I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

D. Pender requested revising the order of the agenda to move Item IV, New Business, ahead of Item III, Old Business, to allow the guest speaker to address the committee first.

A motion was made by T. Bough, seconded by M. Koren, to approve the agenda with the revised order of business. The motion passed.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Approval of Minutes

The October 14, 2008, minutes of the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment meeting were electronically approved.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. USOAR – Student Eligibility
E. Seaver reported that a student eligibility issue has come up with regard to the Undergraduate Student Opportunities in Artistry and Research (USOAR) grants, and he would like input from the committee.

He said that he has had several students who are seniors and are scheduled to graduate in May are asking to submit proposals to the USOAR program. He explained that when funding for the awards is approved, the grant money is dispersed at the end of February or first of March to be used from that time on through the end of the project which normally carries through the summer and into the following fall semester. The students then complete their projects, and there is an accounting process at the end of the project where the student submits a final report and expenses. The report is then reconciled with the grant funding that was awarded.

The issue that arises then is that, if the money is not awarded until March and the project is not done until the summer or following fall, there is no way or means to hold the student accountable in terms of funds, the project, etc., as the student is no longer enrolled at NIU. He said that, in the past, if this situation arose, the decision was made internally, and a senior would not be permitted to submit a proposal because the student would be graduating and would no longer be at NIU. However, this year, since there has been an extraordinary number of seniors asking to submit proposals, he felt he should get input from the CUAE. He said that one senior was given approval to submit a proposal request as the student was returning to graduate school at NIU in the fall; thus, there would be some accountability for the funds.

E. Seaver pointed out that there was no clear provision or wording in the current USOAR guidelines. He added that, essentially, this award is for freshmen, sophomores and juniors, and the wording should be clarified and included in the guidelines for the next academic year.

J. Isabel suggested that a statement be added to the guidelines to indicate that, if a senior is returning to graduate school, he/she would be eligible to apply for a USOAR grant. E. Seaver said that this wording could be added to the guidelines with the approval of the committee. He added that the senior student would then be required to provide verification of enrollment in the NIU graduate school for the next fall semester before funding would be allocated for the project.

J. Brunson asked if some responsibility or pressure could be placed on the student’s faculty sponsor to ensure that the project would be completed. E. Seaver said that, if a final report is not submitted from the student, a $2500 hold can be placed on the student’s bursar account, and then the faculty member could be contacted to have them track the student. J. Brunson commented that, if the faculty member is willing to support the student’s project, the faculty member should also have some measurable accountability. E. Seaver responded that the faculty member could be asked to verify that they have assurances from the student that they will have accountability.

After further discussion, the following motion was made to add wording to the USOAR guidelines to clarify the eligibility of students who are of senior status.
A motion was made by W. Johnson, seconded by J. Isabel, to clarify and revise the Undergraduate Special Opportunities in Artistry and Research (USOAR) Guidelines, effective immediately, to clarify eligibility of senior students to submit USOAR proposals: Senior students who will be graduating in May are not eligible to submit a USOAR proposal unless they are returning to Northern Illinois University for graduate school the immediate following fall semester; senior students who will be graduating in December must complete USOAR projects and submit a final report before they graduate in December. The motion carried.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Update on Campus Improvements

Guest Speaker: Bob Albanese, Associate Vice President, Finance and Facilities Operations

Bob Albanese provided the committee with an overview of completed campus improvements and upcoming improvement projects. He noted that the current budget situation will have an impact on campus improvement projects. He explained that the university is waiting for the state budget projections for the remainder of the year, and, if the state institutes a state-wide budget cut, how much that will translate to the university. He said that, on the positive side, ten or fifteen years ago, the university was much more dependent on state revenue than at the present time. The university now relies much more on tuition and other types of revenues generated through student enrollment. He said that the Division of Finance and Facilities has made student retention its number one priority for the fall and will be making a concentrated effort to do everything from their side to encourage student retention and keep enrollment numbers up. He said that the division is committed to doing everything it can to make sure that it is as customer friendly as possible. The division will be taking a look at what can be done from the its perspective to deal with student retention issues, such as looking at enhancement of facilities.

