MINUTES
Approved

Present: T. Bough (VPA), D. Changnon (Ex Officio, Acting Associate Vice Provost), G. Chen (EET), W. Johnson (LIB), D. Lotshaw (LAS), G. Schlabach (EDU/UCC Rep), D. Sinason (BUS), M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services)

Absent: J. Brunson (Ex Officio, Student Affairs), C. Carger (EDU), A. Dreessen (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development), P. Hastings (Student/LAS), E. Hoffman (Student/EET), M. Koren (HHS)

Guests: T. Griffin, Ombudsman
Denise Rode, Director, Orientation and First-Year Experience
Julia Spears, Coordinator, Office of Student Engagement

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Johnson, seconded by Lotshaw, to adopt the agenda. The motion carried.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Approval of Minutes

1. Minutes of the February 8, 2011, CUAE meeting were electronically approved.

2. Committee members reviewed and approved the minutes of the March 8, 2011, CUAE meeting.

A motion was made by Lotshaw, seconded by Johnson, to approve the March 8, 2011, minutes of the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment meeting. The motion carried.

III. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Review of Proposed Revisions to the Undergraduate Special Opportunities in
Julia Spears, Coordinator, Office of Student Engagement, provided the committee with an overview of the proposed changes to the USOAR process being recommended by the USOAR selection committee. She explained that CUAE, as the oversight body for the USOAR process, is being asked by the selection committee to review, provide input, and approve the suggested changes to the timeline, budget cycle, and proposal format. The selection committee has recommended that the proposal submission timeline be changed in order to streamline the process. The recommendation is to shorten the amount of time between the submission deadline and the time that the student is actually notified as to whether he/she will receive funding.

Spears said that, under the current timeline, information soliciting proposals is distributed to campus in the early fall, with two open workshop/informational sessions held in October. The deadline for applications to be submitted to the college offices is the first of December, and the college rankings are typically due to the Vice Provost’s office around the third week of January. During the month following, the selection committee reviews proposals and awards funding, with students being notified of the award decisions around the first of March. She pointed out that, in the case of seniors who want to apply for this funding, the students receive notification of funding only six weeks before they graduate. Many of the senior students are already working on their projects, incurring expenses, and hoping that they will receive funding for it. She said she feels this does not make the process very student-friendly, as many of the students who do participate in this program are seniors.

Spears distributed a handout detailing the changes recommended by the selection committee. She described that, under the new timelines, the call for proposals information would still be distributed to campus in the fall, but the submission deadline to the college office would be moved ahead to October 15, 2011, with the college rankings due to the selection committee by November 1\textsuperscript{st}. She commented that, although the fall is a demanding time for college offices, it appears this timing would work well as most colleges will have worked through their heavy personnel matters by this time. The selection committee would then review and approve funding by November 15\textsuperscript{th}, and the award recipients would be notified by December 1, 2011. The recipients would then have a full semester to actually work on their projects.

Schlabach asked what sector of the colleges reviewed and ranked the proposals. Spears said that, in most cases, this falls under the responsibility of the College Curriculum Committees. If the new timelines are approved, Spears indicated she would be in contact with the colleges now to make sure this would be on the calendar for their agendas in October. Bough said he agreed with providing students more time to work on projects, however, he wondered if two weeks was enough time for the colleges to make decisions on the proposals. Schlabach pointed out that the fall is a heavy time for colleges meeting curricular and catalog dates, as well as personnel deadlines. Spears said that some flexibility with the suggested due dates has been built into the revised timeline, so, if it is felt that the colleges should be given additional time, that could be accommodated; however, the selection committee review time would then be shortened somewhat. She pointed out that the major concern is to have a timeline that is more
student centered so that more students will apply and be able to have this experience.

Changnon suggested that the deadline date for notifying students receiving funding be moved back a couple of weeks from December 1st to the end of final weeks or to January. He pointed out that it is likely that most students would not be spending significant time working on their projects over the holiday break.

Further discussion centered around the possibility of having two separate submission and review cycles, such as an academic year program and a summer semester program, or moving to a calendar year program and what deadlines might be used and how funding would be allocated for two separate submission cycles. The rationale for establishing two proposal submission cycles is that multiple opportunities would be created for students to participate in this experience, as well as accommodate any students who wished to submit a proposal but may have missed the first deadline. It was pointed out that having two submission cycles would create an additional burden for the colleges as more time would have to be designated for reviewing a second set of proposals; therefore, it might be beneficial to have input from the college offices before creating a second proposal submission cycle. The number of proposal submissions and the quality of the submissions have an impact, as well, on the amount of time needed for review and ranking by both the colleges and the selection committee.

Bough suggested that the committee move forward with approval of the timeline changes recommended by the selection committee for the fall 2011 and then revisit the idea of multiple submission cycles at a future meeting in the upcoming fall. Spears agreed to provide the committee with additional information, including a draft of a timeline for a second submission cycle, at the beginning of the fall semester.

Schlabach made a motion, seconded by Lotshaw, to approve the revised Undergraduate Special Opportunities in Artistry and Research (USOAR) Proposal Submission and Review Timeline, Budget Cycle, and Proposal Format, as recommended by the USOAR Selection Committee, effective for the fall 2011 semester submissions, as noted below:

- **October 15, 2011** – Deadline for proposal submission to college office
- **November 1, 2011** – Deadline for college to submit rankings to selection committee
- **November 15, 2011** – Deadline for selection committee to approve proposal funding
- **December 1, 2011** – Deadline for notification of funding to student recipient

The motion carried.

