Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT
126th Meeting
Tuesday, February 9, 2010
Altgeld Hall 225

MINUTES
Approved

Present: J. Barakat (Student/LAS), T. Bough (VPA), J. Brunson (Ex Officio, Student Affairs), C. Downing (BUS), A. Dreessen (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development), B. Henry (HHS/UCC Rep), K. Johnson (Student/CAB), G. Matushek (Student/VPA), S. Schweitzer (Student/EDU), Seaver (Ex Officio, Vice Provost), M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services)

Absent: W. Johnson (LIB), M. Koren (HHS), M. Koss (EDU), M. Lenczewski (LAS)

Guest: T. Griffin, Ombudsman
Brian Hemphill, Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management
Greg Long, Professor, Co-chair of the Baccalaureate Review Task Force
Denise Rode, Director, Office of Orientation and First Year Experience, and Co-Liaison of Foundations of Excellence®

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by C. Downing, seconded by J. Brunson, to adopt the agenda. The motion passed.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by C. Downing, seconded by J. Brunson, to approve the November 10, 2009, minutes of the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment meeting. The motion passed.

III. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Baccalaureate Review, Part Two
T. Bough introduced Greg Long, Co-chair of the Baccalaureate Review Task Force. Long provided the group with a brief outline of activities and work which has been done by the Baccalaureate Review Task Force over the last year. He explained that in spring 2009 the task force undertook the charge of finding out what the university felt would be important student learning goals. Input was gathered through focus groups and an online survey with reports summarizing the feedback being put together over this past summer. In September three reports were posted on the Baccalaureate Review website. All of the reports stated the same thing but conveyed the information at different levels of depth, and all three reports emphasized that the task force was focusing on the “three Cs” as proposed student learning goals (critical thinking, communication and understanding of context). Long explained that, rather than moving ahead with only those three goals, the task force felt it would be valuable to once again in the fall revisit all of the groups initially called upon to obtain feedback on what had been developed thus far. An online feedback option was also made available.

Long said there were three basic themes of feedback, the first being the need for adding one more learning goal, “creativity.” Secondly, students’ majors needed to be highlighted, and, thirdly, the idea that students should “know a foreign language.” He said that there was agreement on both the idea that creativity be added as a goal and the idea of highlighting context. With regard to knowing a foreign language, however, the basic feeling was that taking four courses of a foreign language would not make students know a foreign language. Thus, this aspect is being looked at more in terms of how to operationalize this relative to global and international learning outcomes rather than having students specifically taking a four-course sequence.

The task force also thought that there would be value in having a “purpose statement” that would help as the development of learning objectives was pursued. After much discussion, the task force formulated a framework statement which will be used to guide the task force through the process of creating the meaningful and measurable student learning objectives associated with the proposed goals. The purpose statement will be finalized during February and distributed along with a spring update on activities of the task force.

Seaver said that it should be pointed out and made clear that the purpose statement is not a mission statement but rather a purpose statement for the baccalaureate degree.

K. Johnson commented that she is pleased with the addition of creativity to the purpose statement as it relates to more than just academics. T. Bough said that he agreed and appreciated the task force’s implementation of “creativity” into the purpose statement, noting that it sends a positive and encouraging message not only to students but to faculty, as well. He expressed his thanks to the task force for this addition, noting that the College of Visual and Performing Arts will be grateful.

C. Downing suggested that the terminology “recognizing context” could be made stronger by changing the language to “developing context.” Long agreed with the suggestion, and he will share this with the task force.

Long went on to report that members of the steering committee are leading goal
development teams. Each team is comprised of ten members, both task force and non-task force members, and each will focus on developing some institutional-wide objectives that will fit with the broader goals. During a March task force meeting, the goals developed by the teams will be presented to the task force for feedback, and this information will then be brought back to the appropriate committees for further reaction during April. Updates will then be posted online.

Long added that the task force is continuing to reach out to Student Affairs as this process develops further. He pointed out that this is more than just an academic focus but co-curricular, as well, and also includes aspects of the first-year experience.

Long expressed his appreciation for the work of the task force and added that he appreciated having the opportunity to update this group. He encouraged everyone to submit comments and/or questions at any time.

B. **Foundations of Excellence® Update**

Denise Rode began by stating that, in addition to serving as Co-liaison of the Foundations of Excellence® (FOE) in the First College Year, she is also serving as chair of the Academic Convocation committee. On behalf of the Academic Convocation committee, she brought to the attention of the group that a call for proposals for the faculty and staff academic research project presentations, which will be the focus point of the 2010 Academic Convocation, is now being made. A website containing further information and details is now online, and she asked committee members to share this call for proposals with their colleagues.

