Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

106th Meeting
Tuesday, November 8, 2005
Altgeld Hall 225

Approved

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

Absent: A. Dreessen (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development), N. Bukonda (SAHP/HHS), W. Draper (Ex Officio, Student Housing & Dining Services),

Guest: T. Griffin (Ombudsman)

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made and seconded to approve the agenda. The motion passed.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the October 11, 2005, meeting were electronically approved.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Committee Goals for 2005-2006

Committee members continued discussion from the October 11th meeting regarding goals for the committee for this year. M. Lenczewski reviewed the areas identified as immediate areas for the committee to focus on which included:

1) Obtain overview/background from Student Affairs and information from Ombudsman (presentations at today’s meeting)

2) Coordinate a student focus group that will provide a student perspective

3) Explore more of the City of DeKalb/NIU relationship

In order to expand on the above immediate areas of focus, the following suggestions were made as means for collecting data and further information as to what concerns students may have regarding the campus environment:

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1) Ask Ombudsman Griffin to encourage department chairs to come to CUAE meetings to talk about cases/concerns brought to their attention
2) Hold CUAE committee meetings at various campus sites utilized by students
3) Read/review book *My Freshman Year* written by a professor on sabbatical who entered a university as a freshmen student to see what the experience was like and what the issues are facing students today
4) Ongoing retention data collection (available from Office of Institutional Research)
5) Utilize other data already available from various offices on campus (departments that do surveys, the Office of Faculty Development)

In order for the committee to move forward and/or accomplish any set goal, clear doable action items need to be identified. Possible ideas mentioned were an overpass walkway (providing easy access for students to community) or bike paths. To gain more information about and to explore these ideas further, E. Seaver will invite to the next meeting Rena Cotsones, NIU Executive Director of Community Relations. In addition, Bob Albanese, Associate Vice President for Finance and Facilities, will be contacted and asked to provide any information he has available on past research done on parking and bike programs.

### B. Student Affairs Presentation

B. Hemphill, Vice President of Student Affairs, distributed several handouts and presented an overview of the Division of Student Affairs. He stated that the four key areas of concentration for the division when looking at NIU and its future were:

1) Redefining the mission to meet a changing social and financial landscape
2) Serving a non-traditional, economically challenged, growing population
3) Creating new knowledge - research extensive
4) Enhancing partnerships and educational alliances

The above four areas were the foundation for determining the Student Affairs core values. He emphasized that in every decision being made the student must be at the heart of that decision. He noted that we need to provide our students with the kind of experiences they should have and need to have to move on into the community. These are things that make up the foundation/cornerstone/focus as Student Affairs moves forward in its work.

1) Student-centered service
2) Partnerships focused on student learning
3) Establishing an inclusive community
4) Actively building collaborative relationships

B. Hemphill discussed with the Student Affairs staff what areas they felt needed to be improved on. Items shared by the staff
included improving teamwork, moving from a “good” organization to a “great” organization, enhancing student-centered culture, and regaining prominence on the national scene. Also, potential barriers to success, as well as ways to avoid those barriers, were discussed. He emphasized the importance of sharing information, expertise, and financial resources.

Initiatives were offered to and addressed by the division immediately. Two teams were formed to conduct research of over 80 institutions across the country to gather information in order to make a recommendation of what Student Affairs should look like. One of the first initiatives addressed was a review of the Student Affairs organizational structure. Two proposals for organizational charts were submitted and put together to form one chart now organized by community of practice of student life. B. Hemphill reported that the new organizational structure is working fairly well. He noted that a significant change made in the structure is that previously all directors reported directly to the Vice President whereas now directors report to an Assistant Vice President. The Student Affairs Cabinet, which includes all the Assistant Vice Presidents and directors, meets monthly.

He reported that accomplishments of the two teams also include the development of an improved alignment with the core values, vision and mission statements of Student Affairs; establishment of the infrastructure needed to carry out the strategic plan; and the expansion of responsibilities of existing Assistant Vice Presidents without any additional funding be added.

