Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

117th Meeting
Tuesday, April 8, 2008
Altgeld Hall 225

MINUTES

Approved

Present: I. Bhanji (Student/LAS), T. Bough (VPA), D. Cesarotti (EET), A. Dreessen (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development), J. Isabel (UCC/LAS – substitute for C. T. Lin), W. Johnson (LIB), D. Pender (EDUC), R. Shortridge (BUS), K. Wesener (Ex-Officio, Executive Director, Housing and Dining)

Absent: B. Hemphill (Ex Officio, Vice President for Student Affairs), M. Lenczewski (LAS), E. Phillips (Student/Student Association), E. Seaver (Ex Officio, Vice Provost),

Guest: Donald Grady, NIU Police Chief
Tim Griffin, Ombudsman

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

In the absence of both M. Lenczewski and E. Seaver, D. Pender served as chair for the meeting.

A motion was made by T. Bough, seconded by D. Cesarotti, to approve the agenda.
The motion passed.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by D. Cesarotti, seconded by T. Bough, to approve the minutes of the February 12, 2008, Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment meeting. The motion passed.

B. Report of Strategic Planning Task Force on Student Success

There was no report.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Safety Net Follow-up
A. Dreessen made some comments as a follow-up to concerns expressed last fall by T. Bough regarding a situation in which he was assisting a student who required urgent assistance. She suggested that it may be possible to work in conjunction with Chief Grady and the emergency operations planning office to incorporate better training and communication to faculty and staff to inform them of the proper steps and contacts to make if in a similar situation. T. Bough acknowledged the follow-up and agreed that it is important for information to be easily accessible to faculty. He suggested possibly incorporating this into the emergency operations document.

B. Campus Climate – Lack of Courtesy Issue

The committee will postpone discussion on this topic until the next academic year.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Campus Safety and Campus Disaster Plan

Guest speaker, Don Grady, Chief of NIU Police, opened the floor to answer questions from committee members related to campus safety issues.

D. Cesarotti offered thanks to Chief Grady and his staff on behalf of the committee for their efforts and impressive response during the February 14th tragedy. He asked what Chief Grady’s response was to such questions as what’s new, what’s next, and how is the university going to move forward.

Chief Grady responded that the NIU campus is overall one of the safest in the country. The campus has a very low crime rate, and everything is being done to ensure the safety and security of everyone on campus. He said that the public safety department has gone well beyond what is normally considered to be the standard for policing, such as community safety centers in residence halls which are staffed with police officers twenty-four hours per day. He said that measures to deal with circumstances involving active shooters or intruders have been improved, and every police officer has had active shooter response training, and all officer vehicles are equipped with ballistic shields for additional protection.

Although not able to reveal intimate details, he said that there are some undercover things being added, one of which is a mechanism being developed now that will allow the police to be more aggressive in terms of stopping violent acts of behavior from occurring. He said that models in other organizations are being looked at which may have aspects that would be adaptable to NIU’s organization.

He went on to say that there are currently 46 university police officers on the force; this number is being increased to 62 with the addition of new officers by fall 2008. This will ensure the placement of three police officers in the residence halls in the evenings rather than the current two. He said that new emergency medical technician kits have been ordered, as well as fifty additional kits; these kits are placed in all residence halls and many other locations around campus.

He went on to say that there will be a change made to the access control format in the residence halls so that professional security personnel will be used rather than student population. All of those individuals will be tied directly into the police department with communication systems so that they will be able to talk directly to a shift commander rather than having to dial into 911. He also noted
that the alarm/alert system is currently being worked on so that everyone will be able to receive an
alert signal immediately if one is sent out. An alert system is being discussed that would let everyone
in and around campus know that there is a problem on campus. He explained that the signal would
be much like the tornado siren but would be voice controlled with safety instructions being given on
what to do. He noted that the email messaging system will also be used; however, the signal system
will be the major system relied on to get the immediate alert out to the campus community. The
email messaging will then be used to disseminate additional information as necessary.

T. Griffin commented that he has had some faculty members contact him and indicate that they felt a
bit uncomfortable during the February 14th crisis because the rooms in which they were teaching did
not lock. He asked if Chief Grady had any comment on the potential of installing locks on every
classroom door. Chief Grady said that an assessment is presently being done of all locks and locking
devices on campus, and many doors already do have locks installed that lock from the inside. He
noted that locking the door from the inside means help from the outside can not enter, and, if inside
locks can not be accessed from the outside without some special consideration, it is likely that a
perpetrator would also know this. He added that some serious thought has to be given to this issue
before every door is equipped with a lock from the inside as shooting incidents are usually well
planned out circumstances involving large groups of individuals, and perpetrators are familiar with
room setups. Doors with locking capability from the inside must be equipped with a mechanism that
would allow them to be opened from the outside, especially if the door is made of steel.