Rode provided an overview of the Foundations of Excellence® process to date. She pointed out that the Foundations of Excellence® and Baccalaureate Review processes are running parallel as both will run over a several year time span. She explained that the Foundations of Excellence® is a national initiative under the auspices of the National Policy Center on the First Year of College out of North Carolina. The focus of the initiative is to help develop the best possible first-year experience for freshmen, and the impetus for Foundations of Excellence® was the strategic planning process which began a few years ago. In conjunction with the Strategic Planning Task Force on Student Success, a proposal on the Foundations of Excellence®, was presented to focus on the first year experience of NIU’s students. This a collaborative effort between Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, and the National Policy Center.

Rode went on to say that this is an internally-driven study, not an external review, and it identifies areas that need improvement in the first year as well as concerns areas that are already working well. The study focuses on what the institution controls and does as opposed to what the student does. The ultimate goal of the initiative will be to produce and implement an effective action plan for the comprehensive first-year experience.

She described that the model being used is comprised of a set of aspirational principles (dimensions), not minimum standards that the university is aiming to go above and beyond. The dimensions will guide the evaluation of the university’s efforts for first-year students. She explained that this is somewhat of a self-measurement as well as a
planning model. She emphasized that the goal is to develop what is thought to be an excellent beginning for the university’s new students. She added that a task force comprised of approximately twenty members representing every NIU constituency and campus experts has been formed, as well as nine dimension committees. The focus for Foundations of Excellence® is the institution as a whole, and the unit of analysis is the entire first year. The method is to evaluate the current first-year experience through the work of the nine foundational dimensions committees.

Rode went on to explain that the foundation of the FOE program is what has been termed the current practices inventory. An audit of all existing programs and services, such as CHANCE, FYRE, UNIV 101, etc., for freshmen has been done and made available to members of the dimensions committees. She said that Foundations of Excellence® is based a lot on what is called evidence, and the decision-making that results from this will be based on the evidence that has been collected to date and will continue to be collected over the next few months. Two surveys have been administered to date, a student survey in fall 2008 and a faculty/staff survey in spring 2009, and a content analysis of the open-ended responses has been completed. A variety of focus groups have also been held, in addition to several “mini-surveys” and other qualitative types of research such as “secret shoppers” attending orientation sessions, campus tours, and open houses for prospective students. As part of the survey process, six institutions, which are the most comparable to NIU, have been identified by the task force as educational benchmark institutions for NIU.

Seaver added that the task force is now at the starting point to begin the process of compiling a summary of all of the data that has been generated. One of the issues that the task force has, as recommendations are asked for and are coming from the nine dimension groups, is how to incorporate these recommendations into a format that is usable. Some of the recommendations are very specific but have certain requirements, and other recommendations are more general in nature. He said that most universities take a one-year time frame to complete this process, but NIU has taken two years because of the Baccalaureate Review process also being in progress.

Seaver said that each dimension committee has written a report with its recommendations, and the National Policy Center reviewed each report and made suggestions. He said that some of the recommendations that have been made are already being implemented because some of those same recommendations were made in the strategic plan. He reported that preliminary results have indicated there are primarily five areas that most of the recommendations fall under: 1) Oversight Coordination; 2) Merit and Reward; 3) Academic Advising; 4) Programming; and 5) Communication. He said the task force will begin to look at whether a set of recommendations can be developed under those five areas.

Seaver said one of the next steps will be for the Steering Committee to begin to look at all the recommendations and pare the number down to a smaller, more manageable number, resulting in an action plan for the next five years. He emphasized that recommendations will not be lost, as this will be an evolving process; everything can not be done in the first five years. A series of reports including recommendations will be developed and shared with the NIU community. Recommendations will be aligned with
the Baccalaureate Review process and will then be presented to the President, Provost, etc., and implementation will begin.

A brief discussion followed with student members sharing perceptions of their own first-year experiences, and committee members posing questions and comments regarding connecting students with faculty and activities during their first year, UNIV 101, and developing additional opportunities for first-year students. Rode encouraged and invited committee members to feel free to submit ideas and/or suggestions that they feel would be important for the task force to know.

C. Enrollment Management Strategies

Dr. Brian Hemphill, Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, provided an overview of the division’s approaches and strategies regarding enrollment management as it relates to the strategic planning process. He shared copies of the strategic planning enrollment management timeline which details where the process currently is and the direction of the process as it moves forward. He emphasized the importance of having the institution commit to a set of goals as it relates to enrollment and make a commitment to where the institution is going year by year around an enrollment target.

Hemphill explained that the process began by developing a structure for an enrollment planning task force around strategic planning. The task force group is comprised of approximately 45 members including vice presidents, deans, faculty, directors, students, and staff from across the university. Provost Alden presented the charge to the task force in September 2009. The first order of business was to make sure everyone was working on the same level of knowledge around enrollment, so, a series of presentations were made to the group relating to admissions, retention, financial models, etc., and how enrollment fits into each aspect.