Albanese noted that the Division of Finance and Facilities has had a hiring freeze in effect since August, and there are currently approximately 115 vacant positions. He said that the division utilizes student help where possible, which benefits both the students and the university. The division also tries to hire extra help personnel more extensively than in the past to fill temporary gaps between the filling of positions. He reported the Physical Plant has been impacted heavily by the freeze. Much more prioritizing has to be done with the day to day maintenance needs, especially from the health and safety side, and longer delays in accomplishing work order requests have resulted. He said that, although there is an increased burden on a small number of staff, the division is trying to utilize personnel as efficiently as possible in order to keep the campus at a high level of operation. He commented that NIU is probably one of the few universities in the state that still cleans offices every day. He said also that on days when special events are planned, additional help is brought in and hours are
Albanese updated the group on the following campus improvement projects which have either been completed or are currently in the process of being worked on:

1) Campus Beautification Projects - He noted that even with the stretching of funding, the planting of flowers and trees is important for campus beautification. He pointed out that the beauty of the campus is key in attracting students. He reported that an opportunity is being developed for departments, donors, alumni, etc., to sponsor the planting of a tree, the purchasing of a bench, etc. He would like to see this program accelerated so that additional trees and benches designated as memorials are added to enhance the look of campus.

2) Parking Services – He noted that Parking Services previously reported direct to himself, however, that unit now has been shifted to be under the supervision of Chief Don Grady in Public Safety.

3) Completed Improvement Projects – Several projects completed this year include the following:

   a. East Campus Central Chilled Water Plant – The chiller plant is located near the Campus Life Building and will be online in approximately eighteen months. The state is co-funding this project with the university paying for about twenty percent of the project. The piping for the project was completed during the summer of 2008, and the chiller plant itself is now being constructed. Once in operation, the chiller plant will provide a much more stable air conditioning environment for the buildings on the east side of campus.

   b. West Campus Roadways - This is a long-term project and involves the land that the university owns west of the convocation center. As the city has been working on the Bethany Road extension, the opportunity was there for the university to develop roadways there and lay out the grid for future development. This is a federal project, thus, no university monies would be used for this project.

   c. Track and Soccer Field – This project was funded by the athletic program through game revenues and donations. Albanese noted that this new field will put the university in good shape because if Chicago is selected as the 2016 Olympics site, NIU will be one of the facilities involved in supporting some of the events.

   d. Wesley Building – The Wesley Building has been purchased by the University and, once it has been renovated, will house centralized advising and retention services. Work on the building has begun, with the first priority being to make the building safe by taking care of mold issues. It is hoped that the building will be completed within six to nine months.

   e. NIU Police Station – The former Speech and Hearing Clinic Building is currently being renovated for use by NIU Public Safety. The renovation is extended.
approximately 80 percent complete.
f. Parking Lots – The upgrading of parking lots is a continuing process. The parking lot behind Lowden Hall was completed during the summer of 2008.

4) Upcoming projects will include the following:

a. Parking Lots – Two small parking lot projects are planned for the upcoming spring. Scheduled to be upgraded are one area of the Human Resources Building lot and another section of the Convocation Center parking lot.

b. Martin Luther King Commons area – A project to rethink and renovate the MLK commons area is planned for this summer. Albanese pointed out that this area is a main focal point of campus and should be maintained at a higher level. It is hoped that this commons area will be completely redesigned into a more attractive manner this coming summer.

c. Founders Library Outside Patio Area – Albanese said that he hoped that the outside courtyard area next to the lower level of the library can be recreated to be more attractive. It is hoped that this project might also be done in conjunction with the MLK commons renovation.

d. Campus Alert System – Albanese noted that this is something that is an important health and safety issue to the whole campus, and all universities are dealing with this issue. A campus alert system has become a priority for the University. It is imperative to have a campus alert system that is state of the art and makes sense for NIU. Several ideas have been reviewed, and NIU has been brainstorming with other universities. The University has committed resources to come up with a plan that will work for NIU, and once the right plan and the right engineering is determined, information will be made available to the university community. T. Bough commented that students are greatly trusting and believing in the new text alert system recently initiated on campus. Albanese commented he was pleased to hear that as it is important to have systems in place that students are comfortable using and accessing.

