Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

121st Meeting
Tuesday, February 10, 2009
Altgeld Hall 225

MINUTES

Approved

Present: T. Bough (VPA), P. Brown (BUS), D. Cesarotti (EET), J. Isabel (UCC/HHS), W. Johnson (LIB), K. Lyell (Student/LAS), D. Pender (EDUC), E. Seaver (Ex Officio, Vice Provost), M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services)

Absent: J. Brunson (Ex Officio, Student Affairs), A. Dreessen (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development), M. Koren (HHS), M. Lenczewski (LAS), Jon Tharnstrom (Student Association)

Guest: Brian Brim, Project Manager, MyNIU
T. Griffin, Ombudsman
Greg Long, Co-Chair, Baccalaureate Review Task Force

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Approval of Minutes

The November 11, 2008, minutes of the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment meeting were electronically approved.

III. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. MyNIU Update – Brian Brim, Guest Speaker

Brian Brim, Project Manager for MyNIU, provided a status report on the new student information system, MyNIU. He reported that the implementation portion of the project is now ending its first year. The schedule of classes portion is currently being put into operation for the first time. He explained that each time a segment of the new system has been brought into operation for the first time, there have been discoveries of things that need to be changed; so, changes are being made as the implementation
process moves forward. He said that the implementation team has encouraged individuals working with
the new system to let them know what does or doesn’t work well in order to help the next
round of implementation go smoothly. He said that changes are being made every term as the process moves along. He also said that regular meetings are being held with the ITS Help Desk to work on solutions to problems, and these solutions are then passed on to the training group.

Brim answered several questions related to specific application processes, emphasizing that the new system is not a replacement for Blackboard. He said that, if there are items that faculty need to have posted, such as a syllabus or an assignment, Blackboard is the tool that should be used for that purpose. Any problems or issues that the department cannot resolve should be referred to the ITS Help Desk.

E. Seaver reiterated that, as the implementation moves forward and the basic tool is up and running, the focus will be to look at what additional functionality can be added. He said that, through dialogue with other institutions that are further ahead of NIU in working with the People Soft system, the university is learning of new functionalities that could be used that would benefit NIU students. He added that this is a “continuing to evolve” situation. He noted that one additional function being looked at now is the creation of a way for faculty to take the grades from Blackboard and electronically enter them into MyNIU. He added that one benefit of the new system is the ability to get data much more readily at different times during the semester, thus making it much easier to do diagnostics relative to the university.

B. **Baccalaureate Review Update – Greg Long, Guest Speaker**

Greg Long, Co-Chair of the Baccalaureate Review Task, updated the committee on work of the task force. He explained that the development of NIU’s strategic plan lead to the determination that general education needed to be examined. A task force, the Curricular Innovations Task Force, was formed in conjunction with the strategic planning process, and the task force met throughout the 2007-2008 academic year. Out of the work of the task force came a recommendation to look at reforming general education. A steering committee for this purpose was put together comprised of representatives from different areas of the university. Several members of the steering committee attended a conference on general education last spring. As a result, it was determined that, before general education reform can take place, it would be necessary to identify and know what the baccalaureate degree goals of the University are and what the university wants its students to learn, attain, become, etc. He said that the last time the university performed a comprehensive baccalaureate review was in 1983; however, not much reform or implementation came as a result of the 1983 study even though recommendations were suggested.

Long went on to say that the steering committee felt that it was important to engage the entire university in discussion about what the baccalaureate goals should be. In order to do that, the steering committee and task force has begun conducting focus groups and open forums with various groups across the campus community (faculty, staff, students, administrators, employers and community colleges). In addition, in order to allow all individuals to have the opportunity for input, an online survey has been developed. A link to the survey, as well as a link to the baccalaureate review
website, has been placed on the NIU homepage.

Long said that, until now, there has not been any ready source of information on general education available, and, in order to learn about general education, one must go to the undergraduate catalog. The hope is that the baccalaureate review website will be used as a means to keep the university community informed as to what is happening with the review process, and, eventually, this website will transition into a general education website where students can access and get relevant information through a link on the NIU homepage.

