ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL
Minutes of December 3, 2012
3 p.m., Holmes Student Center – 505

Present:  Abdel-Motaleb, Alden, Baumgartner, Birberick, Brantley, Damodaran, Douglass, Falkoff, Gordon, Gorman, Hertz, House, Matuszewich, Prawitz

Guests:  Julie Crouch, Director, Center for the Study of Family Violence and Sexual Assault; 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; Greg Waas, Chair, Department of Psychology; Karen White, Director, Psychological Services Center

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m.

Christopher McCord, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Stephanie DeCicco, assistant to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Karen White, director of the Psychological Services Center; Julie Crouch, director of the Center for the Study of Family Violence and Sexual Assault; and Greg Waas, chair of the Department of Psychology were introduced.

Two announcements were made. First, certificates of appreciation were presented to the subcommittee chairs Lisa Baumgartner and Geoff Gordon. We appreciate you both for doing this job. Second, in the spring semester a program review task force will be put together to streamline the program review process to make it more faculty friendly. We are interested in having people who have recently gone through the process serve on this task force. We would like ideas for making this a better process. The Education Advisory Board will soon release a report on streamlining the academic portfolio process.

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of November 19 and 26, 2012, and the motion passed unanimously.

McCord said that in the set of programs being reviewed today you are seeing us at our best. This is a large department, and its mission is research, graduate and undergraduate education, and university service. Particularly in the two centers, there are strong demonstrations of engaged learning. The Psychological Services Center (PSC) combines service to the community and educational opportunities for students. The Center for the Study of Family Violence and Sexual Assault is enormously important and a real value on the national stage. The center continues to be a strong source for external funding and outreach for faculty research. These programs and centers are doing exactly what we look for.

Waas stated that the review process does force you to take a step back and look at all aspects of the department. Crouch thanked the APC for the opportunity to do this review. It makes the center a more integral part of the campus community. White said that going through the process is a fair amount of work, but it is interesting to hear what other people have to say about the center.

The meeting was turned over to Geoff Gordon to present the subcommittee reports. He thanked his subcommittee members for their hard work in reviewing the programs and centers.
There are several strengths noted for the Departmental Context section. The report was well written and well presented. The department has been productive in contributing to the external community.

There are several discussion areas. What are the implications associated with the growing undergraduate population? The number of faculty has not increased. This is not an isolated incident; this is happening nationally. There has been a 32 percent increase in undergraduate enrollment with no additional faculty positions, and this creates pressure within the department. The department works with the college to meet demand. One compromise is that the department has had to hire more instructors to meet the needs of the programs. Having so many instructors is counter to our pedagogy. On average, 180 students take part in engaged learning activities with faculty. With the number of students we have, we can’t continue to do this. We want our faculty teaching the critical courses, but we have to make staff compromises because of the growth in enrollment. This also affects scholarship, and it impacts the department at all levels. The department is good at plugging the holes, but the increase in enrollment without an increase in faculty positions is clearly a stressor. Could you speak about limited admissions? The department investigated a limited admissions process eight years ago. It was told unequivocally that this was not going to happen. Given the current state of enrollment within the university, this is not what we want to be doing. The department’s preference is to figure out a way to meet the demand. How do you manage independent studies? Every faculty member makes a decision on how many independent studies they want to supervise each semester. Luckily, our discipline has many different types of research. There are many opportunities to place students, and we have graduate assistants who can supervise undergraduate students. What is the department’s plan for alleviating space needs? The department has systematically cannibalized all of the extra space available. One of the restrooms has been turned into a resource center, and storage rooms have been converted into research space. The department works with the college to fund research efforts. There is no place left to reconfigure. If additional faculty are hired, they will need laboratory space.

The recommendations for the future include space reallocation and implementing limited admissions. Begin communicating with other departments and directly with the provost’s office to re-start at ground zero in space allocation (re-engineering of the space assignment process is needed). Some departments are really growing in size while others are shrinking in size. Consider implementing a limited admission process should you reach the point where education is suffering.