B. Hemphill stated that the division, as a 90-day initiative, has developed a five-year strategic plan. He explained that the plan will define the division’s vision, mission, goals, core values, strategies to bring goals to life, and assessments. In conjunction with the strategic plan, challenges that will impact the success of the division will be identified with relation to institutional, state, national and international. A committee comprised of fifteen appointed members, chaired by Donna Simon, Associate Vice President, Student Affairs, was formed and has been working for the past eleven months on the various components of the strategic plan. The finalized strategic plan is in the process of being printed and will be distributed to the university community soon.

He went on to share the Student Affairs vision statement with the committee: “The Division of Student Affairs inspires students to engage and succeed in their individual pursuit of learning as they transform into dynamic leaders.” He pointed out that if students don’t connect with or find their niche with this particular community, they won’t stay; so it’s important to inspire students to engage and succeed in their individual pursuits of learning. In conjunction with this, the division’s mission statement states that the division “creates student learning opportunities beyond the classroom that inspire intellectual, personal, and civic growth for leadership in a diverse and complex world.” He noted that both statements clearly convey what the division is all about.
B. Hemphill described future initiatives that are on the horizon for the division, which include analyzing resource management and reallocation, fundraising, marketing, benchmarking, assessment, defining initiatives to enhance student retention, building/renovation plans for student housing, analyzing staff evaluation procedures, and review of annual planning processes. He emphasized that all of these initiatives are very connected and very important to what the division does and how it moves toward serving students.

During discussion, it was asked if Student Affairs could assist in enhancing and/or improving the university’s connection/integration to the City of DeKalb to help make the city a more student friendly environment. He agreed that there is improvement to be made in that area and that they will be working with the city to work on the NIU/city partnership.

It was also asked what areas he thought that CUAE could help Student Affairs with. He said that one of the important things is continuing to reach out and connect with faculty about the student experience, being here on campus, and how faculty can become more engaged in this.

C. Ombudsman Report

Tim Griffin, Ombudsman, reported that the Office of the Ombudsman deals and responds with issues brought to them by members of the campus community. During the last year, there were approximately 1100 individuals that came to the Office of the Ombudsman with questions concerning or issues related to the university requesting assistance. He distributed a handout showing the breakdown by current and former undergraduate students and by types of complaints and asked that this information be kept confidential. He noted that complaints over the former year had increased by approximately five percent, which is consistent with previous years. He pointed out that the concerns reported are wide-ranging.

C. T. Lin noted that many students seem to be dissatisfied with the service they receive from faculty and staff. He asked what might be done to improve the faculty and staff service to students. T. Griffin commented that there are a number of things being done, and more things that could be done, to make improvements in this area. He noted that one suggestion might be that, for non-teaching faculty/staff, having expectations in place from supervisors at every level that courteous and respectful communications will occur and then evaluating whether or not that transpires by the actions of people who were served; and, in turn, holding a person’s evaluation process accountable for appropriate and professional behavior would be a big step. In addition, T. Griffin reported that there are also instances of individuals being asked questions beyond what they are trained and expected to know, so students go to the incorrect office. He feels that a lot of this has to do with the complexity and decentralization of the university as an organization. It also has to do with how faculty and staff are trained to respond to students in such situations. Students ultimately find their way to the Office of the Ombudsman, and be
given appropriate direction. He said that part of the reason this happens is that we have not adopted a culture here at NIU where we check with places like the Office of the Ombudsman, usually due to being in a hurry and wanting to be helpful to the students. The ultimate solution would be to develop a culture among our tenured and tenure-track faculty of mutual respect and service towards students.

D. **Honors Update**

As a follow-up to a request from a previous meeting, E. Seaver distributed a breakdown of all Honors students by major.

IV. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **USOAR Clarification**

E. Seaver reported that a senior Accountancy major had contacted him regarding submitting a USOAR proposal application. The student is due to graduate in December, 2005, and was interested in submitting a proposal, even though the grant would not be awarded until the spring 2006 semester. Committee members confirmed that the student was not qualified to apply.

V. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:37 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 14, 2006, beginning at 2:00 p.m. in Altgeld Hall 225.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Keller
Recording Secretary