Long said that the goal of the task force is to have data collected from the survey and focus groups by the end of the spring semester so that the summer can be spent looking at the data and developing recommendations. Recommendations will then be brought back to the university community in the fall. Further input will be sought, and, with endorsement, a final set of goals will be generated and presented to the appropriate university governance bodies, including the General Education Committee, Undergraduate Coordinating Committee, etc., for approval. He added that, once the goals are approved, phase two of the process will be to look at what is already being done at NIU and to identify any areas which might need to be strengthened or modified. He said that all of these things will be run through the appropriate committees. He added that this will be an excellent opportunity for the university as a whole to have input and make some decisions in terms of how NIU ultimately looks at its baccalaureate goals and how that will lead to reform in the general education program.

D. Cesarotti suggested Greg Long be invited back to speak to CUAE again at a meeting in the fall to update the committee on further progress of the Baccalaureate Review process.

C. Foundations of Excellence – E. Seaver

E. Seaver distributed an informational document to committee members that provides a brief description of the Foundations of Excellence® (FoE). He explained that, from the strategic planning process, one recommendation of the Curricular Innovations Task Force was for the university to apply to participate as a member institution in the Foundations of Excellence®. This was an accepted recommendation, and, after completing an application, the university was approved to participate in this process over the next two years.

He explained that the Foundations of Excellence® is a self-study, and in NIU’s cohort there are thirty universities that are participating in this process. He said that the FoE is a very systematic self-study of first year experiences. The basic process is that, by way of using faculty, students, and a number of resources, an audit of what the university does with first year students is taken, and then a plan developed that will provide students with an excellent first year experience. He noted that “first year” experience refers to not only UNIV 101 but to everything that the university does, such as programming, that has the potential to have an impact on first year students.

E. Seaver said that five individuals were selected to attend a FoE training session this past summer. Upon return from the training, a steering committee was formed, followed by the creation of a large task force that will lead the university through the
process. He and Denise Rode, Director, Office of Orientation, will serve as Co-Liaisons for the task force.

He reported that the process of doing a campus-wide audit is now underway. He explained that the process is set up around nine different dimensions, which include such aspects as university organization, philosophy, diversity, learning, etc., each having its own committee to guide the work of the process. Each dimension committee will have co-chairs, one from academic affairs and one from student affairs and will be comprised of university faculty, staff and students. Each committee will study a set of proponent indicators based around a series of questions relative to what the university is doing now and how effective the university is with relation to the first year experience. The performance indicators are not only relative to all of the dimensions but also to data compiled from a survey taken in fall 2008 of all first year students. He said that 40% of all first year students responded to the survey. Data from the survey will be used by the dimensions committees as they begin the audit and development of a plan during the first year of the process.

Seaver went on to say that this coming Monday a faculty survey will be launched, and all faculty and staff will receive an invitation to participate. Data will be compiled from this survey to gain insight into faculty and staff perceptions and participation in the first year experience and will be used by the dimensions committees as they do their self-study.

He said the goal is to have data collected by the end of this present semester or early summer. Following the completion of data collection, each committee will write a report on how the university is performing relative to the critical performance indicators that ask how the university is measuring up and what the university wants to do to be successful with students. The completed report will be a reference document for the institution that will be used to determine where there are areas for improvement, how improvements are being made in those areas, or other recommendations that would enhance the first year experience. He emphasized that this is not about good or bad, but rather about where the university is now, how the university measures up, and where the university needs to go. He noted, also, that some things are already being discovered that it is felt need to be added to the first year experience, and those things can be implemented along the way without having to wait until the end of the process. He said the end process will result in having a report that conveys a self-assessment segment as well as development of a plan to move forward. The entire process will take about two years.

T. Bough asked for a more specific definition of some of the dimensions, and Seaver provided examples. Seaver said, also, that there is one other piece of information that will be looked at along with the survey of first year students. All first year programs are being surveyed. He added that one other thing being done is the posting of at least five of the university’s highest enrollment freshmen classes. Of those, grades of D, F, W and I will be looked at in terms of percentage to determine which courses have extremely high numbers of those posted grades. Freshmen courses with a moderate or low enrollment that show a high degree of D, F, W, and I may also be looked at, as well. All of this data will aid in looking at how students navigate the academic system in order to be successful.

Seaver encouraged CUAE committee members to participate on one of the dimensions committees if invited to do so.
D. Lack of Courtesy Issue – E. Seaver

E. Seaver commented that the lack of courtesy issue on campus has come up in previous committee discussions and in reports from Tim Griffin, Ombudsman, and he felt it necessary to address the issue in relation to the responsibilities of the office of the Vice Provost.