**B. CUAE Committee Goals and Agenda Topics for 2011-2012**

Committee members discussed suggestions for meeting topics for 2011-2012. A tentative schedule of agenda topics will be developed and attached to the April minutes for further review at the first committee meeting in September.
C. Selection of Faculty Chair for 2011-2012

Selection of faculty chair was postponed until the September meeting.

D. Orientation/First-Year Experience Overview

Denise Rode, Director, Office of Orientation and First-Year Experience, provided the committee with an overview of Office of Orientation and First-Year Experience. She shared that the mission of the Office of Orientation is to offer high quality programs and services to help NIU’s new students and their family members understand the university, the expectations that NIU has for students, and what students need to learn to be successful both inside and outside the classroom. She described that orientation is a three-part process, not an event. The process starts in the summer with academic orientation to the University. The second step occurs when students return before classes begin in the fall and participate in Welcome Days, Academic Convocation, and events scheduled during that time designed to help students get to know other students and the campus community. The third, very important, step is taking a UNIV course.

Through the Office of Orientation, three undergraduate orientation programs are offered for CHANCE students, international students, and traditionally-admitted students. Orientation sessions are held for community college transfer students within the region during the spring semester and throughout the summer along with new freshman sessions. Special sessions are held for non-traditional students, veterans, and student athletes. Rode pointed out that summer orientation is a campus-wide effort and collaboration involving many individuals.

Rode said that the Office of Orientation works very closely with the Office of Student Academic Success, which oversees MAP-Works, a student tracking program focused on improving student success and retention. Another first-year initiative used by Orientation is REACH (Retention Effort for All inComing Huskies), a program in which specially selected, trained peer callers spend several months each fall and spring contacting first-year students who are not involved with or connected to some sort of high impact program, such as athletics, band, honors, UNIV course, etc., to see how they are doing, answer questions, and help them navigate the NIU system. During the spring 2010, Rode reported that 128 new students were contacted, and, during the fall 2010, 541 new students were contacted. She said most students reported doing well and appreciated the call.

Based on best practices, The First-Year Success Series program was started several years ago and will have twenty-five programs slated for 2011-2012. The programs are related to such topics as communicating with roommates, leadership opportunities, financial aid, etc., and have collaborative partners in Housing and Dining, Military Student Services, Student Involvement and Leadership Development, Financial Aid, Student Employment, Academic Advising Center, Writing Center, Study Abroad, and Health Enhancement.

Also, based on best practices at other institutions, Rode announced that a new concept, a common reading experience, is being initiated on campus. This initiative is centered around the book This I Believe II, a collection of seventy-five 500-word essays from a
diverse group of writers. Faculty, staff, and administrators will be invited to write their own 500-word essay, and a series of open-mic type events will be scheduled in the fall at which these individuals will be invited to read their essays. She explained that the purpose of the common reading is to promote reading as an essential academic activity and to promote discussion across all lines of the university. She noted that this will connect and fit well this year’s Northern Pact theme of “An Open Community Where Freedom of Expression is Respected.”

The UNIV 101 and UNIV 201 courses, which are administered through the Orientation office, are courses for new freshmen and transfer students. Approximately 60% of the freshman class was enrolled in a section of UNIV 101 for the fall 2010 semester, which is the highest percentage that has been achieved to date. Rode said that the desire is to increase this percentage even more, and the course and its value are highly promoted during orientation to both students and their parents. Student athletes and CHANCE students are required to take a UNIV 101 course, and some students are taking the UNIV course in connection with a themed learning community. Several specialized sections of UNIV are also offered related to Business Interest, Health and Human Sciences, Honors, African American Females, Latinos, Marching Band, and Veterans. An international section has also been proposed. The traditional sections meet two times per week for twelve weeks, and the CHANCE and athlete sections run the entire fifteen weeks of the term. Rode added that data collected reflects that students who take the UNIV courses have higher grade point averages and are retained at higher rate.

Lotshaw asked if there was training offered for faculty who teach the UNIV courses. Rode explained that a one-day training session for instructors is offered in the spring, and additional information is also shared with departments at the faculty meetings prior to the fall semester. She said that, in order to be eligible to teach the course, an individual must have a master’s degree, have prior college level teaching experience, and complete the instructor training. If an individual does not meet all of the three criteria, he/she could be placed, if possible, with an experienced instructor. Griffin added that the training sessions encompass a diverse group of individuals with a wide range of backgrounds. Bough commented that, having just taught a UNIV course this year for the first time, he found the experience most rewarding and found the UNIV training to be more training in “how to be a teacher” than what a new faculty rank professor would receive when first arriving on campus. He added that the textbook provided to instructors is both user and student friendly and weighs into some very mature issues. Rode said that the UNIV courses also focus on teaching students how to find and use the resources that they need on campus. She said that, in efforts to increase support for NIU students through their second year, the possibility of a pilot “Sophomore-Year Experience” program is now being looked at for the fall of 2012. Other future plans include expansion of MAP-Works in UNIV courses and the potential use of the new residence hall facilities for orientation in 2012.

Rode invited and encouraged faculty and staff to volunteer to participate in an orientation program, teach a UNIV 101 section, be a faculty mentor or orientation faculty speaker, or participate in the common reading experience.

Bough thanked Rode and congratulated her on being named one of ten Outstanding First-year Advocates by the National Resource on the FYE-SIT & Cengage Learning in
January 2011.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 13, 2011, at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Montgomery