D. Pender commented that she was pleased and appreciative of the foresight decision to have all
police officers trained as EMT’s had been made as this certainly made a difference in saving lives
during the February 14th shootings. She also expressed appreciation to the crisis management teams
working in the residence halls on the evening of February 14th. She commented that the entire
faculty does not understand crisis management or what things should be done in an emergency
situation. She suggested that it would be helpful to have faculty and staff training in emergency
response procedures in order to provide better information about what to do and not do in a
classroom crisis situation. D. Grady responded that a training plan for the entire university, to include
faculty, staff and students, is being created; it is intended that the training will be done annually and
will be completed on the computer, much as the present ethics testing is done.

T. Bough asked if Chief Grady could provide an overview of the services that the NIU Department of
Public Safety provides and does not provide. Grady answered that the department is a service
oriented department, and all officers help with all safety issues, no matter how small or how large,
with prevention being the goal. He said the department has placed officers in the residence halls in
the evenings. He said that training is critical, and all officers are sent to the national crime prevention
institute, and each receives 200 hours of crime prevention training in addition to the 400 hours of
regular training each individual needs to become a police officer. EMT training is mandatory for
every police officer, and each officer becomes an EMT or paramedic. All officers undergo training as
first responders to an active shooter and high risk entry, in addition to having a critical incidence
response team of highly trained individuals is in place. The department also has hazardous material
technicians present on campus. He emphasized that training for officers is not just in tactical
matters; they are also taught problem identification and problem solving. All officers hired are
required to have, at the minimum, a bachelor’s degree.

R. Shortridge commented that she thought training of faculty was an outstanding idea. She asked
Chief Grady what general advice he could give a faculty member for handling an erratic student in
the classroom. Chief Grady answered that judging erratic behavior is difficult. He said that, if it is
possible and the faculty member is aware of the situation before hand, the faculty member could call
public safety to alert them. Or, another student in the class could be taken aside and asked to make
the call to 911 to have an officer come quietly to the classroom, in either uniform or plain clothes attire.

D. Pender asked Chief Grady to comment on the crime rate on campus. Chief Grady reported that the crime rate on campus is low with most incidents of crime taking place in or around the residence halls. Typically, during the first two weeks of the fall term, there have been numerous auto burglaries. Police officers are now stationed in the residence hall parking lots for those first two weeks of the fall term, and, as a result, there has been a significant decrease in the number of auto burglaries. He said that the late night drive service has also helped diminish the amount of crime and injury on campus significantly.

T. Bough asked Chief Grady to comment on the threat to campus in December that resulted in the closure of campus. Chief Grady noted that the threat was taken very seriously, but once it was determined that the threat was no longer credible, the campus was re-opened. He added that the December threat had no correlation to the February 14th shootings.

D. Pender remarked that the committee had an interest in hearing about the campus safety plan. Chief Grady said that there is an emergency operations plan in place. He noted that the plan is a comprehensive, all-hazards plan, which is consistent with what is referred to as NIMS (National Incident Management Systems). He said that the plan has been developed for use in virtually any crisis circumstance. There is a full-time staff of seven individuals that work on the emergency operations plan, and the plan is constantly being reviewed and updated. He noted that for any event on campus, there is an incident action plan drawn up involving coordination with the DeKalb Fire Department. Projections are made on what could happen at any event and how a response will be made to that situation.

D. Pender thanked Chief Grady for addressing the committee. She also commented that it was evident to her that the police officers who were stationed in the residence halls during the February 14th tragedy were compassionate and committed to the students. It was clear that the officers were well thought of and well received by the students, and the students felt much safer because of their presence there.

B. Overview of Current Year Activities

D. Pender briefly reviewed the year’s list of agenda topics discussed by the committee during 2007-2008 and asked if there were any topics to be carried over. It was suggested that the topics of campus facilities and campus safety be included as annual agenda topics.

C. Committee Goals for 2008-2009

The following topics were suggested as agenda topics for 2008-2009:

1) MyNIU Update (September meeting)
2) Counseling and Student Development Speaker (M. Sharma)
3) Campus Climate/Strategic Planning Survey Data
4) Overview of Crisis Response to February 14th
5) Campus Facilities/Improvements Update (B. Albanese)
6) Campus Safety Update
7) On site meeting/tour (Location?)

D. Selection of Faculty Chair for 2008-2009
Selection of a committee chair for 2008-2009 was postponed until the first committee meeting of the fall 2008.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:25 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 9, 2008, at 2:00 p.m. in Altgeld Hall 225.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Montgomery
Recording Secretary