The meeting was called to order at 3:10 p.m., and introductions were made.

It was moved and seconded to remove the approval of the November 19, 2012, minutes from the agenda (item number 2). The motion passed unanimously.

Baron-Jeffrey said that the Center for Child Welfare and Education (CCWE) became a center within the university in 2000. The primary focus of the center is to work with children in foster care and children who had been in foster care. Almost all of the center's funding comes from the state. The funding for the center had been relatively stable until FY13. The SPS staff who work in the center have a passion for the population they serve. The center has been able to assess educational services for more than 1,000 children by delaying or deterring suspensions or expulsions. The center staff assists with strategies to address educational problems. It looks at how trauma effects education and provides training in these areas. The center is well positioned to be part of NIU’s outreach.

Robinson (Center for Governmental Studies) noted that perhaps what is most important to us is the process of this review. Doing this review forced us to do some very strategic reflection. We appreciated the opportunity to participate in the review process.

McCord said the Public Opinion Laboratory (POL) is a unique entity in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Its mission is to provide survey research tools, which serve the university and the broader community. It is the only unit in the college that does not have a direct instructional mission, but it is involved in student learning. The lab does have an obligation to balance providing engaged learning opportunities for students with its service to clients. The review process is useful to us. Olson noted that the POL does not have formal goals for education, but engaged learning is happening in the laboratory. Going forward we will work on how we can list and quantify this information.

The meeting was turned over to Lisa Baumgartner to present the subcommittee reports.

The review for the Center for Child Welfare and Education is well written, and the Unit Context section has many strengths. The center offers training, staff development, and technical assistance to schools,
child welfare providers, mental health providers, and legal-court personnel servicing children and youth in communities across Illinois. Despite funding challenges, the center has continued to deliver services to children through the grants it administers. The CCWE grant programs have been successful and have been replicated in other states.

There are several points that we would like to discuss. All of the funding sources for the CCWE are noted in the text and charts on pages 9-12, but it’s difficult to know whether the center is properly funded, and whether, moving forward, university and external funds can be relied upon. Could you talk about the alternative groups that could be targeted for funding? The center does anticipate that it will have diminishing funding in the future. We have been talking with the Office of Sponsored Projects to help us identify grants that we can apply for. We have also had conversations with agencies that would be interested in the work that the center does. We are exploring other sources, such as truancy programs. Funding for DCFS was cut by $5 million, and our project was cut by $1 million. Due to this funding cut, the center lost a significant amount of staff. Now we are looking at addressing the needs we are contracted to supply. We recognize that there is a loss of services for some clients, and we are looking for funding to explore resuming services to these clients. It is often the case that children who go into foster care tend to be identified as having emotional issues. In the State of Illinois, 50 percent of the children in foster care have emotional issues compared to 15 percent of children who are not in foster care. When these children are returned to their biological parents, are adopted, or have a guardian assigned to them, we work with them to help them figure out how best to provide needed services to the children. We like to have an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) in place for these children. The parents must sign off on the IEP so their child can receive services. We try to educate them so they can make the best informed choices about services. Funding has been cut off to provide these services to guardians and biological parents. We are looking at ways to collaborate with other entities to provide the education and training for caregivers who no longer receive our services. The center is also charged with trying to figure out how we can do professional development for the field. Addressing one problem at a time does not work. Are there foundation grants for this type of work? The center is looking into this. This is also a pipeline issue because you lose students early in the education process. Some educational foundations might be interested in getting students the help they need. We are looking at the Carnegie Foundation, Open Society, Casey Foundation, etc. We are still in the research process for this. In doing the research, we found that not a lot of people are seeking grants for the type of work we are doing at the center. There is not a specific focus on foster children. The big foundations involved in K-20 and the pipeline issues might be interested in funding these types of programs (such as, Gates, Lumina, and Pew). The number of youths served and persons trained has peaked and has been trending downward in the recent past. You may want to use the percentage of referrals met rather than youths served, in addition to the number of individuals served because it is good to have fewer students in the system. We talked about the number of youths served to give you a sense of the center’s capacity. The center accepted 100 percent of the referrals that have come to us. Add in the caveat that the goal is to train community contacts to meet the demands of these students, reducing the number of clients served. Talk a little bit about the benchmark indicators for the next review. The inclusion of the client satisfaction surveys and training evaluations are good targets to have for the future. At the subcommittee meeting we talked about why the center hasn’t established benchmarks for this review, but you have them for the next review. What is the indicator for educational issues, interventions, and results? We are looking for at least 75 percent client satisfaction and at least 95 percent for services addressed appropriately. How do you plan to increase opportunities for research and publication that were impacted by the decrease in funding in 2009? We will seek to collaborate with people within the university. The center has just been relocated to the Division of Outreach, Engagement, and Information Technologies, and there are other people in outreach who seek funding like we do. We hope this will increase our funding opportunities. We will still collaborate with the agencies that we have collaborated with in the past.
There are two recommendations for the future. Develop assessment instruments as described for client satisfaction and training and reporting of data. Clarify benchmark indicators and targets for evaluation. This has already been addressed.

The Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) has many strengths. The CGS is one of only eight centers in Illinois with a broad public policy focus, and of these centers it works in the most economically and demographically diverse region. The staff of CGS is strong, innovative, and dedicated to the center’s mission. Although the university has decreased support for the center by 12 percent since 2005, overall revenues have increased due to external funding. The center generated more than $9.7 million in external funding for projects involving 140 clients between 2005 and 2011. In keeping with its public service mission, CGS has managed to answer requests for assistance from public and non-profit agencies, even when the projects were unfunded. Since the last review, the center has both maintained a regional focus and expanded its geographic scope. It has also developed new approaches to human service case management.

There are a couple of discussion points we would like to talk about. Under the Unit Objectives section, perhaps some specific examples of how exactly the CGS staff supports the teaching and learning functions of NIU could be mentioned. The CGS is not an instructional center; it does applied research. Undergraduate and graduate students are involved in projects completed at the center. We are still learning how to optimize undergraduate and graduate learning at the center. The tradeoff is that involving students in projects is time consuming for the PIs. We work with students to find out what their individual learning plans are and what classes they are taking. We try to make a good match. You are really helping students learn. I think you will be tasked with providing learning objectives in the future. Given that the center is part of the university, we are obligated to do this. Every engaged learning outcome a student has may need to be quantified in some way. We work on workplace skills with our undergraduate students involved at the center. The graduate students publish papers and present at conferences. The CGS understands the value of this. The CGS ran a deficit of more than $100,000 in 2012. Is this something to be concerned about long term? How will the center deal with funding issues moving forward? Dealing with many projects on different funding timelines has an effect on this. Final payments sometimes get pushed back to the next year. Covering costs is an issue every year. We are covering about 75 percent of our expenses, and this is improving since we are pulling out of the recession. Last year we lost some clients, and we had to cut back on funding. The center hopes to break even next year. The external funding and net funding levels seem to have increased. On page 23, a goal is to diversify funding sources. Do you have any potential strategies to accomplish this goal? We were asked to take over the Local Government publication. We are also looking at other opportunities with foundations, digital financial reporting, and health initiatives. We have the Institute for the Study of the Environment, Sustainability, and Energy on campus. Are the faculty associates from this institute collaborating with your members? Do you have any interactions with faculty who put together an interdisciplinary certificate of graduate study in healthcare policy and management? These were two excellent suggestions from the subcommittee. The CGS works with public administration, law, and business faculty. We like to collaborate with other faculty, but it depends on the nature of the projects we have and if there are projects we can develop sound proposals for. The number of projects mentioned in the appendix has decreased significantly since FY07. Why? This looks dire, but it is not. We have to think about doing a lot of small projects or doing a smaller number of large projects. The small projects are a lot of work, but produce a small amount of money. We look at where the needs are the greatest and funding opportunities that are consistent with what we want to do.

There are three recommendations for the future. Create specific plans for quantifying data concerning project tracking, client satisfaction measures, and impact measures, as well as student and staff
accomplishments. As mentioned in the report, work on measuring, benchmarking, and achieving performance targets. Devise specific strategies to achieve goals mentioned in Appendix B.

Largely as a result of this process, and in working with Anne Kaplan, the CGS is putting together a strategic plan so we can track the inputs into our center and translate them into outputs and accomplishments. We are looking at creative measures that we care about. This will also help our partners know what we are doing in the region. In the next three months this will probably be completed.

Right now the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is very focused on trying to make the case of the impact of public universities nationally. The standard measures of economic impact are about outcomes. APLU is trying to make the case that public universities do something that is more sophisticated and useful. This provides an opportunity to have dialog with outside constituencies. It is instructive for us to do this, and we will continue to work on this. This also creates a culture of more transparency on both sides. Have there been discussions about what the outcomes are expected to be? APLU has combined analytical people who are working on the matrix with program review people from all around the country. They are looking at what the factors should be and what is possible to count in a meaningful way. The University of Mississippi system has a good model to follow. The model talks about what the university system has done for the community.

The APC turned to the review of the Public Opinion Laboratory.

