Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

128th Meeting
Tuesday, April 13, 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), W. Johnson (LIB), M. Koren (HHS), G. Matushek (Student/VPA), P. Munn (Student/SA), E. Seaver (Ex Officio, Vice Provost), M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services)

Absent: K. Johnson (Student/CAB), M. Koss (EDU), M. Lenczewski (LAS), S. Schweitzer (Student/EDU)

Guests: Bob Albanese, Associate Vice President, Finance and Facilities Operations
Shevawn Eaton, Director, ACCESS
T. Griffin, Ombudsman

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

T. Bough suggested revising the order of the agenda to hear presentations from the two guest speakers prior to the regular business meeting.

A motion was made by C. Downing, seconded by W. Johnson, to adopt the agenda with the recommended revised order of business. The motion passed.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by W. Johnson, seconded by C. Downing, to approve the March 16, 2010, minutes of the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment meeting. The motion passed.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Residence Hall Recommendation
As follow up to the committee’s residence hall tour and discussion at the March meeting, T. Bough asked committee members to review and comment on the draft language of the recommendation in support of moving forward with renovation of the university’s residence halls. He added that he wanted to make sure the language was strong enough.

M. Koren asked where the recommendation would be submitted, and M. Stang suggested that it be first submitted to the Division of Student Affairs. Also, through the governance system, this will go to the Undergraduate Coordinating Council via the minutes of this CUAE meeting. C. Downing commented that, in light of the dismal budget situation, the urgency in making the recommendation is somewhat lessened.

E. Seaver pointed out that there is a plan in place for the renovation of the residence halls, and the necessity for the renovation has been stated numerous times by many different offices. He said that, by making the recommendation, additional support for keeping residence hall renovation “on the front burner” will be on record. C. Downing agreed that this will show that this issue is of vital concern to this committee, as well as show that the committee has taken time to tour the residence halls and look into the issue. E. Seaver also pointed out that this will communicate that the faculty and staff of this committee recognize the vital importance and need for renovation of the residence halls and the desire to have the governance process of the institution behind the plan and that this should be a high priority of the institution. Seaver added that this could be forwarded to both the Division of Student Affairs and the Division of Finance and Facilities.

Committee members reviewed the following proposed Residence Hall Recommendation language:

In following its mission
• to promote a campus atmosphere and environment conducive to learning;
• to evaluate the impact of campus housing facilities upon the learning environment; and
• to make recommendations for the improvement of the academic environment of the undergraduate students at Northern Illinois University,
the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment fully supports and makes the following recommendation:

“It is the recommendation of the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment (CUAE) that Northern Illinois University set as a major priority the reconstruction and renovation of the current residence hall facilities and move ahead as soon as possible with updating the residence halls to bring them into the 21st century so as to create a clean, healthy, inviting, welcoming and comfortable, “home away from home,” living space for undergraduate students, thereby promoting an atmosphere conducive to learning and emphasizing the major contribution an improved
residence can make to the co-curricular environment and academic success of its students.”

After additional discussion, a motion was made to accept the language as written above.

A motion was made by M. Koren, seconded by C. Downing, to approve the Residence Hall Recommendation language as it stands and submit the recommendation to Student Affairs and Enrollment Management and the Division of Finance and Facilities. The motion passed.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Campus Facilities Improvements Update

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

Albanese reported that, in terms of the campus infrastructure, the university is probably in the best shape that it has been in the last ten years, basically, as the result of performance contracts that are renewed every year. He said that the Board is committed to moving forward with any performance contract that can be put together to generate some savings. He said that, also due to performance contacts, the university’s utility costs have dropped by 30% over the past ten years, even though the square footage has increased, resulting in savings exceeding one million dollars.