Seaver said that currently there are three or four primary issues being addressed in the area of academic affairs for undergraduates under the office of the Vice Provost. The two major issues are admissions and retention, and the issue of retention has been somewhat circled around for some time. He explained that the university can bring in 5,000 new students every year, but if they are not staying at NIU because they don’t like it here, then there needs to be more focus put on retention. He said that one of the major issues is that the campus is not very student friendly. He said he has received complaints about almost every major office on the campus, rightly so or not. The complaints may not necessarily be about the decision of the office but about the way in which the person was treated. He emphasized that every effort should be made to be courteous in the way in which we approach students, even when conveying a decision which may not be in the student’s favor. He said it is his feeling that, over time, NIU’s campus has become less of a student focused, student friendly campus with one of the major issues being lack of courtesy to students.

Seaver pointed out that this campus is not an easy campus for students to navigate. Students have a difficult time getting information about where they are supposed to go, and, therefore, students start to become shuffled around. This adds to the campus climate. He noted that students who leave the university are being surveyed as well as students who are admitted to NIU but do not come. In addition, a sampling of freshmen prospects are also being surveyed this year to find out what they think about NIU and about NIU’s major competitors.

Seaver said that a number of things are now being initiated, particularly in the offices that report to the Vice Provost, to try to measure how the offices are doing with relation to students. He said that he hopes, partially by setting this kind of example and partially by reaching out to other areas, especially through the Foundations of Excellence® initiative, to start to generate a campus climate that is much more positive for the students. He said that all of the offices reporting to the Vice Provost will be doing satisfaction surveys. Each semester, results of the surveys will be compiled, and an action plan will be put together. He also said a barrier study is being done in the Vice Provost’s units to identify what things are seen as barriers for students and where students run into problems.

Seaver also reported that a calling center is in the process of being established within the Vice Provost’s area. The calling center will be available to any students who have been admitted to NIU or are prospective students who have any question about the university. Students may call the number with a question, and an answer or response will be provided to them within twenty-four hours. If the answer is not available, the student will be referred to someone who can assist them within twenty-four hours. Eventually, it is hoped that this will become a portal for the entire university.
Another measure being taken is a coordination with Human Resources and employee orientation to include education of new employees on what it means to work at the university and work with students. In addition, Human Resources has agreed to develop a supervisory training program for those individuals who may be moving into supervisory roles.

Seaver announced that in an effort to accommodate students, office hours of those offices reporting to the Vice Provost were extended during the first two weeks of classes of this semester, and this will always be the policy from now on. This will also be the case at other times during the semester which are key times for students to get things done. Offices will remain open until 6:00 or 6:30 p.m.

A brief discussion followed about the work environment, accountability, and evaluation implications for staff members. It was suggested that increased training for staff be coordinated with Human Resources. In addition, it was suggested that campus offices stay open on Fridays in the summer until summer session is underway, implementation of self-service portals with a link for freshmen, and GIS mapping for individual student schedules were suggested as possible ideas for assisting students with navigating campus.

E. Report from Affirmative Action and Diversity Resources (AADR) Committee – W. Johnson

W. Johnson provided a brief report of the recent AADR committee meeting, noting that the committee heard a guest speaker who discussed and explained the procedures to file discrimination and harassment issues. The committee also discussed procedures to promote diversity.

W. Johnson also requested, on behalf of the Academic Convocation Committee, a list of the 2007-2008 USOAR recipients to contact as possible research presenters at Academic Convocation in August. E. Seaver said his office would provide a list of recipients to him.

F. Parking Concern – J. Isabel

J. Isabel asked if there was any update on the status of the chiller plant construction near the Campus Life Building and what the timeline was for re-opening the parking spaces that had been removed due to the construction of the chiller plant. She said that several faculty and staff have voiced complaints about the lack of parking spaces.

Tim Griffin suggested that individuals be encouraged to use Huskie Bus transportation as an alternate option. He also suggested that there be encouragement made for some kind of modification to at least one of the Huskie Bus routes that would take into account that occasionally faculty and staff might ride and want to stop at places like Human Resources or other destinations.

E. Seaver also noted that he thought Paul Stoddard, Secretary of Faculty Senate, has been trying to work with the Parking Committee on this issue.

V. ADJOURNMENT
The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 17, 2009, at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Montgomery
Recording Secretary