The B.A./B.S. in Psychology programs have many strengths. Students have achieved a high level of recognition and provide a valuable service to the community. The program serves a significant role in providing coursework to non-majors. The program provides strong support for its students. Faculty remain involved in scholarship, and the training is phenomenal.

We will talk about several of the discussion points. What is the approximate percentage split between the B.A. and B.S. programs? Which one is growing the most? The split is pretty stable at 2:1—two B.A. students to one B.S. student. There is no huge difference in program outcomes. Students take the program that they will perform the best in. Is access to courses a problem? No; we used to have some backlog, but this backlog has been cleared out. There is never a legitimate reason for students not to graduate in four years. The department is staffing some laboratory courses with instructors, but research active faculty are the ones who bring these courses alive. If we continue to experience increases in enrollment, we may have to cut one of the laboratory requirements. We think it is important for our students to have two laboratory courses. Why should students come to NIU for your degree? What is the value added? I tell students our department is the perfect size, and all the major areas in psychology, except CSI, are represented. Students can take course work and have other experiences with people who are actually doing the research. The department is small enough that students can work with these people in the laboratories. Your program is far superior to the comparison institutions you selected.
What are the challenges, and are their areas where you are lacking? The comparison group was identified based on the National Research Council (NRC) rankings. These are departments that have doctoral programs. Many of the characteristics identified as strengths are not necessarily associated with high ranking programs. Having a large undergraduate program and engaged learning opportunities are not associated with high rank programs in the NRC rankings. This is the balance we want to strike, but you can't have it both ways. We would like to be compared to much higher ranked programs, but we can't be because 180 students each year are involved in engaged learning opportunities, we offer an intensive undergraduate program, and our faculty are heavily involved in undergraduate education. The departments I selected as aspirational programs are, indeed, ranked well above us by the NRC. Some of the institutions you compare yourself to have different laboratory requirements for undergraduate students (three require zero labs; three require one lab; and NIU requires two labs). I would view this as a strength of our program, but if we only required one lab, we might be able to devote additional time to other goals such as securing more external funding. However, we want to have a very engaged undergraduate program and a good graduate program. There are choices to be made here.

There are a couple of recommendations for the future. Increase efforts to develop hybrid and online courses. Gather more information from employers. Keep working on the means to 1) further differentiate NIU from competitors and 2) better publicize why NIU’s program is a good investment for students. Continue efforts to develop and utilize effective alternative advising methods because the more students you have, the harder it is to advise all of them. Hire additional tenure-track faculty.

The M.A. in Psychology program has many strengths. The document is well written. The program is flexible. Faculty, with limited resources available, are able to meet the needs of a variety of students seeking a good number of career objectives. The program has high levels of research and publishing. Many of the theses are published. The pass rates on the licensure/certification examination are consistently above the state average.

Many of the discussion points for the M.A. program overlap with the Ph.D. program. How does the M.A. relate to the Ph.D. program? For the most part, the M.A. program is a piece of the Ph.D. program. Students are admitted to the Ph.D. program, except for specialist-level students in the school psychology area who are admitted into the M.A. program. The school psychology area is outstanding. The students’ credentials are excellent for this program area and for the Ph.D. program. There is a higher percentage of theses published than dissertations. Students are encouraged to publish their theses. If a student is not going into academia, they don’t necessarily publish their dissertation. Do all students need to complete a thesis? No, there is a non-thesis option for students terminating at the M.A. level. Virtually all of the students in the specialist-level school psychology area choose the non-thesis option. If you compare the documents side by side (a thesis and a dissertation), it is hard to tell which one is which. It would make life easier if we only had a Ph.D. program and not the terminal master’s degree. This is a tough decision. The programs have dual accreditation processes, and both processes are extensive. The master’s program requires a fast rotation of courses, and this is a disadvantage. On the other hand, there is a tremendous need for master’s level school psychologists. When students complete this program, they have multiple job offers. These are the students that will go back to the northern Illinois region and serve as psychologists in schools. When we went through the accreditation process for school psychology, we noticed that the culture was starting to shift. Are you saying it is moving toward school psychologists with Ph.D. credentials? Yes, this has been occurring for a number of years, but it has accelerated recently. Do you see the accrediting body pushing this over the cliff? This is a highly politicized issue. Most state boards of education have refused to go along with a doctoral requirement for practice in a school setting, and I expect the entry level requirements to remain the specialist-level credential. Sometimes students admitted to school psychology change their minds and seek admission
into the Ph.D. program. The department is resistant to make the decision to drop the school psychology area within the master’s program. Is it possible to use your program to provide services for fees? This would help the department generate money for its use. There are some departments that do that. These types of psychology departments have a strong applied emphasis, and generating funds is a major focus. This is a choice. If you do that, the national rankings will likely go down. The highest status psychology programs are research programs. By virtue of accreditation standards, students in the school and clinical psychology areas are pressured more to move through the program in an efficient manner. Students in other areas do not have this pressure, and sometimes when they complete their Ph.D. course work, they slow their progress while finishing the dissertation (sometimes due to employment, etc.). This does impact time to degree.

