Present: Abdel-Motaleb, Alden, Bak, Baumgartner, Birberick, Dawson, Douglass, Falkoff, Gordon, Gorman, Hertz, House, Matuszewich, Mini, Prawitz, Simpson

Guests: Stephanie DeCicco, Assistant to the Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Christopher McCord, Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Sherrill Morris, Acting Associate Vice Provost for Academic Outcomes Assessment, Office of Assessment Services; Matt Streb, Chair, Department of Political Science; Kurt Thurmaier, Director, Division of Public Administration

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m. Chris McCord, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Matt Streb, chair of the Department of Political Science; Kurt Thurmaier, director of the Division of Public Administration, and Stephanie DeCicco, assistant to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences were introduced.

An updated membership list was distributed to the APC members.

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of September 10, 2012, and the motion passed unanimously.

Chris McCord said that the biggest structural issue the college has been looking at is the structure of political science and public administration. This is not because these two areas have problems. Public administration is evolving as a discipline. Basically, the division and the department have had a sound relationship that has worked for the past 35 years. The Department of Political Science is engaged in faculty research, has undergraduate and doctoral programs, and supports general education. The faculty have been very responsive as we try to understand engaged learning opportunities. Public administration is a nationally ranked program. The division has focused on the M.P.A. program and participated in the life of political science.

Matt Streb said he is excited about what is happening in the department. The department has a very junior faculty. The department is research intensive, academically rigorous, and student focused. Three of the faculty members in the department have been awarded the Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching award, one faculty member has been awarded the Presidential Teaching Professorship award, and another retired faculty member, who is still teaching, was awarded the Presidential Teaching Professorship award. During the review period, one person who had a tenure-track contract was not renewed because we were not happy with that person’s teaching. We are a department that is committed to teaching. If you take away the Division of Public Administration faculty and Chris Jones (who is the associate vice provost for the University Honors Program), the department does not have any full professors. Last year the department hired a full professor who is not tenured. The faculty are publishing in good places. At the undergraduate level, our students are engaged learners. We offer an innovative curriculum and participate in the Themed Learning Communities. At the graduate level, we appear to have the largest political science graduate program in the state. The strongest fields are public administration, comparative politics, and political theory. The primary challenge is the junior faculty, but this also creates opportunities.
Kurt Thurmaier told the subcommittee that he appreciated the feedback. The strength of the M.P.A. program is its mission to improve the excellence in public service delivery (in both the non-profit and governmental sectors). The NIU program is ranked #5 for local government management training and #12 for public finance and budgeting. The thing that makes our program distinctive is our internship program. The division brings in a lot of external funding to the university. If all of the internships where treated as GA positions, the division would generate $741,800 per year. The internship students work 20-24 hours per week for a 22-month period doing research work in a community. The division is also engaged with our alumni. Alumni help recruit students into our program. This is part of our national effort to brand our program. Our mission and our learning outcomes drive everything that we do.

Lisa Baumgartner thanked her subcommittee members; this is a group effort. The reports were well written.

There are many strengths in the Departmental Context section. One strength is the highly qualified, award-winning faculty who work to improve retention and graduate rates.

