ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL  
Minutes of March 31, 2014  
3 p.m., Holmes Student Center – 505

Present:  Abdel-Motaleb, Boutin, Brantley, Chakraborty, Chandler, Dawson, Douglass, Falkoff, Goldberg, Gordon, House, Kolb (for Birberick), Li, Mini, Molnar, Shortridge

Guests: Chris Parker, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Outcomes Assessment; Jeff Reynolds, Director of the Office of Academic Analysis and Reporting; Ritu Subramony, Director of Academic Accreditation

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m.

Announcements

There were two annual assessment updates distributed with the agenda. One is for the entire university, and one is for the graduate programs. The primary intent is to see (1) the level of compliance for the annual update process and (2) the quality of the reports submitted. If you have suggestions about how these reports could be more useful or tailored to what the APC could use, please let Chris Parker know. Normally these reports are distributed in the fall. Feedback on the annual assessment updates is given to the programs individually as well.

You should have received an email from Carolyn Cradduck indicating that the APC will have one additional meeting on May 5. This will be a joint meeting with the Resources, Space and Budgets (RSB) Committee of the University Council. The interim CFO, the interim provost, and the president will attend this meeting, and they will discuss priorities in terms of the vacancy hearings. The interim provost asked that the APC and RSB members make recommendations concerning these priorities that are aligned with (1) the mission, (2) the keystone goal of student career success (including the three pillars), and (3) the Spring 2014 Statement of Budget Priorities from the RSB. Moving forward in FY16 there will be a more standardized process for the vacancy hearings.

The 7th Annual NIU Assessment Expo will be held on Friday April 4, 2014, from 8:30-noon in the HSC Sky Room. Ten different programs will be showcased at the expo. Please join us for the expo if your schedule permits.

Purushothaman Damodaran is unable to serve the rest of his term on the University Assessment Panel (UAP). This is a very worthwhile committee that looks at assessment holistically. I have learned a lot about the university serving on this committee. The main activity of the UAP is to look at status reports during the mid-term of the assessment cycle. If something is missing, then this can be addressed prior to undergoing program review. Dhiman Chakraborty will attend the last UAP meeting for this semester. We will ask again about your willingness to serve on the UAP, and we will elect a representative from the APC to serve on the UAP for the 2014-2015 academic year.

The next agenda item is the consent agenda for follow-up reports. It was moved and seconded to accept the three reports on the consent agenda. The motion passed unanimously.
For the M.S.Ed. in Educational Research and Evaluation degree program we asked the department to provide a report on the implementation of all assessment methods. The concern is that they have some tools and a plan, but there are no data reported. It was moved and seconded to seek more data from the department, and the motion passed unanimously.

For the B.S. in Chemistry degree program, we asked the department to report on assessment findings (provide evidence that the methods included in the assessment plan have been implemented; data/findings from methods are summarized and included in the report; and faculty have reviewed the data/findings from the methods and determined what actions need to be taken based upon the findings). For the M.S. in Chemistry this information was provided, and that is why it was on the consent agenda. The B.S. part of the report didn’t have the level of data provided that the M.S. report had; there was no evidence provided in the B.S. report. It was moved and seconded to request more data from the department for the B.S. in Chemistry program. The motion passed unanimously.

The B.A./B.S. in Journalism and the B.A./B.S. and M.A. in Communication Studies programs were asked to report on the implementation of all assessment methods and the use of the data. No data are provided in the report. It was moved and seconded to ask the programs for more data, an explanation of how these data help them assess the programs, and a description of the specific learning goals that these methods address. The motion passed unanimously. There needs to be a link between the methods and objectives. We can ask for this information.

We are seeing a pattern here; some of the reports provide information on assessment methods, but they are not providing the data. Chris Parker or someone in his office should reach out to these departments and tell them that we need data. It is fair to say that they don’t have results. We should ask why they don’t have the data.

Maybe subcommittees should put these together with the original report, and then discuss them at a full APC meeting. Are you suggesting that the subcommittees take a set of the reports for review? If we had the piece of the original report, that would be helpful. Then the subcommittees could report out to the full APC.