In January, five subcommittees, each comprised of eight to ten individuals, were formed to focus on the various aspects of enrollment management. Subcommittee chairs could also add additional members to be a part of their group based on the individual’s expertise within the institution, so some groups are much larger than others. Each subcommittee will be meeting weekly over the next few months. In April four of the subcommittees will be sharing their preliminary findings with the task force, and the final subcommittee presentation will be made in June. Final subcommittee drafts will be presented to the task force in August, September and October, with November being the deadline for having all the reports due. Hemphill said that the plan is to have the final presentation of the report to the task force, Provost Alden, and President Peters and Senior Cabinet in February, and after that the report will be rolled out to the institution.

Hemphill went on to describe the charge of each of the five subcommittees and what each is working on. The five subcommittees and chairs are:

Marketing and Branding – Kathy Buettner, Chair
Recruitment – Brandon Lagana, Chair
Retention – Earl Seaver, Chair
The Marketing and Branding Subcommittee will be focusing on how to go about achieving branding prominence for NIU within the region and beyond. A part of the subcommittee’s charge is to look at how to begin improvement of Northern’s name recognition, which is important from an enrollment and recruitment standpoint when recruiting both students and faculty. The subcommittee will also be looking at how marketing and public relations campaigns can be designed in order to hit some of the target populations, such as first-year students, graduate students, law students, alumni, and potential employers, as well as corporate organizations and sponsors, etc. Another of the major tasks of this group is to identify criteria and guidelines for campus-wide consistent messages and related procedures.

The Recruitment Subcommittee is looking at setting overall recruitment targets in key populations. One specific task of the group will be to look at how to increase the prospect pool for NIU students. Hemphill said that right now approximately 16,000-18,000 undergraduate student applications are expected to be brought in. This subcommittee will look at how to increase that number. Another area of focus will be how to improve identification and recruitment of target populations with taking into consideration the demographic shifts going on in the state. The overall task of this subcommittee will be to develop a grid or model to look at all of the different populations and areas and what the targets should be for NIU as it moves into the future.

The Retention Subcommittee’s charge is to look at improvement of semester-to-semester retention and the four-, five- and six-year graduation rates, as well as how to improve student-centered culture. In addition, the group will look at initiatives that are already in place, such as the Student Success Plan and Foundations of Excellence®, that will work to improve first-, second-, and third-year retention rates. The group’s charge also includes establishing targets and models for the next five years and creating a corresponding grid that includes first-year students, CHANCE students, graduate and law students, as well as sophomores, juniors and seniors.

The Institutional Facilities and Capacity Management Subcommittee’s charge is to develop a facility and capacity model to support the institution as it moves back toward the enrollment target of 25,400 students. Hemphill reported that at the end of the fall 2009 semester, enrollment totaled 24,397 students, and the ten-day spring 2010 semester count totaled 22,668 students. He noted that the drop between the fall and spring semesters is normal. This subcommittee will be working on identifying the ideal number of tenure-track faculty to support the 25,400 student enrollment target, as well as faculty/student ratios and academic advising/student ratios. The group will also be looking at classroom space, equipment requirements, and clinical requirements. The tasks of this group will be to establish baseline ratios for capacity management and minimum requirements to support enrollment goals, create a corresponding grid that includes classroom capacity, course loads, house capacity, etc., and establish strategic objectives that will operationalize the facility and capacity management grid.
Hemphill went on to say that all four of the afore-mentioned subcommittees will be funneling information into the final group, the Strategic Enrollment Target and Budget Forecasting Subgroup. This subcommittee will serve as the official committee that will gather all of the information from each of the four other subcommittees and use that information to develop a five-year plan of enrollment targets that include student profile, recruitment, retention, credit hour production and graduation rates. The plan will clearly state what NIU’s targets are with regard to new students, transfer students, retention or graduation rates.

Hemphill commented that the university has already begun some targeting recruitment efforts by running radio message ads in Spanish in the Latino radio and cable television markets. He added the Admissions Office has begun transitioning admissions applications and brochures to Spanish. He reported that the number of Latino student applications in January showed an increase of approximately 56%, the number of Latino students admitted was approximately 42%, and the number of students confirmed is about 24% above the past year. Hemphill noted that this ethnic breakdown of applications is a reflection of what is happening in the state.

Hemphill provided a snapshot of the ethnic enrollment projection stating that the ten-year projection for white student population, college ready, is showing a decline over the next ten-year period, while the African American, Asian and Latino student population projections are showing increases. He added that NIU’s applications are beginning to mirror what those projections are showing, but it will be a gradual process.

Hemphill said that one other area also being looked at is the university’s scholarship model and the leveraging of scholarships that would allow NIU to compete for students in key populations.

After a brief discussion, Hemphill summarized that the subcommittees are working very hard, doing great work and asking key questions that will help NIU be more strategic considering the level of competition for students in the state right now. He emphasized that there is a lot of work to do as there is a lot of competition for students among both community colleges and other four-year institutions. He offered to bring the final strategic plan/report back to this committee in 2011 once the Provost and the President have endorsed the report.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 16, 2010, at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Montgomery
Recording Secretary