There are a couple of recommendations for the future. Conduct your own survey of alumni and/or employers to get their perspective on the program. This information can also be used as a recruiting tool. Continue to develop and implement plans for increasing male and minority enrollments. Look at increasing the use of technology to offer hybrid models. Continue to determine the cost-effectiveness of a terminal M.A. program.

The Ph.D. in Psychology program has many strengths. The report is well written. Demand is high, and the program has engaged learning activities, including participation in independent studies, practicum programs, research apprenticeships, etc. The program attracts students from underrepresented groups. The percentage of minority students completing the degree is commendable. The pass rates on the licensure/certification examination are consistently above the national average. The program has a high level of research.

There are several discussion points. Is there a target enrollment? The program controls the number of students admitted. If there are too many students interested in an area, then we take in fewer students. Having 130 to 140 students is a comfortable number for us. If we were unable to get instructors to teach at the undergraduate level, that would cause serious problems for the graduate program. For those who don’t complete the degree, what are the reasons why they don’t complete? Many students decide a master’s degree is enough; this is especially true for such programs as the school psychology and the social and industrial/organizational psychology areas where graduates with a master’s are more employable. How do you count this? I don’t have the exact figures. In the school psychology and clinical areas, I would guess that 80 percent of those admitted complete the degree they are admitted to. APA monitors this very closely. Attrition varies area by area. What is the time to degree completion? For those who don’t complete, have you followed up with the students about what types of supports they may want to help them finish the degree? The students we are talking about are very senior students and very accomplished students. For example, one student under my supervision has been in the program for eight years, and he has completed all of the analyses for the dissertation. He simply needs to write it up. He was at this stage last year, and he is still at this stage this year. He has a family and works full time. I have asked him what I can do to help him complete his degree. I have tried to encourage him to complete the degree. The students that are missing in action were not in a cohort. When students are in a cohort, they begin working with their peers and have a better completion rate than students who are not in a cohort. All first year students take statistics together. Could you find ways to create supports for students who linger? Maybe you could create new cohort groups for those who are still struggling to finish their degrees. This is a good suggestion. Are there ways to shorten degree completion time? This is not a centralized department question. Individual areas are concerned about this. For example, the candidacy examination is currently being changed within the clinical area. This is a hard problem. We are always tinkering with ways to help students have a shorter time to degree. The time to degree is six and a half to seven years for the Ph.D. This is hard to change because the students are maturing into adults or they are starting families. Most of our students are funded, but
the cut off for funding is five years. How do you go about allocating resources between the undergraduate and the graduate programs? We identify what we need to teach at the undergraduate level to maintain the curriculum along with the graduate program, and then we ask the dean for supplemental resources as necessary. So far this has been a workable model. That is the balance we have to deal with.

The recommendations for the future are to survey alumni regarding degree completion time and look at the use of technology. Survey the alumni for words of wisdom to shorten degree completion times. Look at the use of technology to offer hybrid courses that will alleviate enrollment management problems, improve accessibility, and decrease degree completion time. Overall, you are doing a phenomenal job with resources. Prioritize which programs are the most important. You can control the number in the doctoral program. This program supports the university in a big way.