There were several discussion points/areas for improvement noted in the report. One is the immense faculty turnover since the last review that has presented challenges for the department; including an increase in service obligations for recently tenured professors and untenured professors, the lack of any voting members in the international relations subfield, search committee fatigue, low morale, and issues with teaching some courses and understaffing in some subfields (pp. 6-7). How are you handling this as a faculty? We have hired a senior person and two junior people for the international relations subfield. Right now we have three people up for tenure, and they have received strong reviews at the department level. Two years ago we hired an associate professor for the public law subfield. We are becoming a department that is full of associate professors. We are also hiring three new people this fall. It has been a challenge that the senior administrative team members are not full professors. We try to protect our junior people from a research standpoint. This is getting better, but it will still take a while for us to get up to where we want to be. The culture of the department is strong. A thematic emphasis was created on democracy and justice (American government with political theory). The number of women and minority faculty is still low in the department, only 8 of 30 faculty members are women and 4 of 30 faculty members are minorities. Last year when we hired four new people, one was a female and one was an African-American. Our gender and minority faculty numbers are not out of whack with the discipline as a whole. There are three searches going on now, and it looks like we have a diverse applicant pool gender wise. Political science has traditionally been a male dominated discipline. Simply having a female instructor doesn’t mean that the course will attract female students. We would like to have a 60/40 split. Political theory is a 95/5 split and American government is a 75/25 split. Public administration is much more mixed, and comparative politics is more gender balanced. American government is more a white male dominated field. There have been a fair number of retirements over the last couple of years. After we hire three new people, we will be back to where we were before the retirements. The graduate student stipends are low, which affects the recruitment of top graduate students. The stipends are about 80 percent of the average stipend in the discipline. How are you working to address this? We were at 75 percent of the median, so there has already been some improvement thanks to the dean. We talked about only filling some of the assistantships, which would allow us to increase the dollar amount. If we did this, the dean might ask why we only filled 18 out of the 21 assistantships, and he might decrease our funding for assistantships. We are looking to find donors to give supplemental dollars to students. Donors are more willing to give money to undergraduate students. We have lost students who have gone to inferior programs because of the dollar amount offered by these other programs.
One of the strengths of the B.A./B.S. in Political Science program is that it offers two online courses per semester and teaches regularly off campus. This is a fantastic way to attract students to your program. Minority enrollment is good.

There are several discussion points/areas for improvement that should be discussed. Graduation rates for minorities have decreased. This concern was not addressed in the areas to be improved or the priority chart. What will be done to improve the rates (p. 25)? What we do is for all students, not just minority students. We are involved with the Early Alert Program, and the undergraduate advisor contacts students to see what the situation is. All of these things help improve graduation rates. There are very few students in the program who do not have a personal relationship with at least one faculty member. We have over 400 students in the undergraduate program. How will the department address the downward trend in credit hours earned by non-majors (pp. 25 and 30)? Lower division costs appear to be trending up with no explanation for root causes, so it is also hard to understand how the costs compare to 2009. This reflects what is going on with enrollment in the university as a whole. We are involved with the Themed Learning Communities, but this really doesn’t work for us at the 100 or 200 course level. At the 300 course level it could work. There could be political science and GIS courses on redistricting. This gets political science students interested in geography and geography students interested in political science. What is being done to get employers to actually return internship evaluations (p. 34)? What competencies are desired? We try to get information on what the students do and information on their communication and writing skills. Does a faculty member or internship advisor have communications with the employers? Yes, and this faculty member does not receive a course release or additional money to do this. The internships are very piecemeal. It might be helpful if this person talks about the internship evaluations early with the employers. The information from the steady placements are good, but it is hard to get this information when you don’t have a consistent relationship with the employers. You might want to consider using an exit interview to gather this information. That would be good. What student learning outcomes could be highlighted regarding the program changes that were addressed? Other than design of a rubric to assess multiple learning outcomes (definitely student writing, but others implied), the focus seems to be more on program design than on student learning (pp. 36-37). Have data been gathered to assess these outcomes? We are in the process of doing this right now. We just went through our general education courses and found that we were not doing good general education assessment. We are starting to do post-tests in courses. We are thinking about programmatic changes and trying to improve our assessment measures. Ties between measurable learning outcomes and assessment methods need to be made in the document. Perhaps creating a chart would solve this problem.

One of the strengths of the M.A. in Political Science program is that faculty members monitor the rigor of their courses through an annual review of graduate syllabi.

