Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

132nd Meeting
Tuesday, February 8, 2011
Altgeld Hall 225

MINUTES

Approved

Present:  T. Bough (VPA), J. Brunson (Ex Officio, Student Affairs), G. Chen (EET), P. Hastings (Student/LAS), M. Koren (HHS), D. Lotshaw (LAS), G. Schlabach (EDU/UCC Rep), E. Seaver (Ex Officio, Vice Provost), D. Sinason (BUS/Substitute for C. Downing)

Absent:  C. Carger (EDU/Substitute for M. Koss), D. Changnon (Ex Officio, Acting Associate Vice Provost), A. Dreessen (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development), E. Hoffman (Student/EET), W. Johnson (LIB), A. Phillips (Student/Student Association), M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services)

Guests:  Bev Espe, Assistant Director, Health Services
          Janet Giesen, Instructional Design Coordinator, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center
          T. Griffin, Ombudsman
          Murali Krishnamurthi, Director, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center
          Stephanie Richter, Instructional Technologies Coordinator, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center

I.  APPROVAL OF AGENDA

T. Bough proposed revising the order of the agenda to move Item III, Old Business, to follow Item IV, New Business, so that presentations by the two guest speakers may be heard by the committee first.

    A motion was made by D. Lotshaw, seconded by D. Sinason, to adopt the revised agenda. The motion carried.

II.  ANNOUNCEMENTS

A.  Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by G. Schlabach, seconded by D. Lotshaw, to approve the November 9, 2010, minutes of the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment meeting. The motion carried.
B. Introduction of Committee Member

T. Bough introduced David Sinason, Department of Accountancy, who will be representing Charles Downing and the College of Business on the committee for the spring 2011 semester.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Committee Discussion: Campus Climate/Community Standards Discussion

Postponed until future meeting.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Health Services Overview

Bev Espe, Assistant Director, Health Services, thanked the committee for inviting Health Services to provide an overview of their services. Espe said that University Health Services is nationally accredited by the Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC) and has been accredited for almost thirty years. She said the Health Services’ role on campus is multi-purpose, with four main purposes: 1) provide health care and preventive services for NIU students; 2) fulfill a public health function; 3) maintain the student health insurance program; and 4) provide medical consultations to campus entities. Espe distributed two samples of informational brochures that are provided to students; the brochures provide brief descriptions of all of the services offered by Health Services as well as the hours and contact information.

Espe described that Health Services is primarily a student health service and has very limited services for employees. Dependents of students are not eligible for services unless the dependent/spouse is also an NIU student. Health care and preventive services offered by Health Services include chronic health conditions, prevention and wellness, nutrition counseling referrals, immunizations, TB testing, allergy injections, athletic medicine, travel consultations, and limited employee health services. She noted that travel consultation is one of the few services that employees may utilize. Psychiatry services for students are also provided, however, the psychiatrists actually report through the Counseling and Student Development Center which is a relatively new structural change. The public health function component includes serving as the compliance office for state pre-enrollment immunization requirements, the reporting and managing of communicable disease response involving NIU students, maintaining state mandated notifications, and partnering in disaster and pandemic response planning.

The student health insurance plan is maintained by Health Services as well as the annual process for waiving enrollment in the plan, and assistance is offered for filing and tracking of claims. She explained that students are automatically billed for student insurance at nine credit hours, but if a student can show proof of comparable coverage through their family
plan, the student insurance may be waived. A student who is carrying between six, seven, or eight hours, may come in and purchase the student insurance. Students carrying below six hours are not eligible to purchase the insurance. Espe noted that students are eligible to use Health Services regardless of whether they choose to enroll in the student health insurance program or not. She also emphasized that Health Services does not provide emergency medical care or pay for any medical care received elsewhere.