e. Other Summer Projects – Albanese gave an overview of summer performance contract projects. He explained that every year the University develops a performance contact. The State of Illinois has developed a law stating that, if the University can develop a project that has a utility energy payback over twenty years, the project can be financed with the utility savings that is generated. Such projects would be those that could be done on campus that basically don’t cost the university anything, because whatever the cost, it is being saved in the electric bill. NIU is the leader of performance contracts in the state with a total of seven. The utility savings has been used to do the following “green” projects this past summer:

1. Windows and doors installed in DuSable Hall, Dorland Building, and Gabel Hall.
2. Solar heating for pool water in Gabel Hall – saved about $50,000.
3. East and West Heating Plant – Infrastructure work, replacing
existing roof.

f. Summer 2009 Projects will include the following:

1. Grant Towers – Plumbing projects such as replacement of faucets and urinals that have low consumption fixtures – saving consumption by replacing with more efficient fixtures.
2. Evans Field House – Windows and door replacements.
4. Nursing School – Replacement of doors and provide ADA doors and ramp.
5. Rockford Education Center – General maintenance and repair.
7. Dorland Building Freezer Upgrade and/or Shutdown to minimized usage and increased energy efficiency.
9. Investigation of possible other uses for wind turbines on other parts of campus for both energy usage savings and a teaching environment for students.
11. Cleaning of duct work in some buildings.

In summary, Albanese commented that this is a very ambitious schedule for next summer. He noted that some projects may not be completed due to affordability or the payback may not be realized. He noted that the challenge is to figure out what can be done to improve the campus and keep things moving forward without having to impact the university budget. He emphasized that the division is a support function of the university and is focused toward supporting the academic mission of the university.

T. Griffin asked the status of the student request from last year for the placement of a bus shelter near Barsema Hall and the Engineering Building. Albanese responded that the issue appears to currently be at a standstill, however, he would look into re-opening discussion on this once again. He agreed to keep the committee updated on this.

T. Griffin also asked for an update on the Red Bike Program. Albanese responded that the Red Bike Program is now operated through Parking Services and oversight of the program is now handled through NIU Public Safety. He did note that the program now has 85-100 bikes on campus, and all bikes are out at all times. He said improvements to the program include newer, better bikes and more accountability by bike users. Students must now put their ID information online in order to use the bike, and they must sign an agreement that they will show up every two weeks to prove that the bike is still in good shape. Students may use the bikes for two weeks at no charge. Albanese said that he plans to check with the Director of Parking Services, and, if more bikes are needed, twenty more bikes will be added to the program.
Albanese noted that a campus rental car program was also being looked at, however, with the numerous logistical issues to be considered, this was still in the preliminary investigative stage.

D. Pender expressed a concern about accessibility within campus buildings. She said that it is possible to get from parking lots into all campus buildings from the outside by pushing the accessibility button to open the automatic doors. However, once inside a building, it is not easy to maneuver from floor to floor. She explained that once a person is out of the elevator, there are not accessibility buttons on any of the inside building floors to open doors. She noted that the spirit of the law is certainly being met in being able to get inside the building, but a person in a wheelchair can not move through the buildings very easily. She voiced another concern, as well, in that it is impossible to see or be aware of a person in a wheelchair on the reverse side of a door with no window who is trying to enter using the door handle. This could create a hazardous situation. Albanese noted that working in accessibility is a part of any project being done, and the university has worked hard at making elevators accessible. He noted that there is still some state funding that has not yet been released which is designated for accessibility signage, etc., that might be possible to use for this type of project. He will investigate this.

D. Pender thanked Dr. Albanese for attending the meeting and invited him to return in the fall to address the committee again. B. Albanese agreed to provide the committee with another update in fall 2009.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 10, 2009, at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Montgomery
Recording Secretary