There are a few discussion points/areas for improvement. One is that women and minority enrollment has decreased. For the graduate programs we have an arrangement with an organization that will provide us names of minority students, which we will try to recruit into our programs. Faculty members recognize the need for improved advising to increase graduation rates. What specific things are being done to improve the “poor advising” that students receive? A director of graduate studies may help to coordinate both the M.A. and Ph.D. programs and meet with students to clarify the requirements. The Ph.D. students come here to work with a specific faculty member; this is not true for the M.A. students, which makes it easier for the M.A. students to get lost. We have an advisor for the M.A. students. I’m not sure that I would say that this is “poor advising.” Not all of the students in the M.A. program need to take the research course, but students in the American government field need to take the research course. This is confusing to some of the master’s students, but this is being addressed. The research course is not a requirement for all the master’s students because of the size of the program, and we can
only offer one section of the research course. The M.A. students who are not required to take the research course do complete another research methods course. An M.A. degree is a research degree, and we are trying to figure out how to make the research course a requirement for all M.A. students. There are several benchmarking issues for the program (pp. 56-57). Completing assessments isn’t a “benchmark” item—it’s something that has to be done. Increasing graduation rates is fine as a benchmark, but an explanation as to why the current 40 percent is poor and on what basis the goal of 70 percent is ideal or realistic should be included in the review. We can include this information in the document. Tracking students after graduation is also not a benchmark; it’s an activity that the department is supposed to be doing. There are no measures to assess teaching effectiveness. Requiring a methods course is also not a benchmark. Increasing the number of M.A.s who enter the Ph.D. program is a good benchmark (p. 56). External benchmarks are comparisons with other schools. This depends on what the definition of a benchmark is. What is in the review is what is really valuable to me. I would think these are things that our program is doing or should be doing. There needs to be baselines, targets, and measurements in the benchmarking section. The proposed curriculum change to add a required methods course is excellent from a pedagogical view. However, given that the faculty who teach methods courses have retired or taken administration positions, is it possible for the department to staff the increased workload? Thanks to the dean, we should have a new quantitative methods person next year. Some recent hires are contributing to this as well. We don’t have an advanced quantitative methods person. We are starting to find more and more people to do this. We might have to have two sections of this course, but we don’t have the power to offer two sections. Enrollment has decreased in the M.A. and M.P.A. programs and it has been flat for the Ph.D. program. How many students can be accommodated in the programs, and what are your enrollment targets? We are trying to figure this out right now since we are larger than we should be. Our program has the same number of Ph.D. students as the program at UoI, Urbana/Champaign. Governor’s State’s master’s program is larger than our master’s program, but they do not have a Ph.D. program. We are looking at the size of our faculty and how many students we can accommodate. We are thinking about shrinking the size of the programs a little bit, but this is counter to what the university is talking about. We can’t grow the political science programs right now. The M.P.A. program is focused on growing its program. We have a Certificate of Graduate Study in Public Management, and we hope that students in the certificate will complete the M.P.A. degree. Our targets are for 100 mid-career students, which would be a significant increase (we have 25 mid-career students now). We want to do this because when we look at the profiles of neighboring Illinois programs, there are a lot of mid-career professionals, mostly in the Chicago land area. Outside of Chicago there are over 400 NGOs. We would like to diversify our portfolio, and we are thinking about creating a pipeline from degree completion programs to the M.P.A. program to serve our niche to improve government. We would like to improve leadership and management skills in local governments and NGOs. For the pre-career students we would like to become a national program. Our alumni will help us recruit nationally. We are pushing alumni out of Illinois to help us set this up. Within the next year, we would like to increase pre-career students by 20 percent; within five years, we would like to have 150, maybe 200, mid-career students in the program. Have you thought of doing some internships that are study away? Yes, the top program at the University of Kansas has this structure. For one year students have an internship somewhere in the country. If we were to follow this model, it would change how we deliver our curriculum. The constraint is how we think about what we are doing.

The APC turned to the Ph.D. in Political Science section of the review. There were several discussion points/areas for improvement noted. In terms of program design, how will the program be scaled down to accommodate the new Graduate School designation of at least 72 credits for doctoral degrees (p. 65)? It will not be necessary for the students to take a lot of dissertation credits. There is a balance between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and all the fields contribute to this. There appears to be individual student assessment done on a regular basis (p. 77). It is noted, “because these are individual-
level data, there is no attempt to draw aggregate or summary conclusions from the assessment tool.” Why? The main thing is that the assessments are being done for student purposes. Assessment of the individual students is not an assessment of our overall students. I would add this to the document. This is a ranking of the students. Increasing the minority graduation rate is a great benchmark (p. 80), but why not measure the percent of minorities of all graduates? Measure the percent of minorities who start the program who go on to graduate. The benchmark that seems odd is the one that talks about moving up in the US News and World Report rankings. You don’t know what criteria were used for these rankings. This is good to have as a goal. An example is that we could say that we are ranked 76 and we want to move up to 60. Is this acceptable? It seems to me that benchmarking is about where you are in respect to certain qualities and where you want to be in the future. Down the road you can look at how things improved.

