Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

105th Meeting
Tuesday, October 11, 2005
Altgeld Hall 225

(Approved)

Present: T. Griffin (Ex Officio, Ombudsman), B. Hemphill (Ex Officio, Vice President for Student Affairs), H. Harris (Student, BUS), M. Lenczewski (GEOL/LAS), C.T. Lin (UCC/LAS), A. Peterson (Student, EDUC), E. Seaver (Ex Officio, Vice Provost), L. VandeCreek (LIB)

Absent: M. Bringas (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development), N. Bukonda (SAHP/HHS), W. Draper (Ex Officio, Student Housing & Dining Services), P. Nelson (LIT EDUC)

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

One correction was made to the agenda.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Approval of Minutes

There were no official minutes to be approved; however, the committee reviewed discussion notes from the September 8, 2005, meeting.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Election of Chair for 2005-2006

E. Seaver outlined the duties of the committee chair and asked for volunteers or nominations of individuals willing to serve in this capacity. C. T. Lin nominated M. Lenczewski; she accepted the nomination and agreed to serve as chair for the 2005-2006 academic year. Formal approval of the appointment will be sought at the November 8, 2005, meeting, as there was not a quorum of members in attendance.

E. Seaver said that the first few meetings of CUAE will be spent starting to explore what the options are for areas of concentration for this committee during this current year. He said that the first area the committee will be looking at will be Academic Support Services, i.e., those aspects of the Vice Provost’s office; after that the area of Student Affairs will be explored to gain an overview of what has been happening over the past year in the way of changes and new initiatives there. B. Hemphill agreed to present an overview of Student Affairs at the November meeting.
which would include the mission, vision, and the reorganization of that area.

T. Griffin added that he would also be willing to present to the committee any issues raised by undergraduate students in the office of the Ombudsman during the last academic year. E. Seaver agreed that would be helpful to the committee, and he would like to include that presentation at one of the next meetings.

B. **USOAR Guidelines**

E. Seaver briefly reviewed the guidelines of the Undergraduate Special Opportunities in Artistry and Research student award program and the charge of this committee with regard to that program. CUAE has oversight over the process. A separate subcommittee that includes representatives from each of the colleges will review the proposals and report back to CUAE. He noted also that two evening workshops are being held for interested students.

C. **Committee Goals for 2005-2006**

Seaver opened discussion on what areas of focus this committee might consider as focal points for this year. He noted that, in the past, this committee has dealt more with larger “over-arching” areas rather than specific types of things. He suggested that it might be beneficial for this committee to learn more about the new tutoring center, the academic advising center, or other new or changing areas, in order to be kept informed as to the direction things are moving on campus. He views the committee as being able to have a larger impact on the institution as a whole, and, over the past few years, it has been difficult to bring enough topics in front of the committee to determine what “over-arching” issue should be concentrated on. He noted that having a more student focused/student friendly campus is a large issue, as well as academic integrity. A large issue being looked at more is the concept of where the institution is headed with regard to retention and the focus on trying to improve the retention and graduation rates. He said that those are areas he sees this committee being able to discuss and become a sounding board for. He noted specific goals for the committee may be better identified after the committee hears the presentations of B. Hemphill and T. Griffin.

C. T. Lin noted that in a previous committee discussion, it was suggested that one topic for the committee might be to initiate better partnership/incorporation of NIU and the City of DeKalb. One aspect of combined focus might be working on creating an environmentally, student friendly town for students so more students would be more inclined to stay in the area on weekends.

E. Seaver noted that that aspect fits in with the thoughts of Student Affairs. He suggested that after the committee hears B. Hemphill’s presentation next month, with regard to the community/university relationship, Rena Cotsones, NIU liaison for
community affairs, could be invited to attend a meeting to discuss what kinds of things they are trying to do that relate to that concept.

M. Lenczewski suggested that possibly someone from the City of DeKalb could also be invited to speak to the committee with regard to any plans the city may have for transforming the downtown area to be more student friendly. E. Seaver added that City Council members or the DeKalb Main Street Coordinator could also be invited. He also noted that it might be worthwhile to invite student leaders to attend a meeting to convey their perception of the institution and that of students they are in contact with.

In summary, E. Seaver recapped the following three items as immediate areas for the committee to focus on:

1) Obtaining overview/background from Student Affairs and information from Ombudsman
2) Comprise a student focus group that will provide a student perspective
3) Explore more the City of DeKalb/university relationship

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Academic Support Services

E. Seaver distributed a booklet to committee members which included descriptions of each of the Academic Support Services units which report to the Vice Provost. He gave a brief synopsis of each unit, noting that these units are all involved with the academic success of our students.

Educational Services and Programs consists of four smaller units:

CHANCE is a special admissions program, the largest in the state, that admits students who would not meet all of NIU’s minimum admission qualifications. Particular high schools, primarily from the suburbs and Chicago Public Schools, are targeted where the percentage of students who go on to university settings is quite small. Approximately 500 freshman are admitted each year through the CHANCE program, which represents about one-sixth of the incoming freshman class. Students receive significant services from CHANCE staff to help in the transition as well as taking developmental course work along with regular coursework.