Espe provided an overview of the medical consultation/withdrawal process noting that this process is currently under review. A student requesting withdrawal is advised first to talk with their department advisor or advising dean and then follow-up by filling out an application through Health Services. Part of the application includes obtaining documentation from their attending physician; students are responsible for obtaining and providing this information. Once the required information is submitted, the complete file is forwarded to the Health Services Chief of Staff for medical review. If the documentation is complete, this process can be turned around in as quickly as 48 hours. A letter is then sent to the student’s advising dean with a copy to the student noting that medical documentation supports or does not support the withdrawal. Espe said that, if the medical withdrawal is not supported by Health Services, she isn’t sure how departments handle the situation. E. Seaver commented that this is problematic for departments because, even though the student may have had a medical situation which might have started earlier in the semester, the student may have attended a portion of their classes but is now not doing well academically.

Bough commented that he received an email from the university advising him that a student of his was hospitalized and would be out for the present week. He said he interpreted this to be a professional courtesy alerting him to this fact and assumed that when the student returned all of the usual makeup procedures would go back into effect, as he the faculty member sees fit. Espe said that email notifications such as those come directly from the Office of Student Affairs. Tim Griffin reiterated this, stating that there is no authority over faculty members’ decisions to provide makeup or not, and they are not attempting to impose that. He also added that Student Affairs will not typically conduct investigations so to confirm that a student is or is not hospitalized. Sinason noted that, in some rare instances, if a student is going to miss several weeks of the semester, a faculty member may believe it is in the student’s best interest to recommend that the student withdraw.

Espe added that, even though students often come in asking, Health Services will not provide absence notes for missed classes to students who have been ill but have not been to Health Services for care. She pointed out that this is a problem for students, because they are not always sick enough to go see a doctor but they are too sick to go to class. Bough commented that this is a legitimate concern and asked if there was a means to express concern about this to a higher body. Seaver answered that at the present time there is some catalog language on absenteeism, but it generally rests in the hands and at the discretion of the faculty member. A recommendation to the faculty could be made, but this is a difficult issue in the governance system. Griffin said that there didn’t appear to be a clear recommendation the committee could make that would help much with this situation. Seaver added that there is some new proposed catalog language being developed and debated right now which will come through the Admissions Policies and Academic Standards Committee (APASC). The proposed language relates to providing students with the option to
appeal a grade if they feel a punishment has been too severe. Chen asked if Health Services compiles an end of year report or summary breaking down by percentage and number of different types of student concerns. Having this information might assist this committee in addressing or making a specific recommendation. Espe said that the Health Center now has an electronic medical record system and that information regarding the most common diagnosis or the top twenty could certainly be shared with the committee.

Espe went on to provide an overview of the Federal and State Regulatory and Compliance agencies and the number and type of Health Services staff. She also shared FY10 utilization data which included numbers of patients served, visits, immunizations, prescriptions, and x-rays, as well as medical withdrawal applications and other applications. She also noted that most of the costs of the Health Services fees are now covered under the student activity fees, but there are some user fees for medications, immunizations, missed appointments, specialized procedures, and select lab work. Payment options include paying by cash/check, billing to bursar’s account, or charging to MasterCard or Visa. Appointments may be made either by calling the center or going online through the Health Services secure web portal.

Strategies for reaching students include printed materials handed out and mailed, web information, email, *Northern Star* ads, new student orientation, open houses, and word of mouth referrals. Espe described several of Health Services’ cutting-edge initiatives: 1) applying student learning outcomes to assessment practice; 2) electronic medical records; and 3) digital radiography. From the aspect of developing a community campus, Health Services helps students maintain participation in class and campus activities, provides student employment opportunities, has a Student Health Advisory Council (SHAC), networks with the campus, university committee participation, and serves as a campus resource.

Espe addressed several questions raised by committee members related to Health Enhancement, possible extended hours or evening hours and/or a customer service survey of students, nutritionist staffing, and travel consultation for students, student spouses, and employees.

**B. Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center Presentation: “Promoting Teaching Effectiveness at NIU”**

Murali Krishnamurthi, Director, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, provided the group with a presentation and overview of the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center. Two Faculty Development staff members, Janet Giesen and Stephanie Richter, both of whom provide teaching support, assisted with the presentation.