The APC turned to the strengths of the Unit Context section for the Psychological Services Center. This is a well presented report. Thank you. The center engages in a great quality of collaborative efforts with diverse entities (the hospital, Ben Gordon Center, private and public schools, etc.). This is to be commended. The center provides the integration of teaching and research into practice, and it offers a great benefit to the university and external community through the free (or low cost) service offerings. Collaboration exists between the center and the department.

We will discuss a couple of the discussion points. What are the limits to meeting demand since the demand for services is growing? By how much does demand currently exceed capacity? What is the greatest capacity constraint right now? The constraint is the number of graduate students who can be trained to work in the center. By the end of every semester, there are 10 to 20 people who are waiting for services. The center does not keep a waiting list, but when openings occur, we will contact the people who are waiting for services. Right now there are 75 active cases. Some of these individuals are waiting for services because they don’t have the money to go to a private practice. The only way to increase services is to have faculty supervise more graduate students. Does the number of clients influence the number of doctoral students? No; one doesn’t drive the other. If we bought out faculty time to increase their service in the center by having more adjuncts, this would be a different model. Previously we didn’t encourage faculty to do clinicals beyond what is required for supervision. What are the pressures in terms of demand for services by families unable to pay the fees? There are no real pressures. We don’t want students providing services for which they are not well trained to provide. How are contracts/grants acquired? Why do certain school districts move in and out of the funding picture? Contracts come to the center in a number of different ways. Every year at a community outreach meeting, outside agencies learn about services we provide and then sometimes create an externship. Sometimes we receive calls from school districts. When state funding decreases, some school districts can’t pay for our services, but there is always someone else who needs our services.

Recommendations for the future go along with what we just talked about. Continue to seek the means to increase the purchase and availability of high demand test equipment without taking away from other needed resources. Continue efforts to develop closer ties to psychiatric services so that third party reimbursement for services provided can be obtained. Overall, great job.

The Center for the Study of Family Violence and Sexual Assault Unit Context section has many strengths. Again, the report is well written and well presented. The center uses best practices, and has a wide range of expertise incorporating 12 faculty members who hold appointments in other departments/areas. The center is a state-of-the-art research facility and provides a wide range of support to investigators conducting research. It has done a phenomenal job of securing over $10 million in externally funded grants and contracts. The center serves a critical mission in providing consultation and program evaluation services helping families.
There are a couple of discussion points where the APC members need clarification. Where are the graduate students coming from? Does the center support graduate students from other disciplines? A large number of the graduate students are in the doctoral program in psychology. Other graduate students are from political science and foreign languages and literatures. The fellowship is broadly defined, and we welcome applications from anyone in the university. Why was there a high increase in funding in 2011? Waas has a large contract with the State of Illinois (CFS) and he works with us in supporting the evaluation component of this project. There has been some growth in the number of individuals applying for funding. Since writing this report, five additional grants have been submitted. What are the limits to meeting demand? What is the greatest capacity constraint? The center is not at capacity now. We have the space to support more projects. Some projects don’t require space. I don’t see us reaching capacity anytime in the near future. You mention the need for faculty expertise in psychophysiological research. We have a state-of-the-art building, and this is a tremendous resource, but we don’t have the staff right now to oversee the use of this facility. An emeritus faculty member who works nine months of the year oversees this for us now. The center would really like to have a full-time person who has facilities management expertise manage the facility. What kind of research goes on at the center? We have two laboratories: psychophysiology and EEG. A number of different types of research (brain wave, EEG, skin conduction, etc.) can be done in these laboratories.

There are three recommendations for the future. Continue to seek increases in the amount of contributions from private funding. Perhaps, establish an external advisory board to help raise funds for the center. Continue to seek funding for areas of the center’s facilities that are not completed, and continue to grow faculty and staff expertise in selected areas of need.

This was a very nice exercise to go through in evaluating these programs and centers. They are role models for us.

The meeting adjourned at 4:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Cradduck

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