Northern Illinois University  

**COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT**  
130th Meeting  
Tuesday, October 12, 2010  
Altgeld Hall 225

**MINUTES**

**Approved**

Present: T. Bough (VPA), J. Brunson (Ex Officio, Student Affairs), D. Changnon (Ex Officio, Acting Associate Vice Provost), G. Chen (EET), C. Downing (BUS), E. Hoffman (Student/EET), W. Johnson (LIB), M. Koren (HHS), M. Koss (EDU), D. Lotshaw (LAS), A. Phillips (Student/Student Association), G. Schlabach (EDU/UCC Rep), M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services)

Absent: A. Dreessen (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development)

Guests: T. Griffin, Ombudsman  
Greg Long, Co-Chair, Baccalaureate Review Task Force  
Denise Rode, Co-Liaison, Foundations of Excellence®

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 M. Koren, to adopt the revised agenda. The motion carried.

II. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

A. **Introduction of Student Committee Member**

T. Bough introduced and welcomed two new student members, Eric Hoffman, representing the College of Engineering and Engineering and Technology, and Alandis Phillips, Student Association Director Student Life.

B. **Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made by W. Johnson, seconded by D. Lotshaw, to approve the September 14, 2010, minutes of the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment meeting. The motion carried.

III. **OLD BUSINESS**

A. **Spirituality/Religious Growth Issue Follow-up Discussion**
T. Bough stated that the topic of spirituality had come up in a discussion at a CUAE meeting during the previous academic year. From the committee’s previous discussion, it appeared that this was a matter of concern. He said that, with the support of the committee, Bough and Tim Griffin made a presentation to the Baccalaureate Review steering committee to bring this concern to their attention. Bough emphasized that, from his perspective, this still continues to be a matter of concern, especially in light of the fact that the Baccalaureate Review committee has not supported including language addressing this issue in any of their review statements. He added that the Foundations of Excellence® Philosophy Statement does speak to this issue in that the expectation is to teach students how to reason ethically and morally and interact in a global society; he just isn’t sure the institution is doing that.

T. Griffin shared that a newly published study covering a period of several years involving 136 institutions of higher education has indicated that higher education institutions that help students address their spiritual needs academically and co-curricularly result in higher degrees of satisfaction from alums, higher levels of leadership skills, higher levels of retention— all of which are being identified as items that students would be expected to accomplish at NIU. He added that presently NIU does not have a spirituality or world religion general education class.

M. Koss wondered about this being an issue of separation of church and state. Bough said that there is a difference between offering individuals information and allowing them to make their own decisions versus endorsing or mandating a particular requirement.

G. Schlabach suggested that the notion of spirituality, ethics, or moral behaviors could be intertwined with the notion of critical thinking, using ethics or morality as a framework. This would mean identifying moral values that could be embraced collectively thus serving as a code of ethics. Students would have to match up their behaviors and actions with the framework through critical thinking. G. Chen agreed with the critical thinking aspect but feels that reinforcement of that would be necessary, as well.

D. Changnon brought to the attention of the group that the “Northern Pact,” mentioned by Vice Provost Seaver at the September CUAE meeting, is a process by which NIU students are presented with the expectations of the relationship that will be developed between faculty, staff and students. The Northern Pact comes out of Student Affairs and is presented to students at Academic Convocation. There is a Northern Pact Pledge that students are encouraged to sign.

A. Phillips commented that he is seeing that there are things that are trying to be implemented with freshmen students, but there doesn’t seem to be adequate follow through or mentoring to reach back to or keep in contact with those students. He added that some students feel that faculty are here for their own reward rather than for the students. This results in the students feeling less of a priority and perceiving that they are not wanted by the faculty. He added that he thinks strides are being made to correct this, but faculty members do need to be more student focused.

D. Changnon suggested that, if there is interest to follow up further on this topic, a subcommittee be formed to investigate this matter in further detail and develop
language for a formal recommendation. He added that, if there is enough interest in this issue, it would be worthwhile knowing what courses are currently offered that already incorporate some aspect of religion, how frequently the courses are offered, and what the enrollment and/or student population of the courses is.

T. Griffin reported that he has researched information on such courses during the previous year, but he found no courses for general education credit with primary content on spirituality or world religions. He feels strongly that students are in need of this, and this is something that should be made available for students through the general curriculum or the institutional co-curriculum programming.