Krishnamurthi thanked the committee for inviting him to talk about teaching; he felt this would be a nice opportunity to share some information about services related to teaching provided by the Faculty Development Center. Krishnamurthi added that he would distribute a couple of handouts for discussion after the presentation. He said that during the previous fall semester he received a proposal from Dave Changnon relating to promoting teaching excellence in the classroom. He noted that many of the traditions Changnon proposed are already in existence. This demonstrated to him that, because there are so many different things going on at NIU, it is difficult for every individual to be aware of all options available.
Giesen provided some background information noting that the Faculty Development Center was established in 1998 for faculty support and professional development. In 1999, the Center assumed more responsibility for teaching faculty how to use technology, and in 2003 responsibility for the TA training support was transferred to the Center. The Center promotes teaching effectiveness through programs on teaching effectiveness, consultations and classroom observations, mentoring via other faculty, and other various resources such as tutorials, videos, guides, etc. All of the programs and services are free, and one full-time staff member is designated for teaching support.

Giesen went to describe that during 2009-2010, the Center offered 174 programs consisting of seminars, workshops, institutes, etc., which involved 1,905 participants. The program audience included faculty (tenured, tenure-track, and adjunct), teaching staff (SPS, teaching civil service), instructors, and graduate assistants from across campus with faculty making up the largest percentage. Teaching programs include both daylong institutes and workshops, and two-day Teaching Effectiveness Institutes are offered in both the spring and fall. These institutes have been offered at the beginning of every fall and spring since 1999, and approximately 2,000 attendees have participated through spring 2011. Teaching Assistant Orientations have been offered at the beginning of each fall semester since 2003, with approximately 2,600 attendees through fall 2010.

Giesen went on to say that major workshops are also offered throughout the semester. Programs are of varying length on a range of topics and are offered via multiple modes, such as face-to-face, online, and simulcast. The Center also sponsors teaching seminars by masters such as the Presidential Teaching Professors and Board of Trustees Professors. Teaching programs are sometimes offered on demand by a department or unit related to a special technology and may be held in the unit's area. Some of the program topics are based on input from participants who have attended previous workshops. Many of the presenters are volunteer faculty and staff members from NIU, but national speakers having a specialized topic are also sought. Technology workshops include best practice for integrating technology. The workshops are not centered to specifically teach faculty how to use the technology but rather how to effectively use the technology in a classroom setting. Giesen added that aspects of diversity and how faculty deal with accessibility considerations are also integrated into the workshops. She emphasized that workshops are voluntary not mandatory, and there are many repeat participants. Programs are advertised through listservs, website, departmental contacts, and other means.

Giesen provided statistics regarding teaching-related services, noting that during the 2009-2010 academic year, 770 consultations were held with 330 individuals from 73 academic and support units. Consultations can range from a conversation of a few minutes to several hours in a lab. Topics that are repeatedly requested may be developed into a workshop. She pointed out that many of the consultation requests are for technology integration issues, but they often lead to teaching related help. Stephanie Richter shared such an example with the committee.

The Center also provides a classroom observation service. This is a voluntary service which starts with a meeting with the faculty member, followed by one or more classroom
observations by one or more of the center staff. A final assessment summary is then put together, and a meeting is held with the faculty member to share final results of the assessment report. Krishnamurthi noted that this process is confidential and is extremely time consuming, occasionally taking as many as fifty hours. Although it is rare, a department may also suggest that a faculty member seek this service, although this is then viewed to be more of a mandatory rather than voluntary option.

Giesen went on to describe that, in addition to classroom observations, the Center also provides another type of technique called small group instructional diagnosis in which a faculty member who is tenured and nearing promotion realizes that some assistance is need with their teaching. The small group instructional diagnosis involves a Center staff member attending the faculty member’s class and arriving before the faculty member arrives in order to ask pertinent questions of the students in the class. Giesen pointed out that this can be risky for the faculty member, as everything the students share with the observer is reported back anonymously to the faculty member. This process provides a quick snapshot to the faculty member of how things are going in the class. Faculty members respond positively and meet with center staff several times afterward to discuss ways to improve, etc.

Mentoring services are provided for new faculty as well as for continuing faculty who need some assistance. Faculty needing mentors are matched with someone whom it is felt would be a good match for the particular person; this is a voluntary type of service.