ACCESS is a campus-wide tutoring program. When ACCESS was originally established it was established for CHANCE students only, but, over the years, it has turned into a campus-wide tutoring system. There are a number of locations that provide the services, and the program is growing every year. A new 8,000 square foot tutoring center in the basement of Grant South just opened and was on the Open House tour for
the first time this week. Both CHANCE and ACCESS play an important role in retention efforts at the university.

Student Support Services is strictly a grant-funded program where services are provided to assist students, some of which are CHANCE students, in utilizing existing university services in attaining their academic and life goals.

Upward Bound is an external program in which assistance is provided to students who are preparing to enter college from targeted high schools. Targeted areas include Aurora and Rockford. Student Support Services and Upward Bound are both federal grant programs that are geared toward low income and first generation college students.

Enrollment Services is comprised of the following units which are student service and admission focused:

Admissions office is responsible for handling the admission process of undergraduate students as well as the recruitment of new students.

First Year Connections focuses on helping students adjust to college life through two specific courses, UNIV 101 and UNIV 201, specifically designed for new freshmen and transfer students respectively, and through faculty mentoring. A future goal is to improve faculty participation in these courses.

Student Financial Aid provides assistance to students seeking financial support for their education.

Registration and Records is responsible for creation and maintenance of academic records, undergraduate admissions records, and the implementation of admissions policies and academic standards.

Transfer Center office was recently moved from Registration and Records into Admissions. This office is a liaison to the community colleges and provides transfer services to prospective and current students, faculty and community college colleagues. This office will also now be assisting in recruitment in terms of various groups that NIU would like to have coming through as transfer students.

Office of Retention Services is a one person office. Two major efforts coordinated by this office are the “Early Alert” program, in which a letter is sent out to faculty members who are teaching key freshman courses, in which there is a history of students struggling, asking faculty to identify freshmen who are struggling in their classes. A follow-up contact is made with the student to determine what kinds of services the student might need or what referrals could be made. The director of CHANCE also oversees the
Black Male Initiative, which is a growing program, currently up from 35 to 75, for black male students who are the highest risk students for retention and graduation. This is an attempt to provide a strong mentoring relationship with the director, GA’s, and others in the upper division.

In addition to the Early Alert Program, through the REACH (Retention Effort for All inComing Huskies) program, for approximately 1500 freshman whom are felt to be at risk for leaving NIU during the first year. These are students with low math placement, who came late to orientation or don’t appear to be connected with anything at the university. Calls or contacts have been made by trained students to over 1000 of those identified to ask what questions they have or what help they may need. Most frequently, those students asked how to find an advisor or get advising. Secondly, students wanted to know how to read a DARS report. Follow-up calls will be made to these students in November to see if they have gotten the assistance they needed. These students will be followed into their second year as well. This is a joint effort between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

Center for Black Studies is a cultural center and offers a minor in black studies. The center provides a number of supporting and organizing activities for the students, including a peer mentoring program.

The Honors Program is used as both a recruitment and retention program. The Honors Program is another growing program; the number of honors students has almost doubled in the last five years.

Scholarship Office now has a dual role in that the coordinator works with undergraduate students to help them identify institutional scholarships as well as serving in the capacity of a financial retention advocate. If a student is experiencing a significant financial crisis due to being locked by the financial aid system, the coordinator then attempts to help the student, either through scholarship funding or helping the student maneuver through the financial aid system.

Student Athlete Academic Support Services formerly reported to Intercollegiate Athletics and this last spring was moved to now report to the Vice Provost. This unit provides the counseling and/or tutoring that is provided to student athletes on campus.

Academic Advising Center exists to provide advising services to students who come to NIU who have not yet declared any major or any college, primarily freshmen. The advising center was created to assist those students by having professional staff available to focus on helping those students choose a major. The Academic Advising Center is also coordinating the majors fair.

During follow-up discussion, T. Griffin asked what has caused the large increase in the Honors Program over the last five years; he
asked if it was because we have more students with higher scores or have our standards changed. E. Seaver answered that the increase is due to getting more students interested. He stated that in order to automatically qualify for Honors a student has to be in the top ten percent of the class and have an ACT composite of 27 or above. Of those students that NIU brings in that have the 27 ACT, 75–85% are actually coming into the Honors program. A student may also enter the Honors program by coming into NIU and doing very well here; a big part of the growth is being seen there. He went on to state that standards have not been lowered at NIU, but there are more students taking advantage of the program.

M. Lenczewski pointed out that there seems to be a lack of science majors in the Honors Program, and she would like to see more growth in that area. E. Seaver added that composition and representation of the program are being looked at as well as the size of the program.

C. T. Lin asked about the status of the proposed Honors college. E. Seaver reported that he has asked Honors Committee to put together a plan of what an honors college would look like, how it would be different from what is presently in place. The committee is continuing to work on that. He added that a consultant will be on campus in December to review the Honors Program and make recommendations.

In summary, E. Seaver stated that one large issue facing the university at the present time is improvement of the university’s retention rate. He said that the above programs are just a part of the key programs focused on the academic side of that but there are two parts to the student being here – the academic side and the activity/student life side, both of which are key in university retention efforts.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 8, 2005, beginning at 2:00 p.m. in Altgeld Hall 225.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Keller
Recording Secretary