He reported that within the next week or two, the new chiller plant, which was funded through a combination of different state agencies, will be brought online. Five buildings will be connected over the next few weeks, and, it is hoped, that five more will be connected during the summer months. The new chiller plant will replace some of the oldest air conditioning equipment housed in ten different buildings. This will increase air conditioning efficiency and decrease maintenance needed on the older units resulting in a considerable additional savings for the university. Building temperatures will be able to be controlled and maintained at more comfortable levels, as well.

Albanese explained that, due to the current state funding/budget situation, the university is being very conservative in committing to campus improvement projects for this upcoming summer, so, a slow down in the number of projects undertaken will be seen. In efforts to maintain and maximize the university’s cash flow in the short term, he said that several things are being done, such as lengthening the timeline of campus projects, paying vendors’ invoices on precise due dates, and negotiating with large utility companies to forego penalty fee charges for payments after the due date. He emphasized that campus project areas involving safety issues will not be reduced or removed from the project list.
Campus projects that are planned for the summer 2010 include the following:

1) Faraday Hall, Room 143/144 (replacement of seating and painting and interior work)
2) Chiller plant completion
3) Grant Tower C residence hall renovation will begin
4) Emergency alert system completion
5) Neptune fire/sprinkler system update
6) East heating plant – new system/replacement for broken down unit
7) Parking deck – joint/caulk repairs and lighting replacement
8) TV Center – air conditioning improvements
9) Recondition boiler
10) Daylight harvesting/roof projects in six buildings
11) Aesthetic projects along visible and orientation routes (sidewalk and stair repairs)
12) Visitor parking lot – improvement of service and generation of additional dollars
13) Recreation Center – lighting improvement

Albanese also pointed out that there has been a substantial reduction in the number of trades personnel, from 65 to 38 people, over the past three years. This decreased number of available personnel and resources is affecting the timeline for completion of maintenance projects as the list of day-to-day work orders is continually prioritized and re-prioritized in order to maximize the use of personnel. He also said that the hiring of seasonal summer help, usually high school and college students, is being held off for now. It is likely that some summer help will be hired, however, not as many individuals as in past years.

He reported that construction of a bus shelter near Barsema Hall and the Engineering Building is still being discussed. He will check on the status of this and provide the committee with an update in the fall. He also mentioned that the rental bike program has become more popular, and thirty more bicycles have been purchased. The university now has approximately 80-100 bikes available for rental by students and/or NIU employees through Parking Services.

Albanese will provide the committee with an update on the summer improvement projects at a meeting during the next academic year.

B. Overview of ACCESS (Access to Courses and Careers through Educational Support Services)

Guest Speaker: Shevawn Eaton, Director, Access to Courses and Careers through Educational Support Services (ACCESS)

Eaton provided an overview of the tutoring and academic assistance services available to students through ACCESS. She explained that ACCESS began as a sister academic service program to the CHANCE program. In 1997, ACCESS formed a partnership with Housing to open a small tutoring center in Lincoln Hall, and services have since been expanded and have become campus-wide. Currently, there are three walk-in tutoring centers located in Lincoln, Douglas, and Grant South residence halls.
Eaton went on to describe the three basic areas of function under ACCESS, the first of which is the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) tutoring program. She explained that all of the tutoring is peer/student based, and all student tutors go through a training program which is certified through the National College Reading Association. Tutors work in one of two capacities, one-on-one and small group. Students may receive up to three hours of one-on-one tutoring per week, and drop-in tutoring is available in all three tutoring centers Sunday through Thursday, 6:00-11:00 p.m. All tutoring centers are supervised by students who have been trained, have experience as one-on-one tutors in the tutoring centers, and have shown the ability to accept additional responsibility.

Eaton said that most tutoring is for general education courses, 100- and 200-level courses. Approximately seventy percent of the tutoring is for mathematics, fifteen percent is science (mostly chemistry) related, and the remaining percentage is Spanish and a variety of other courses. Any tutoring requests for writing assistance are referred to the University Writing Center.

