedback to the center staff. Also a portfolio will be created, which will allow us to assess writing.

A recommendation for the future is to develop and implement an assessment plan. The center is thinking about doing focused groups with clients who come consistently to the center, clients who come once to the center, and students who never come to the center to gather data about their perceptions of the UWC. A faculty survey is also being developed.

The APC turned to the review of the Department of English. This is a strong department with impressive faculty who are highly qualified.
The department has several strengths. The integrated “smart” and “digital” technologies into teaching is one of the strengths.

An area for discussion is the department needs more funding to support technology. Another area for discussion is faculty diversity; there is one minority faculty member. The department does see this as a pressing problem, and the department would be better off if it were more diverse. The gender distribution in the department is almost 50/50. The department has been quite aggressive in its searches; and it has made sure that the faculty are open to interviewing people from all kinds of backgrounds. On the rare occasion when the department has brought someone of color to campus, it has asked for advice on what can be done to make the candidate feel welcomed. The chair has also attended diversity workshops, and at one workshop it was pointed out that it is helpful to have someone who is the same ethnicity as the candidate involved in the interview process. The diversity issue is a widespread problem across many disciplines.

The subcommittee recommended recruiting from historically black universities and colleges as a possible strategy. It is apparent that the department has been thinking about different recruitment initiatives.

The B.A. in English is a very strong program, and it has a strong minority enrollment. The graduation rate increased 33 percent over the review period, and the students’ achievements are great. This is a cost-effective program.

The discussion points include the drop in the number of students obtaining teaching jobs after completing the teacher certification program and the decrease in participation in the internship program. Students completing the teacher certification program who sought teaching jobs had a 70 percent success rate during the review period, compared with a 100 percent success rate during the last review period. This is due to the economy; we are in an atmosphere of shrinking teaching forces. Even in the science areas there have been well-qualified students who have not been able to find teaching positions. The department works very hard with teacher certification students on how to seek employment, and it is able to track this. Since the last program review in 2002, companies have scaled back on their internships, so the department changed direction and started placing interns in non-profit agencies. Now we are holding our own on the number of internships. Also, due to budget constraints in 2005 or 2006, the internship coordinator position was reduced to a half-time position. There is still a high proportion of students who are involved in internships.

One of the recommendations for the future is to redo the internal benchmarking indicators section. There is a low response rate to the alumni surveys; therefore the program may not want to rely on these data, and drawing conclusions from these data is not very helpful. The indicators need to measure student achievements in some way. Something that might be good to measure is the number of graduates who earn teaching certificates and secure employment within five years of graduation, teacher certification exam results, the number of internship placements and measures of internship providers’ satisfaction with interns, and employers’ satisfaction with program graduates. These are good thoughts; the department is looking for things that would be good to know and trying to gather data on these things. The ideas are good, but there are problems with most of them. The employers’ satisfaction with the intern is part of the process. Gathering employers’ satisfaction with program graduates is problematic. Students who graduate with an English degree have transportable skills. These benchmarks are reasonable.
The APC turned to the M.A. in English part of the review. The discussion points are the minority enrollment and the number of degrees awarded to minorities. At the M.A. level only one minority student was enrolled in fall 2008 and only two in fall 2009. The minority enrollment is also very low at the Ph.D. level. For 2005, 2008, and 2009 there were three M.A. degrees awarded each year to minorities, and for 2007 there was one degree awarded to a minority. There is a strong undergraduate minority population but this has not translated into strong minority representation in the graduate programs. Usually the department doesn’t recruit from its own undergraduate program. At the summer meeting with the provost’s staff there was a discussion about making sure that our own undergraduate minority students are aware of graduate study possibilities, and this will be done. After minority students do enroll in the graduate program, they receive a lot of attention. The department tries to make sure that students are successful. The department also works with students to help them find funding sources if needed.

The Ph.D. in English is a strong and interesting program. Discussion points include time-to-degree and the lack of alumni involvement. The time-to-degree for doctoral students has been negatively impacted because the stipend amount for GAs and TAs is low. Some students opt to teach at the community college level, which lengthens the time-to-degree because students have less time to work on their dissertations. There also might be an issue with the foreign language requirement that impacts the time-to-degree. There have been some discussions about allowing a research tool to fulfill the foreign language requirement. The department would like to improve the time-to-degree, and it is a priority within the department. The department also serves part-time students. Some of the students in the program are traditional full-time students and others are working full-time and completing the program on a part-time basis. Sometimes the part-time students are not active in the program for a period of time. The low stipends are also an impediment. There is a concern that alumni are not actively involved in the intellectual life of the department. Keeping more connections with our alums would be a good idea. Right now the department is trying to find money to produce the Reavis Newsletter. Over the last year, the department has worked hard on contacting some of its alums; the department would like to do more of this.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Cradduck