Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

137th Meeting
Tuesday, November 8, 2011
Altgeld Hall 225

MINUTES

Approved

Present: A. Birberick (Ex Officio, Vice Provost), K. Bak (Student Association), J. Camery (Student/EDU), G. Chen (EET), C. Downing (BUS), W. Johnson (LIB), J. Jones (Ex Officio, Associate Vice President, Student Affairs), R. Layfield (Campus Activities Board), M. Manderino (EDU), M. Mehrer (LAS), G. Schlabach (EDU/UCC Rep), M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services), J. Zambito (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development)

Absent: T. Bough (VPA), K. Chung (HHS)

Guests: T. Griffin, Ombudsman
Donald Grady, Chief, NIU Police

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Schlabach, seconded by Zambito, to approve the October 11, 2011, minutes of the Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment meeting with one correction on page 7. The motion passed.

B. Introduction of New Committee Members

Downing welcomed one new faculty member and three new student members to the committee and asked each to introduce themselves.

III. OLD BUSINESS
A. Committee Discussion: Role of CUAE

Downing opened discussion about the role of CUAE and distributed related handouts. Summarizing previous discussion by the committee, he noted that the committee identified two issues that they felt they might be able to have an impact on in the short term.

The first item is a spirituality statement and recommendation which has been worked on by the committee in the past. He explained that NIU does not have survey of religion or a chance for students to explore such options as world religions or history or to consider and contemplate these types of things. Those options are not prevalent on the NIU campus, and that has been indicated in surveys. The committee felt they could do something about that issue which would help improve the undergraduate academic environment. The second issue recently discussed by the group was faculty accountability/civility. The committee wanted to begin to look at this issue and how to initiate improvement within the constraints of the university system.

With reference to the spirituality statement/recommendation made by CUAE in 2010, Downing pointed out that the committee recommended that these type of courses be offered. A statement and recommendation to this effect went to the Undergraduate Coordinating Council (UCC) last year without resulting action. Downing explained that any new course offering would have to be initiated at the department level. Relative to that fact, he posed the following question to the committee: Is any effort in considering trying to promote curricular change by CUAE fruitless? In other words, would CUAE’s efforts to facilitate adding such courses be fruitless? Downing said that, if the answer is no, and the committee feels strongly about pushing for new courses, as in the statement from 2010, then a new committee discussion should take place. If the answer is yes, then a new statement should be directed to Dr. Brian Hemphill, Vice President, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, to request encouragement/support of speakers, debate, interactions among Association of Campus Religious Organizations (ACRO) members and students, etc., in order to go around the curriculum to still make a potential impact on the undergraduate academic environment and not through the curricular process at this time. He pointed out that matter does seem to fit with the mission of the Student Affairs and Enrollment Management office, as well as the Student Involvement and Leadership Development Office.

Summarizing, Downing asked what the committee thought they could realistically do. His observations were that this could (based on survey information) and should help in recruiting and retention efforts, and there are no prohibitive resource constraints to do this. He reinforced that any decision or recommendation will be entirely based on agreement from the committee.
Relative to the spirituality issue, Downing also shared an informational announcement of a Spiritually-Centered Leadership seminar being offered during the Spring 2012 semester. The course is LEA 490/590 and is designed as an opportunity to explore the intertwining of personal spirituality, epistemology, life work, and leadership and is to be inclusive of all religions, faiths, beliefs, and the lack thereof.

With regard to the second discussion item, faculty accountability, Downing, explained that the potential action path for this would be for CUAE to make a recommendation that all departments consider adding a measures for “civility” to their faculty/instructor student evaluation forms. The issue of holding faculty accountable would have to be initiated at the department level. A statement or recommendation from CUAE could be developed and forwarded to Faculty Senate. Downing presented to the committee for review proposed draft language that he composed for a possible faculty accountability recommendation.

Following some further discussion, Downing suggested that committee members think about these two issues, review the handouts, and be prepared to discuss both items in more detail at the next meeting.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Campus Safety Overview

Downing introduced Donald Grady, Chief, NIU Police, who provided an overview of what safety measures are currently in place on campus.