M. Stang commented that he would like to see the topic be broadened as Student Affairs is soon to be introducing a living/learning community relative to spiritual exploration for next fall. Stang agrees that students are in need of this, and he repeated that he would like to see this be broader than just curricular.

After further discussion, Bough asked committee members for their opinion as to how to proceed with this issue. He offered that the committee appears to have three options: 1) do nothing; 2) move forward to make a recommendation to encourage coursework on spirituality or encourage the offering of general education coursework and co-curricular programming; or 3) form a subcommittee to further research and study the issue with the goal to develop a recommendation of support.

It was agreed that a subcommittee be formed to further research the issue. Volunteering for the subcommittee were T. Griffin, W. Johnson, M. Koren, and G. Schlabach. A time will be coordinated for the group to meet, and an update from the subcommittee will be provided at the November CUAE meeting.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Foundations of Excellence® Recommendations

Denise Rode, Director, Orientation and First Year Experience, and Co-liaison of the Foundations of Excellence® (FOE) initiative, provided the committee with an update on the FOE recommendations being brought forward. She described that the university has been involved in this self-assessment process for the past two years and is now nearing the culmination point. She provided a brief overview of the process to date and explained that the next step in the process is to put together a five-year plan for a comprehensive first-year experience at NIU.

Rode explained that the FOE focuses on the first college year and is a comprehensive self-study and action planning process designed to improve first-year student learning and retention through a focus on institutional policies, practices, and programs. This is a national initiative and involves the institution conducting a self-assessment. Participation in the FOE came out of a recommendation from the NIU 2007 strategic planning report. She pointed out that FOE is a collaborative venture between Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, and an external agency, the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education. FOE is based on a set of aspirational
principles that are referred to as foundational dimensions. The foundational dimensions have guided the self-assessment of current efforts with first-year students, from the initial point of contact through admissions and orientation and extending through the first year. Rode encouraged further input and feedback from committee members as the final report has not yet been completed.

Rode explained that part of the FOE process was to audit all existing programs and services for first-year students. Evidence gathering included a student survey, faculty/staff survey, content analysis of open-ended responses from students, faculty, staff and administrators, focus groups, mini surveys, and secret shoppers at events for first-year students and their families. As a result of the evidence collected, the FOE steering committee developed six themes that were repeated throughout the evidence data that was compiled. The first of the themes was related to oversight and coordination. Rode explained that, although there are many programs in place for first-year students, the programs are not well coordinated, and greater oversight needs to be provided for these programs. She noted that the committee is looking at developing an organizational structure to support the comprehensive first-year experience. It is also the hope that the first-year experience will become an institutional priority, aligning with the baccalaureate goals and thus coordinating with retention efforts.

A second theme, communication, was seen as being important with regard to four specific categories: 1) students, 2) families and supporters, 3) faculty and staff, and 4) administration. Another theme identified was related to programming. Rode said that an inventory of existing programs was taken, and movement has already begun toward the development of more high impact activities which would be important for engaging first-year students. These types of programs would include UNIV 101, themed learning communities, undergraduate research, and MAP-Works. A theme titled environment might include things such as living, learning, residence halls, classrooms, and how first-year students experience the university structure.

Rode went on to say that the theme identified as academic advising is one are that many institutions who have participated in the FOE process have found to be a specific key area for first-year students. The final theme of reward and regard focuses on the need to be able to offer rewards to faculty and staff who work with first-year students in order to expand faculty participation and recognize excellent teaching and service to first-year students.

Rode distributed copies of the draft of the Philosophy Statement developed by the FOE steering committee and asked committee members to provide her with feedback for improvements of the statement as they have the opportunity to do so. By early November, it is hoped to have the statement finalized for inclusion in the final report of the task force. Rode pointed out that feedback from many university committees, including CUAE, was incorporated into the Philosophy Statement. She added that the task force is also beginning to finalize action statements about the first-year experience. She said that the task force became very aware that the first year was being defined too narrowly. The feeling is that freshmen begin their experience with NIU as a prospective student, and the first year continues until the start of the sophomore year, including the summer prior to the sophomore year. Rode added that there may also be a recommendation about a sophomore year experience included in the final report. D.
Lotshaw asked whether this program might be extended to community college transfer students, as well. Rode answered that transfer students will also be included as part of the recommendations.

