Approved

Academic Planning Council
Minutes of October 10, 2011
3 p.m., Holmes Student Center – 505

Present: Abdel-Motaleb, Alden, Baumgartner, Birberick, Cassidy, Falkoff, Gordon, Jung, Koren, Matuszewich, Olson (for Dawson), Prawitz, Simpson, Ye

Guests: Gretchen Bisplinghoff, Undergraduate Program Director, Department of Communication; Brad Bond, Dean, Graduate School; Gary Burns, Chair, Department of Communication; Stephanie DeCicco, Assistant to the Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Carolinda Douglass, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Outcomes Assessment, Office of Assessment Services; Chris McCord, Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Kathleen Valde, Graduate Studies Director, Department of Communication; Karen Whedbee, Assistant Chair, Department of Communication

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m. It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of September 26, 2011, and the motion passed unanimously.

The schedule for follow-up on program reviews and interim reports on new/off-campus programs was distributed to the APC members. This is the last piece of section one “Committee” in the APC notebook.

Gary Burns, chair of the Department of Communication; Karen Whedbee, assistant chair of the Department of Communication; Gretchen Bisplinghoff, undergraduate program director in the Department of Communication; Kathleen Valde, graduate studies director in the Department of Communication; Chris McCord, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; and Stephanie DeCicco, assistant to the dean in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences were introduced.

Chris McCord provided an overview of the department. The Department of Communication is a large and very complex department, and it has one graduate program and two distinct undergraduate programs, both of which are quite sizeable. Every entering freshman takes COMS 100; the department has a large service mission. The department has a diverse mission, and it is diverse in the approaches to that mission. It spans the social sciences, humanities, and the arts. The complexity is also felt in the differing boundaries between faculty research expectations and the emphases and specializations because they do not all align. With this structure there are some challenges in staying on top of everything. Until recently the department has been housed in several different buildings. Space issues remain real issues for the department. The impact of February 14 on the department was very real. In the past the department was severely impacted as far as growth. Now we don’t have that issue; now we have declining enrollments. Some of the decline in enrollment is tied to declining demand for business majors and other issues that we have been looking at. There has also been significant turnover in the department leadership. It is now close to being fully staffed. There are a number of issues that we will continue to work on.

Gary Burns thanked the Office of the Provost, the APC subcommittee members, and the college office for all of the nice things they have said and the support that they have given to the department during the review process.
Marc Falkoff thanked the department for a terrific report. It is nice to learn about programs and departments and what they are doing within the university. He also thanked the members of subcommittee A. He said he would focus mostly on the discussion points as he presented the APC subcommittee report. The big issues are assessment activities, limited admissions, and enrollment.

There are many strengths noted in the departmental context section. The department has an interesting array of technological resources (telemetric lab, TV center, etc.). The department hosts local, regional, and international initiatives (speech camps, forensic program, etc.). The department has accomplished faculty who are professional and have received awards (Presidential Teaching Professors and Board of Trustees Professor).

One of the discussion points is space. Space is an issue all over campus, and the closing of Cole Hall has had an impact on this department. The department is spread across six different buildings (Reavis, Watson, Northern Television Center, DuSable, Zulauf, and Cole). The department is assigned half of the basement in Cole Hall, and it also used the lecture hall in Cole Hall for classes. My understanding is that the building will be scheduled for spring classes, and we hope to use this lecture space again. There were faculty offices in the basement of Cole, but most of the basement area was work space. The report states that the Northern Television Center is at risk for catastrophic failure. The TV center is the only building that is primarily assigned to the department, and we have been told that the electrical and HVAC systems have reached the end of their lifetime expectancy. The TV center is currently at full capacity. The department is suffering from a lack of space and funding. Essentially you would like to have more money and more faculty. The department also has offices in DuSable and Zulauf that have been assigned to us on a temporary basis. Being so spread out is a problem for us. We have six regular faculty who are sharing offices, all the instructors are in one bullpen, and the TAs are in two bullpens. In a recent search, one of the candidates said that sharing an office was an issue, but not a definitive issue. This ended up being a failed search.