A couple of years ago this council decided to invite the chairs and deans to attend an APC meeting to talk about their follow-up reports. This created a lot of anxiety, so this practice was not continued. It does seem like they don’t take these reports seriously. Maybe it would be worthwhile to have a small group meet with them to help the APC get appropriate follow-up reports.

When will we see the program review findings report for the programs that were reviewed last fall? The summary document will be brought to the APC in fall 2014.

The B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. programs in physics were asked to report on assessment findings. This department had a change in leadership. We asked them to meet with Chris Parker, but this meeting has not yet taken place. Chris needs to meet with the department chair. Their activities have to be up to snuff, so they just need to describe what they are doing. They just need to talk about what has happened over the last two years. They don’t tell us why they made changes. Maybe we should invite the chair and the dean to attend an APC meeting for about 10 minutes and then we could ask them where their results are. That was the point of meeting with Chris Parker. Something is not getting communicated to the department chair; the report talks about alumni data. A motion was made and seconded that we ask them to resubmit the follow-up report after speaking with Chris Parker. The motion passed unanimously.
The next item on the agenda is to continue the discussion of the role of the APC. What we are really looking for is follow-up from you on the previous meeting (the panel discussion). My thoughts were that the glasses were half empty and half full. It was clear that the panel members want the APC to have a clear role in evaluating and recommending things for program prioritization. This is encouraging. The negative part is that we collected a lot of questions, but few were answered. Those that were answered were answered in vague terminology. Next time invite fewer people at one time. Maybe we should do this every two years. It is exciting that someone is going to listen to us.

What were your reactions?

- I agree with your statements. I struggle with what we do after we read the reports. What is the role? If these changes are made, the role might change and be more meaningful. I’m encouraged by this.
- I agree. There has been value in having the programs undergo this review. Typically individuals say this process is useful. There is some discussion back and forward, but what we were talking about is that this can be an important council that has a role in program prioritization. They want input from groups like this. We want to have a voice in this. This is kind of exciting, and we need to figure out our role.
- We should read the Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services book. It provides a good sense of prioritization and designing programs more broadly. It also talks about why it is important to get buy in to the process. One of the questions asked when we met with the provost candidates was what experience did he/she have with program prioritization and their thoughts on program prioritization. Some had undergone this at their universities with some success.
- It is unclear how much weight our voices will be given. Is this simply to show on paper that there was faculty involvement?
- I couldn’t agree more. Come meet the provost candidates and ask them about shared governance and whether they would listen to groups like this.
- Starting next fall, how is enrollment going to be part of this?
- Typically when we look at programs, we look at enrollment. In our old role, we would just say if a program had low enrollment. In our new role, we may have some input on what happens to these programs.

Going back to the Program Review Process Task Force recommendations, one of the biggest things was to have a meaningful process. We will now invite the vice president for student affairs and enrollment management to the summer program review meetings. This is an evolving process, and we are moving forward. It is really progress to have this group be part of the budget prioritization process. The recommendations are largely about the mission, not about what needs to be done. I don’t see this as part of this process right now.

We have to be willing and trusting enough to talk about these things. There are a lot of unanswered questions about this process. Looking at the big picture is important. We have all gotten in the mode that we are fighting to keep every penny. More and more we need to know how tight of a squeeze we are in. This has not been a very information sharing university. I am hoping that everything across the whole university is open. No secrets; this includes athletics too. This is the only way we will start trusting each other. I think we are seeing a trend towards transparency. This will take some time to change. It is helpful for us to figure out how this information will be brought to the decision makers. This would be a different audience. This is evolving and we can shape how this evolves. So I’m hearing
a little bit on the humanistic side. Does the APC provide incentives or consequences? Who makes the decisions? I think this is what we need to ask and make recommendations about. I think having representatives from the Office of the Provost staff at the meetings is important. Maybe we can make this more formalized. The statement from the RSB has been very helpful. If we want to recommend specific things, we should put this down on paper. It is nice to have faculty input in making budgeting decisions.

We would like as many people to read the book prior to the next meeting on the 21st. This is a fast read. It will help you frame your thinking about some of these issues.

The meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Cradduck