Rode went on to review the action statements and sample recommendations that have been developed. She pointed out that one of the strongest recommendations was to require academic advising for students with fewer than thirty hours at NIU. Also, it has been repeatedly recommended that a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated first-year organizational structure with an evaluation component be established to evaluate and improve the use of first-year assessment methods. She added that some of the recommendations are already in the implementation stage, and others will be evaluated and rolled out for implementation through 2015.

Rode described that the next steps will be to finalize the five-year plan with recommendations and communicate results to the campus community. Some of the recommendations that are already in place include student messages and family communication. Feedback from the parents receiving messages thus far has been positive. Themed learning communities are also being implemented, as well as MapWorks and Research Rookies, and there will be continued coordination with the Baccalaureate Review. She added that, as the FOE report is finalized and distributed, it is expected that “keepers of the plan” will be appointed to oversee that the FOE continues to be a “living document” over the next five years.

Discussion followed with Rode addressing questions and comments and taking suggestions from committee members related to assessment, peer mentoring, tutoring, and faculty rewards.

B. Baccalaureate Review Update – Goals/Learning Outcome Development

Greg Long, Co-chair, Baccalaureate Review Task Force, provided an update on the baccalaureate review process which has been underway over the past two years. He reported that the task force has developed a purpose statement, including goal definitions and learning outcomes. He distributed copies of the purpose statement and provided an overview of the context of the document. Over the past two years, input has been gathered from various groups across the NIU community. The purpose statement is the end result developed by the task force from feedback obtained from these groups.

Long explained that the baccalaureate goals are the umbrella for the major, general education, and the co-curriculum. The baccalaureate goals will be helpful for collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs and in looking at the relationship between general education and the major. The overall sense and emphasis behind this entire process is student success, and moving toward that end includes obtaining a better shared vision of what NIU expects students to achieve.

Long reviewed the three portions of the proposed document. He described that the purpose statement is to provide overall context for what NIU is doing. The goals and learning outcomes are what is anticipated would be included in the Undergraduate Catalog. Long explained that the goal definitions, Critical Thinking, Creativity, and
Communication, are meant to be very broad. The learning outcomes section includes the university’s current baccalaureate learning goals and the proposed baccalaureate learning outcomes. Long clarified that the learning outcomes were written and designed to be aspirational in nature because these are not just goals that would pertain to the first year of college but rather with relation to the baccalaureate graduate at the end of the student’s time at NIU.

Long made mention of the fact that there had been some discussion regarding requiring a student to know a foreign language. He said that after much discussion, the task force, as a group, felt it would be better to focus on global learning outcomes rather than a foreign language requirement because it would be difficult to change all of the undergraduate degrees to include that requirement. It was felt that the general education curriculum could be infused with a broader global perspective through the curriculum in history, politics, economics, religion, etc.

T. Griffin asked if the term "caring" had been proposed as an addition to the goal definitions. He recalled that it had been recommended that the term caring be included. Long answered that there was discussion about including caring as a goal definition, but it was the decision of the task force that it was more appropriate to include a reference to caring in the purpose statement rather than as a goal definition. Long said that the task force was not asked to specifically identify values by which to guide, so, to address the caring aspect, the purpose statement was written in a broader context in hopes of embracing that.

D. Lotshaw asked if there had been any discussion of a mechanism for assessing students. Long answered that the task force has been consulting with both the Office of Assessment Services and the Vice Provost for Academic Planning in an attempt to write things in a manner that could the learning outcomes could be assessable. Until the learning goals and outcomes are endorsed, it was felt to be somewhat premature to discuss specifics of how to do this or what the reporting mechanism might be. The task force has begun a conversation with regard to this, but, once endorsement of the purpose statement is made, the committee will discuss this in more detail.

M. Koren complimented Long and task force on the work they had done. She asked whether “ethics” had been discussed for inclusion in the purpose statement. Long responded that ethics, social responsibility, and social justice, as with the term caring, were all recommended and discussed with the task force. The feeling was that, as with the foreign language/global learning aspect, these specific facets will fall within the general education curriculum.

Long reported that the purpose statement was presented to the Committee on the Undergraduate Curriculum (CUC) on September 16, 2010, and the committee will present its feedback to him at the October 14, 2010, CUC meeting.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:12 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday,
November 9, 2010, at 2:00 p.m., in Altgeld Hall 225.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Montgomery