The POL has many strengths. Notwithstanding reduced university funding, the POL has taken in more funds over the past five years than it has expended. The POL has seen a steady increase in revenue. The POL is one of the larger academic survey research units in North America. Since the last review, the POL has had positive changes in staffing (higher caliber), survey research capabilities (including online survey capabilities), and the telephone center (due to an infrastructure upgrade). The projects done by the POL are impressive and have helped a wide variety of clients, including municipalities, libraries, park districts, and school districts. It is a primary source for health data pertaining to children and adults. All of the clients that have used the POL services for the past five years indicated they were very likely to use the POL in the future and to recommend it to others.

There are a couple of discussion points we should mention. Students have learning opportunities in the POL, yet learning does not appear to be measured. Are there ways to measure or document their learning? We recommend that the students’ skill sets (e.g., job training/career building), goals, and outcomes for the students who work in the POL be measured. Cross training really addresses this issue. All students develop a skill set (i.e., oral and written presentations to clients). There is a monitoring process in place. Observational training is provided, and then students are monitored to help develop their skills. Even expert interviewers are monitored. The POL just needs a set of rubrics to document the learning outcomes. Do you measure the various skills that students develop and the value of these skills? Students could also put this information on their resumes. Engaged learning happens in all sorts of different venues. The POL completes fewer of its projects for academic researchers within its own institution or for state government as a direct client than other academic survey research centers—less than 1 percent compared with an average of 33 percent at other institutions. Why is this the case? Is there a marketing problem? At other universities units like ours just respond to requests by faculty working on surveys. The POL doesn’t do much of this type of work. I don’t know if we are not known among the faculty, or if we are just different than the large research centers. Some marketing might let the faculty know about the services offered at the POL. Do other institutions provide this type of service to their faculty at no charge? I wonder if people aren’t utilizing your services because of the costs. The larger institutions (University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, and University of
Chicago) have a lot of federal projects. Have you talked to the Institutional Research Board about the services you provide? Surveys have to be so well constructed to meet compliance requirements. How do our social science people do surveys? I don’t think the issue is one of awareness. Having this information distributed to the new faculty through the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center might help. Plans to recruit clients are broadly mentioned. Who are you targeting as clients? Where do you see your growth market? NIU alumni appear to be a good source of potential clients; do you market to them directly? Yes we have done this, and we have received some projects. We would like to identify more of those. Currently we are updating our contact list so we can mail them brochures. 

You report that persistence and initial training period retention rates for trained interviewers have improved. Do you have any data to support the statement to discuss the efficiency of the unit? This was one of the items discussed at the Field Directors Conference. There was a presentation on recruiting and retaining interviewers, and we tried the process they talked about. We had 100 percent retention. Was this 100 percent retention for one year? No not for that long. Some people think they want to be an interviewer, and then they decide that interviewing really isn’t for them. One of the challenges identified by the POL is enlarging the POL client base. It is unclear from the report who those clients will be and what concrete efforts will be made to recruit them. You just need to put more specific information in the report. This is how we are doing, and this is where we plan to go. Are the plans for the future to increase or decrease personnel? The plan to employ 35 undergraduates a year does not indicate if this is an increase or decrease over previous years. The staffing at the POL remains stable. The goal is to have staffing remain consistent with the level of work that varies monthly. The biggest challenge is having a list of clients outside the university who need our services and to provide services to university personnel. This is an ongoing balancing act. It can take up to nine months to hire someone, and we don’t know nine months out what our projects will be. Benchmarks generally have baselines and targets. The POL has done a client satisfaction survey, and the results were quite high. This is our benchmark. In terms of goals, we could aim to do as well in the future. Some benchmark targets say we don’t want to deviate more than 5 percent for this result. How does the POL plan on developing the capability of incorporating cellular telephone numbers in random digit-dialed telephone surveys? We do conduct interviews using cell phones. There are requirements to conduct surveys using cell phones. You must dial the number instead of it being dialed randomly. We don’t call the cell numbers as many times as we call landline numbers. There are also procedures in place in case we reach a child. This is increasingly important because the percentage of cell only households is currently 50 percent. What number shows up on the cell phone when you dial it? It is an NIU number that shows up.

There are three recommendations for the future. Given the climate regarding measuring student learning, perhaps creating learning objectives and measuring student learning would be a good next step. Continue to devote resources to the recruitment process to yield job candidates who will remain in their positions. Consider ways to advertise within the university, so that the university itself can exploit the expertise of the POL.

The POL does the telephone follow-up survey for the Office of Assessment Services. The survey is first sent online, then sent in hard copy, and, as a final step, the POL interviewers call the non-respondents. The response rate for the university on the assessment survey is around 30 percent, but when the numbers are broken down by degree, they can be very small. Assessment services would like to coordinate this process with the departments, and we hope this will help increase the number of respondents. About half of the responses from this survey come from the POL.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,