Another discussion point is what the department is doing to improve publicity and communications efforts, alumni relations, and student recruitment. We are trying to do this in our spare time. We have a group that meets a few times a year to discuss what we can do and prioritizes what we should do. We have put up four electronic bulletin boards that display announcements, and a newsletter is in the works. At some point we would like to improve our recruitment efforts. We have an SPS person in journalism who we share with the Department of English and who is starting to work with current students and advisors at high schools. I would hope that we would do more of these things in the future. There are publications for student media advisors at the high school level where we can advertise (i.e., Quill and Scroll). We might have more than one advisory board. We have a group of prominent graduates from the journalism program from 30 years ago who are quite successful. These individuals come back every year for the journalism banquet. They help us place students into internships and they meet with student groups. Maybe we could form an advisory group from this group. One suggestion made by this group was to get the public relations part of the program certified by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). I think this is a good idea; it will require us to do some things we are not already doing; we would need a few more courses and another faculty member. If you decide to seek accreditation, the accrediting body should meet with all the faculty and some of the students. If we move forward on this initiative, all of the faculty will be invited to participate.

Falkoff turned to the review of the B.A./B.S. in Journalism program. This is an exciting time to be going off and pursuing a journalism degree.

The main discussion point is the assessment plan. The plan has not been fully implemented. Our assessment plan was approved in 2006-07; this plan included an exit examination and a writing sample.
The plan was starting to be implemented, and then there was a change in administration, so the plan did not get fully implemented. This semester we are going to implement the exit examination. All communication majors must take COMS252 which is a pre-requisite for other courses, and it serves as a gateway course. At the upper-division level we will look at the final examination and add some questions for assessment purposes. This will allow us to have information from a beginning course (COMS252) and an upper-division course. There is also a writing component in the internship. We will have pre-tests and post-tests to use for assessment data. The assessment criteria will be tied to program learning outcomes. Internships are mentioned as an important part of the assessment plan. What is your sense of internship opportunities for students now, and are you planning on expanding these opportunities? We have an internship coordinator in the college who will coordinate and hopefully recruit students and employers to expand internship opportunities. This person will focus on the humanities programs.

Another discussion point is how would a program centered on radio compete with programs in the area? I meant student radio as a curricular activity, not as a new program. Other institutions that we compete with provide this opportunity for students, and it also provides a good service to the community. This is something that the campus should have. If the campus had a broadcast station, this would be expensive. Having a student radio curricular activity would not be costly. We do have a few interns at WNIJ.

The program saw a sharp decline in enrollment over the review period (31 percent). How does the program plan on addressing this decline in enrollment? The enrollment in the journalism program is way up since the last review period. The last couple of years enrollment has declined. Is the program concerned about this? We are somewhat concerned. I think some of this decline is related to larger trends at the university and some is cyclical. We are trying to focus on advertising, connecting with people to send us their best students, and having events for potential students. Last year the summer camp was not held, but I think we should be doing this every year. The women and minority student enrollment looks robust, but the graduation rate might have dropped off. Is this a concern? We have noticed this, but I don’t know how to explain it. We have a National Association of Black Journalists group that is active on campus. We had another group that used to be active, but we lost the faculty advisor for this group.

The program has a large proportion of transfer students. How do you recruit these students? The undergraduate program advisor is very active at the community college level, and we are working on various internet sites. We are also working on developing a newsletter. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has a community college recruiter. Have you identified specific community colleges and talked to them about articulation to make your program more attractive? We have a lot of graduates who teach in the community colleges. Transfer credit is problematic since we are a two-year program. There are only a few general education courses, and it is difficult to have transfers come in and start taking courses in the major because of the way the major is structured. We can’t control what courses these students take at the community college level. The constraint is that the students need to take the courses here at NIU. There are also issues with the equipment and students needing to be familiar with what’s used at NIU as they complete degree requirements versus what they may have used at the community college. Aren’t students in journalism required to do a minor or a second major? Couldn’t this course work start at the community college level? Another opportunity is that the state is being connected via broadband, and I think the major community colleges will be hooked up to the broadband system. We might be able to provide course content that the community colleges can’t provide.