There are several strengths in the M.P.A. program. One is that the faculty should be commended for working so diligently on redefining their M.P.A. program competencies in light of accreditation requirements and of mapping their competencies to their courses.

Several discussion points/areas for improvement are noted in the subcommittee report. One is that the document should be more concise. There are no data presented from the new assessments. At the fall 2010 faculty retreat, the faculty started rethinking how we should measure learning outcomes and how benchmarking is done. The program competencies and mission were examined. Also, the public service delivery now includes the non-profit sector. An assessment inventory has been developed, which is based on program level competencies. This fall, all the students will complete this inventory, and it will be sent out to all internship supervisors. This will allow us to compare the self-assessments and the supervisors’ assessments. Prior to graduation, students will be asked to complete this assessment inventory again. Students are not being trained for specific positions; they are being trained to be effective managers in the public service sector. Students also assess the internship each semester. This fall we will have competency level data. Oral and written competencies are the focus. Employers want strong written and oral communication skills, along with the ability to speak well in public forums. To meet the capstone course requirement, students complete analytical papers that take topics in the workplace and provide written analyses and recommendations regarding the topics selected. This is also defended to a panel of three practitioners and two faculty members, and students are graded on the presentations and the ability to defend the recommendations. Two substantive areas are required in the paper. A rubric is being developed to grade these papers. Every course will have a rubric that faculty use to provide feedback to the students. All of this needs to be done for accreditation purposes. The faculty are thinking about what they want to teach and how they want to teach it. In a 600 level course we have collaboration and writing competencies. I will add this to the report. The credit hours and program costs are not available (p. 20). What is the status on this? We did not receive this information. There were communications that went back and forth regarding the credit hour production break down. I believe these data are in the political science numbers. The division does not get credit for the undergraduate courses it teaches because these credits are assigned to the degree program. This makes the program costs for the M.P.A. higher than they actually are. The division also does not receive credit for offering the certificate of graduate study. This does not help us in evaluating our costs. We can look into this. On p. 21 you state that “contrary to the data provided by Assessment Services, only a few graduates continue on to law school or to the Ph.D. program.” Does the division have different data? Very few students complete the M.P.A. and then move into a doctoral program. Most of our graduates move into public service positions. We have 1,200 alumni, and we know where 1,100 of our alumni are at. Maintaining adequate enrollment does not seem to be a benchmark. Put the discussion of the external benchmarking after the charts.
Some of your graduates can't find jobs, and this is one of the largest political science departments in the state. I don't see your impact even though it is the largest school in the state. It doesn't seem like the department is working up to its maximum reputation. We are trying to change the culture of the graduate programs. There is a conference held in the region and, in the past, no one was participating in this conference. Now we have people who attend and present at this conference. The competition in academia is really strong. There are people 5, 6, and 7 years out who do not get jobs in academia. In the American government field it is a little bit more difficult to get a job; there are more positions, but there is also more competition as well. I think we have room for improvement. We have recently lost a lot of faculty that helped us have an excellent reputation in the Southeast Asian politics field.

Do you have a strategic plan that would help you achieve your goals? Have you tried to use the president of the university to help you with these things? We have probably used the president too much. We don’t have a strategic plan yet. I have been chair for nine months, the department is undergoing program review, we planned for the 50th year anniversary of the college, and we have had six faculty searches. The department does not have a formally stated strategic plan, but this doesn’t mean that it does not have a plan. The department is moving in the right direction, and it has goals.

The next agenda item is the 2012 Program Review Report. The report is a summary of all of the programs that were reviewed last year. It includes information on the major changes in the program, major findings and recommendations, actions taken since the last review, and actions taken as a result of this review. It also has the outcome and the decision on program standing. Programs are said to be in good standing or they might be required to submit a follow-up report in the future. This document has been sent to the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the NIU Board of Trustees. The board will review this document at the next Academic Affairs, Students Affairs, and Personnel committee meeting on November 8. Any board member can ask for the full program review, and they have done this in the past. One program came up at three board meetings in a row regarding one issue that had not adequately been addressed. One board member has a reputation of reading the full report and then asking the dean and chair questions about specific issues. If you have any questions about this report, you can contact Carolinda Douglass unless you think the full APC needs to talk about an issue.

The meeting adjourned at 4:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Cradduck