Graphs were provided to the committee showing the number of students tutored through PAL per academic year and the number of total hours of PAL tutoring logged per academic year from 1997 through April of 2010. Eaton pointed out that the current year’s figures will likely be a record high as the numbers through April are already quite close to the 2008-2009 totals with several weeks of the current academic year remaining. During 2008-2009, there were a total of 1,728 students tutored through PAL, and a total of 12,605 hours of PAL tutoring logged.

The PAL area also collects and keeps track of tutoring resources across campus which are not necessarily provided by ACCESS. The “Campus Tutoring Resource Guide” is an informational guide designed for students to reference when seeking assistance with a specific course. The guide focuses mainly on general education and 100- and 200-level courses and provides information about other options for tutoring assistance for a specific course. The guide is updated each semester and posted on the ACCESS website.

A second area of function under ACCESS is the Supplemental Instruction (SI) program. Eaton said that Supplemental Instruction originated at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, and was geared toward students who were at risk for not having adequate study skill strategies and were in need of more enhanced tutoring. She explained that the SI program is set up as a series of weekly review sessions for students taking MATH 108, 109, and 110, Accountancy 206 and 207, Spanish 102 and 201, and Chemistry 110, 210 and 211. The SI program is structured so that the tutor attends the class along with the student in order to listen to the instructor and learn how the course is taught. The tutor also takes the tests and quizzes in order to understand how the instructor is testing and then be able to help students see how the process works. The tutor then facilitates associated group review sessions with the students to aid with study strategies, understanding course content and material, and lead discussions about the actual course experience; thus the tutor becomes somewhat of a “mentor/tutor/expert.”
Eaton added that the SI program is a very effective program. Statistics show that for students in Math 108 who received a grade of A, B, or C but did not attend any sessions of the SI program, the pass rate is 54% for that course; for students who used the service one to five times, the pass rate is 64%; for those who used it six to ten times, the pass rate is 71%; and, for students who used the program eleven or more times, the pass rate is 90%. Also, in the SI program, a mock final is held in the CHANCE math program. Students take the mock exam, and then the SI tutors, after the test, will review the test with the students. Some faculty also post grades and hold review sessions afterward so students are able to see where they made mistakes.

The third and newest program to be added to ACCESS is the A+ Program. Eaton described that the A+ Program is a service that provides either one-on-one or small group instruction in effective reading and/or study strategies. The need for this service was realized when the Nursing program instituted the requirement of passing the reading test in order to be admitted into the program, and there didn’t seem to be a mechanism in place by which to make that work. In conjunction with that, increased support was also needed for CHANCE students and athletes having reading issues and students with learning disabilities. Thus, there were many areas that could utilize professional assistance with reading.

Eaton explained that this program is unique in that it is a professional program, and all the reading specialists are professionals who have a strong background in reading instruction at the college developmental level. She said that the program initially consisted of only one individual, but in March of 2010, through the strategic planning funding, two new additional reading specialists were added.

The program is designed so that the reading specialists assess students’ reading skills and then assist them with developing such things as study skills, note taking skills, textbook reading, speed reading, and testing strategies. The reading specialists generally work one-on-one with students, but there are some small group studies, such as Nursing, which involve a lot of computer based instruction to help build reading strategies. Eaton also added that the reading specialists are very strong in the areas of test anxiety and testing strategies.

C. Discussion of Follow-up Point Based on Foundations of Excellence and NSSE Survey

T. Bough opened a discussion relating to feedback from the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Foundations of Excellence® (FOE), both of which have revealed that NIU students desire more opportunities for spiritual development. Discussion was initiated as a result of learning of Ombudsman Tim Griffin’s observations that the FOE found that NIU students felt that our institution does a poorer job of exposing them to different world religions than it does exposing them to any other dimension of diversity. In conjunction with that, Bough said that feedback from the NSSE survey shows NIU students also reporting that the institution does a poorer job of facilitating the development of “a deeper sense of
spirituality” than it does any other diversity category. After talking about this, Bough and Griffin agreed that this topic should be brought to the committee for discussion and feedback.