The APC turned to the review of the B.A./B.S. in Communication Studies program. The program contributes significantly to the general education program.
One main discussion point is the limited admission policy and the exit declare practice. Is the exit declare practice functioning? We think the limited admission policy was put into place around 25 years ago because of heavy student demand and the feeling on the part of the department or college that the department couldn’t meet the demand with the existing resources. It is a process that allows us to admit more students if we can or block students if we can’t meet the demand. We do this by using a floating GPA. If students cannot meet all the requirements for admission, then they are classified as pre-coms majors. Pre-coms majors receive separate advising. At some point they achieve the admission requirements or they don’t. Some students who do not meet the admission requirements go away, but many of our students don’t go away. They continue to apply, and in some case they continue not to meet the minimum standards for enrollment that varies by semester. Some students get into the program toward the end of their course work because they have continued to get into courses through various means. Some students, not very many, declare the major as they are walking out the door. With the new process in place, students can still declare late in the process. No one is happy about this problem. We have been chewing on this problem and trying to figure out what to do about it. Programs are supposed to file a renewal for limited admissions one year prior to program review. We have not filed for renewal of limited admissions status. In order to get limited admissions the reason has to be because you don’t have the resources to serve the students. I am not comfortable saying this is valid now because we have been serving the students. The way we have been doing this is not the best way to serve students; we are using a lot of contingent faculty (people teaching overloads, visiting faculty, instructors, and adjuncts). We have had this discussion, and I am not sure what we have agreed upon. My recommendation is to let limited admissions expire. If it turns out to be a problem, we can request to have limited admissions again. If limited admissions was put in place to control enrollment and enrollment is going down, is this a moot point? The benefit of being a communications major is it is easier to receive permits. MyNIU is another wrinkle with the way we do permits. With MyNIU, we have other ways to control this. The problem is that pre-coms students are able to progress even though they are not admitted to the major. How does this effect credit hours? These hours are counted as department hours if students are taking courses in the department, but when we look at the majors, these hours are not included. We have had difficulty converging on this issue. We have looked at a number of different vehicles to solve this issue. I’m not sure we should drop the limited admissions status. You can apply to get it back, but there is no guarantee that the request will be approved. At the same time we have had difficulty finding foolproof requirements that you must do this and you must be a declared major. Talking about a declared major is different than saying you have been admitted to this major. Students can declare an intent to be a major. If limited admissions goes away, you don’t need pre-coms. What kind of implications does this have for the program? We are serving the students anyway; we do have separate advising for pre-coms students. The structure would change for this. We had this discussion at the last program review and there doesn’t seem to have been any solution. Staff in the Office of the Provost should meet with the department and college representatives to decide on an approach to solve this situation. There are issues with having a separate process for admission and a separate separate process for enrollment in courses and then saying at the end of the program students have met the requirements. One danger is that the students who apply to the program and are not accepted might go away. If it does work out this way, we may need to request limited admissions. Another piece of this is that we want to increase enrollment to 30,000, which could increase demand for the program. The performance funding initiative also comes into play. If limited admission cannot be turned off easily, then we should not have limited admissions. Limited admissions is only there to balance supply and demand. If this is the case, why not drop the admissions requirements to good academic standing? This wouldn’t solve the structural problem in the short run, but it would solve the problem of having a higher bar to declare the major than to graduate. If you raise the bar again, then you have the structural problem. There are other ways to solve this issue. You could require a “C” in a gateway course. In journalism you have to have a “C” in all of your journalism courses. We have been exploring other ways to handle this. We probably need to have a sidebar conversation to talk about this.
We have had several status reports on this issue. Solutions have been put forth, but this issue has not been solved. We need to solve this issue.

Another discussion point is the decline in enrollment. The subcommittee had difficulty with the chart. It was noted that this is Institutional Research data. This might have been an issue with pre-coms. We can go back and check the data.

One of the recommendations for the future is to resolve the limited admissions issue for this major. Another issue was that it looked as if the graduation rate for minorities was a problem. On page 55 in the report, the degrees awarded to minorities were 62 in FY2006, 63 in FY2007, 53 in FY2008, 82 in FY2009, and 59 in FY2010. These data seem to be within the margin of error.