Giesen added that the Writing Circle is another related service provided by the Center. Faculty from various disciplines attend a facilitated session once per week for feedback. Related teaching resources are available if a workshop is not available. Available resources include Faculty Development Grants for attending teaching effectiveness programs outside NIU, online tutorials, instructional guide and web resources, teaching-related videos, newsletters, and collaboratory lab and multimedia studio for development of instructional materials.

Faculty recognition on campus is recognized and supported through the Center, as well, and recommendations for additional teaching recognition awards have been made to recognize non-tenured faculty through the Excellence in Undergraduate Instruction, international teaching through the Outstanding International Educator, and a Graduate Teaching Assistant award. Giesen stated that the Center is collaborating with the Graduate School on a new initiative, Future Faculty Program, to recognize those graduate students who are preparing to move on to be professors. She shared current teaching-related needs and trends, emphasizing that promoting effective teaching at NIU is everyone’s responsibility and not just the Center’s, and departmental and college-level support is critical for promoting effective teaching.

Krishnamurthi described to the committee that he is seeing a trend that is unusual and alarming to him. He went on to explain that when some individuals approach the center for consultation on their teaching and low evaluations, one of the statements now commonly being voiced is that the individual doesn’t like teaching. He said that many faculty emphasize that they have come to the institution to do research, and they don’t like students and teaching. He said the Center can offer some assistance and possibly refer them to the Employee Wellness Office in Human Resources for some counseling assistance. Krishnamurthi said this is beginning to show more in the attitude of faculty, and he pointed
out that, even if it is only one faculty member, this will begin to affect student retention. He emphasized that he is not exaggerating the issue, and he would like to see the issue corrected.

Krishnamurthi distributed a table of recommendations/possible strategies for promoting teaching effectiveness. He said that this document was developed as a result of Acting Associate Vice Provost Dave Changnon asking what could be done at the departmental and/or college level to improve faculty attitudes toward teaching and students. He said he feels it could be highly helpful to screen for some of these things during the search process by asking candidates to demonstrate their teaching skills. He feels it is extremely important to do this. He pointed out that the last item on the list, “reviewing teaching and learning spaces and environment,” has been discussed during the strategic planning discussions. He said it has come out of those discussions that an assessment and/or survey of the teaching and learning space needs to be done to explore opportunities for improvement to meet the needs of faculty and students. The learning space needs to be reviewed in order to get ideas and suggestions for improvement of space and environmental needs, lighting, heating, outlets, teaching podiums, etc.

Krishnamurthi also distributed a second document consisting of a list of teaching-driven interview questions. He explained that this list of questions was developed as a result of some departments asking him if there was some way for screening faculty candidates’ attitudes toward teaching students during the search process. He consulted with his counterparts at other universities and compiled the list of questions from those provided him from other institutions. He asked committee members whether they felt it would be appropriate to share this with NIU department chairs. He feels this might be helpful for department search committees when screening teaching candidates.

T. Bough commented that he felt there was no reason to not provide this document to department chairs for use as they see fit. He clarified that this list would simply be provided to chairs as a resource for their editing and use as they see fit. It was suggested that an explanatory cover memo from the Provost’s Office be developed to accompany the list. It was pointed out that effective teaching leads to student retention, and colleges and departments have to share in being responsible for student retention. After further discussion, the following motion was made.

G. Schlabach made a motion, seconded by G. Chen, to recommend that Murali Krishnamurthi, Director, Faculty Development and Design Center, provide the “Sample List of Teaching-Driven Interview Questions” to all NIU Department Chairs to recommend for their use as they see fit, particularly when conducting candidate interviews for teaching positions. The motion carried.

S. Richter made a final announcement that an upgrade is scheduled to be made to the Blackboard website, and the website would not be available from May 28-30, 2011. She noted that this will be the most significant upgrade since it was introduced on campus. She explained that primarily a new interface with a simplified process will be seen, including some new features to facilitate collaboration with such things as journals. This will be in effect for the summer and fall semesters, and workshops will be offered beginning in March, 2011, in addition to open labs and training sessions.
V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:03 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 8, 2011, at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Montgomery