Present: A. Birberick (Ex Officio, Vice Provost), T. Bough (VPA), G. Chen (EET), C. Downing (BUS), W. Johnson (LIB), J. Jones (Ex Officio, Associate Vice President, Student Affairs), M. Mehrer (LAS), G. Schlabach (EDU/UCC Rep), M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services)

Absent: K. Chung (HHS), Jill Zambito (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development)

Guests: T. Griffin, Ombudsman

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Mehrer, seconded by Schlabach, to adopt the agenda. The motion carried.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Introductions

Committee members introduced themselves and indicated which college and/or department they represented.

B. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Schlabach, seconded by Mehrer, to approve the April 12, 2011, 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. Selection of Faculty Chair for 2011-2012

Following a brief review of the role of the chair, Charles Downing agreed to serve in this capacity for the fall 2011 semester. Mark Mehrer volunteered to serve for the spring 2012 semester as Downing will not be serving on the committee during the spring semester.
A motion was made by Schlabach, seconded by Chen, to approve Charles Downing and Mark Mehrer to serve as faculty chair for CUAE for the fall 2011 and spring 2012 semesters respectively. The motion passed.

Downing expressed his thanks and appreciation to Thomas Bough for his service as chair of CUAE for the previous two years. He commended Bough for his sincere student-focused, committee-focused, and university-focused work on the committee.

B. Acceptance of CUAE 2010-2011 Annual Report

Committee members independently reviewed the CUAE annual report for 2010-2011. It was noted that the report provides an overview of the committee’s work during the 2010-2011 academic year, and the report is incorporated into the annual report of the Undergraduate Coordinating Council which is submitted to University Council at the end of each academic year.

Schlabach pointed out that the USOAR presentation given by Julia Spears at the April 2011 meeting was inadvertently omitted from the annual report. It was noted that the annual report could not be altered at this time as the report had already been submitted to University Council as part of the UCC report during the summer. However, UCC and University Council will be made aware that this presentation was made to CUAE as this will be reported in the April 2011 CUAE minutes which will be submitted to UCC in October.

A motion was made by Mehrer, seconded by Johnson, to accept the 2010-2011 Annual Report of the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment with the inadvertent omission of the USOAR presentation being noted in the minutes of the September 13, 2011, CUAE meeting. The motion passed.

C. Review of CUAE Agenda Topics and Schedule for 2011-2012

Downing commented that the agenda of topics for this year included some good reports and presentations. He added, however, that there is one issue/topic that he would like to suggest be added for discussion at a future meeting. He said that he is repeatedly hearing feedback, through his service on other committees, that various surveys of students are reporting that students find faculty to be aloof, rude, and unprofessional. He pointed out that, obviously, this is not the case everywhere on campus, but, from what he is hearing, it appears to be a prevalent concern.

Although Downing said he isn’t sure how to address this issue, he feels that this is certainly relative to the undergraduate academic environment which is within the realm of focus of the CUAE. He asked committee members if they felt this was really an issue and if this committee was the appropriate body to address such an issue. If so, he wondered what options the committee would have for taking action and what governing body would need to be forwarded any recommendations made by the committee with the goal of being able to make a positive long-term difference.

Following brief further discussion, consensus of the committee was that the tentative scheduled presentations and residence hall tour on the agenda for the November 8th
meeting be cancelled to leave the agenda open for committee discussion on the above issue and reconfigure future meeting topics. Downing will provide the committee with discussion questions and suggestions in the next meeting agenda packet.

D. **Selection of CUAE Representative to Serve on the Affirmative Action and Diversity Resources Committee**

Wendell Johnson volunteered and, with no objections heard, was approved to serve another year as the CUAE representative to the AADR Committee.

E. **Ombudsman’s Report**

Tim Griffin, Ombudsman, provided the committee with a summary of specific issues and concerns of undergraduate students reported to the Office of the Ombudsman from May 2010, through May, 2011. In comparisons with other similar institutions of higher education, Griffin stated that NIU is hearing fewer concerns about areas such as registration, records, transcripts, and residential life. However, more concerns are being heard related to issues of faculty/staff behavior and professionalism and academic advising.

As compared with prior years, Griffin reported that trends of NIU undergraduates indicate that there is a decrease being seen in the number of students raising issues related to registration and MyNIU, on-campus housing, encumbrances, and student conduct. Increases are being seen in the number of students raising issues related to student academic success, faculty/staff behaviors associated with discrimination and disability accommodation, financial resources, student health issues, grade appeals, and quality of instruction. Griffin pointed out that this is not survey gathered data but rather summaries of reports of self-selected individuals who have contacted the Office of the Ombudsman for assistance.

In an answer to Chen’s question, Griffin said that there is no follow up by the Office of the Ombudsman with students contacting their office. Students are provided available options, appropriate contact information, and referrals to appropriate university offices.

Griffin answered other questions and offered to the committee for thought and discussion, six concluding questions he developed based on data on long-term trends related to undergraduate issues. He requested and encouraged committee members to take into consideration the questions in the context of the committee’s discussion at the next meeting.

V. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:06 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 11, 2011, at 2:00 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,*  
*Mollie Montgomery*