Bough added that T. Griffin also provided information that, according to the U.S. Department of Education data, as reported in the Chronicle of Higher Education, March 5, 2010, Religion and Religious Studies has been the fastest growing undergraduate major for the past twenty years. Bough called attention to the fact that data received from the NSSE and the FOE suggests that NIU students do have an interest in spirituality. He noted that it does fall within the mission statement of the CUAE committee to consider the academic environment and course offerings and to make recommendations for enhancing the academic environment.

E. Seaver commented that exploration of the issue of spirituality may well fit in with the review of the baccalaureate degree goals within the concept defined as “context.” He suggested that the committee’s thoughts on the issue could certainly be communicated to the Baccalaureate Review Task Force. He pointed out that the task force is still working on defining the concept of context, and this might be an appropriate means to have the issue of spirituality taken into account by the task force as it begins to develop the baccalaureate degree goals. He suggested pointing out to the task force that, in both the Foundations of Excellence® and the NSSE survey, NIU students’ perception is that NIU offers less in spirituality, as it relates to world religion, than any other diversity category, and this is something that needs to be considered when developing the goals.

A lengthy brainstorming discussion followed with numerous ideas and suggestions being made for the purpose of increasing options for NIU’s students to experience religious diversity and spiritual growth on the NIU campus. Ideas offered include the following:

- Offering more general education classes in the history of religion, especially religions of the world. It was noted that in a global society, students from a variety of disciplines and careers need to understand the religious mores, practices, and prohibitions of people from around the globe.

- Hosting a guest lecture series to offer viewpoints on religious customs and practices from around the world, as well as to offer greater opportunities for spiritual growth and exploration.

- The creation of Themed Learning Communities to facilitate growth and discussion in this area.

- Inclusion of classes/lectures/opportunities of this sort under the "context" heading of the curricular review process.

- The possibility of soliciting student feedback on the opportunities in this area that students would like to have made available by the institution.
T. Bough agreed to distribute the above list of the committee’s talking points and ideas to members of the CUAE committee for review and input. He will also draft a memorandum to Greg Long, co-chair of the Baccalaureate Review Task Force, with a request to schedule a time that he and T. Griffin could share results of the CUAE committee’s discussion with the Baccalaureate Review Steering Committee.

D. **Overview of Current Year Activities**

T. Bough briefly reviewed and reflected on the topics and activities which were the focus of the committee during 2009-2010. He commented that this past year the committee’s agenda was the fullest it has ever been. Seaver agreed and said that it has been beneficial to have agenda topics and speakers scheduled in advance.

E. **Committee Goals and Topics of Discussion for 2010-2011**

Committee members talked about and offered suggestions for either follow-up or new discussion topics for 2010-2011. The following suggestions were made:

- Campus Climate Survey Results
- Ombudsman’s Report
- Health Enhancement/Health Services Overview
- Counseling and Student Development Center Overview
- Recreation Center Overview
- Baccalaureate Review Update
- Foundations of Excellence® Update
- Campus Facilities Improvements Update
- Enrollment Management Update
- Spirituality/Religious Growth Follow-up Discussion
- Tour of Neptune Residence Hall
- Themed Learning Community Overview
- Orientation/First-Year Experience Overview (Expectations for CHANCE, Freshmen and Transfer students)
- University Libraries - Services Overview

A draft schedule of the suggested agenda topics will be formulated and distributed with the minutes of the April meeting.

F. **Selection of Faculty Chair for 2010-2011**

T. Bough asked for nominations for CUAE Faculty Committee Chair for 2010-2011.

W. Johnson made a motion, seconded by B. Henry, to nominate and approve Tom Bough to serve as CUAE Committee Faculty Chair for 2010-2011. The motion passed.
V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:55 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 14, 2010, at 2:00 p.m., in Altgeld Hall 225.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Montgomery
Recording Secretary