The next program being discussed is the M.A. in Communication Studies. We will go right to the main discussion points.

Discussion points include the issues with assessment, the decline in enrollment, and the focused plans of study. The program has a partially implemented assessment plan. There are two questions (method and theory) included in the comprehensive exam, and this is not sufficient. We are looking at ways that we can do assessment better. One thing we have looked at is using goal statements that students write and adding a question to the comprehensive exam about what they want to do with the set of skills they develop in the program. We would add a question about how they plan on using this information for their careers. There has been a steep decline in enrollment and the number of degrees awarded in particular to minority and female students. The low graduate assistant stipends are part of this decline. We have talked about what is going on with minority and female enrollment, but we haven’t found what is causing this decline. We are still trying to pay attention to this. What are the changes in the degree requirements that the department has proposed in order to develop more tightly focused plans of study? We are starting to implement a more focused plan of study for non-thesis students to meet three requirements in three areas: theory, method, and competency. Students are asked what they have learned in these areas, and some classes can meet more than one competency area. The majority of students finish the master’s degree in three years. The program might want to use this as an internal benchmark.

The next agenda item is the interim report for the M.S. in Family and Consumer Sciences. As we discussed last time, the IBHE requires that institutions submit an interim report three years after a new program is approved. The learning outcomes and the curriculum have not changed. The program has not been successful in meeting the projections for the number of majors, credit hour production, and degrees awarded. There are very few students enrolled in this program. This is a program we will need to watch carefully in terms of its viability. One student has graduated from this program. When programs don’t meet their targets in the first three years, how do you proceed? We are not extremely concerned about meeting exact targets, but if you recall our discussion about the degree program in research and evaluation that program has never come anywhere near their projections. We know it does not cost us anything to offer this program, but this is a hard concept for other people to understand. I think we want to keep an eye on this program. We will point out the issues with enrollment and ask for a recruitment plan. My concern is that the IBHE now requests a list of deleted program on a yearly basis. If they don’t get a lot of deleted programs, they may become proactive on this issue. The APC could ask for a report on degrees awarded prior to the next review, but this will not be necessary because the next full review will take place in 2013-14. We should tell the program now that they need to pay attention and plan recruitment initiatives.
Maybe the name of the program is part of the problem. This program has two tracks (teachers in family and consumer sciences and apparel studies and retailing), and the name does not convey what this program is about. The program needs to do a good job of advertising the program and what it is.

A motion was made and seconded to receive the M.S. in Family and Consumer Sciences interim report. The motion passed unanimously.

The 2011 University Writing Project Report was distributed with the agenda for today. This project assesses course-embedded writing samples from seniors, and this is the fourth year that we have used the same rubric. Sixteen faculty from four colleges participated in the writing project this year. Most of the student papers meet the standards. The mean score for the university was 4.53, and the sample size was 476. All of the categories met the guidelines, except presentation. The presentation (grammar, punctuation, and usage) area is still the lowest score. Is the low presentation score part of a nationwide phenomenon? We can look into this more. This year we asked people to give us feedback on how they are using this information. Current term cumulative grade point averages, ACT verbal scores, and University Writing Center (UWC) attendance were also looked at for variances. For the spring 2011 term, GPA was significant. We have to continue to assist students in developing their communication and writing skills while they are here. Why don’t all the colleges participate? All of the colleges are invited to participate. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences participates every year. The College of Business does this every year within its college. I think this is a great project for university wide assessment. Please pass along our appreciation to the individuals involved in this project. By-and-large, the criteria are met.

The final item on the agenda today is the 2010-2011 Program Review Report. We use the IBHE format to report out the findings to the Board of Trustees, and there will be an item on the next meeting agenda for the Board of Trustees. Two programs were asked to submit follow-up reports: the Ed.D. in Adult and Higher Education was asked to talk about the loss of faculty and the M.S. in Sport Management was asked to submit a follow-up report on the implementation of its assessment plan.

The meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Cradduck