Grady began by describing safety measures currently in place in residence halls. He said that NIU police officers are specifically assigned to all residence halls twenty-four hours per day. Officers are located in “HELP” (Housing, Education, and Liaison Program) community safety centers located in each residence hall which is easily accessible and visible to student residents. He emphasized that policing is a much broader concept than just law enforcement – it is community building. With officers located in the residence halls, students and officers work together to do policing and thus build a safe community environment. Students are also provided with classes on crime prevention and how to protect their personal property to avoid the chance of burglary and reduce “crimes of opportunity.” He pointed out that within a nine-week period, there were 70 car burglaries on campus; however, none of the cars burglarized had alarms, and many were left unlocked and/or had valuables left in plain view. Grady emphasized that eliminating the opportunity is a key in preventing crime.
He went on to say that there are 74 police officers on campus, with 15-20 officers working at any one given time. Every police officer undergoes 200 hours of crime prevention training. The role of the police officer is more than just law enforcement; it is working with students as facilitator, mediator, negotiator, and educator to form a group effort committed to becoming a community working for a safer environment. Mehrer asked how police officers in the residence halls formed relationships with the students. Grady responded that officers in the residence halls form relationships with students by being encouraged to greet them with smiles, talk with them, and interact and/or sometimes share mealtimes with them. Students respond favorably to the positive interaction and eventually begin to take ownership of their officers, thus, building a community relationship.

Schlabach asked whether the campus used any kind of security cameras. Grady said that there are some cameras located on campus, but they are not controlled by NIU Police. NIU Police do, however, have access to the cameras although they do not monitor them on a regular basis. He pointed out that cameras are good for identification purposes, but they are not a deterrent.

Chen asked how many emergency call boxes are on campus, how effective they are, and whether more are needed. He also asked what the frequency of usage by students or staff is, and what the average response time is when a call box is used. Grady answered that the call boxes are antiquated technology, and he doesn’t feel that there is a need for more. He said the boxes are used every week but only by the security guards that test the boxes. Calls are not received by anyone else on the call boxes as most everyone now has a cell phone, and the response from a call box is not any faster than dialing 911 on a cell phone.

Bak commented that he is a resident of Greek Row, and there has been a recent push for a neighborhood watch in cooperation with the DeKalb Police Department. Bak asked Grady his thoughts on the idea. Grady said that he has not been contacted about this, but he had heard about it, and he thinks it is a good idea. It is about community working together with the police to do a better job, and neighborhood watches are a good way to do that. Grady added that there are some other things that they are suggesting and trying to move forward on. One of the things being looked at is reestablishing the liaison program between the NIU Police and the fraternities and sororities. He said there used to be such a program, and it worked really well. The liaison program was designed to make certain that there was absolute communication with the officers of the various fraternity and sorority houses on a regular basis and that educational programs were provided. When events were held, the NIU Police
then worked with the houses to make ensure that the events were safe and secure, and everyone was having fun legally.

Chen asked if Grady thought there were issues with gangs or drugs in DeKalb or coming on to NIU’s campus. If so, he wondered if the city has a plan or strategy to deal with these issues. Grady responded that the City of DeKalb might feel that it has a major gang problem, but, in comparison to other cities, he doesn’t think there is a real gang problem in the City of DeKalb, although there are some who try to simulate being gang members. He said that there are some issues, but it is not a serious gang issue. Grady said that drugs are present. He pointed out that a campus with 24,000 students is a serious market for drug dealers. However, as the residence halls have policy security at the main entrances, drug dealers do not try to sell near the residence halls, so, the drugs that are being sold are sold off campus. He said that there some students using drugs, in particular, marijuana, but use of hard drugs on campus is very rare. It is near impossible to expect that marijuana use will ever be totally eliminated on campus.

Chen asked if there were drug-free educational programs on campus. Grady answered that there are such programs hosted through the programs in the residence halls as well as through orientation and any other time that specific groups request it. Griffin pointed out that there is also a department within the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services that concentrates on health awareness programs, including a lot of these same type of educational programs.

Downing asked if, over the last ten years, the crime rate relative to burglary/violent crime, including sexual assault, was up, down, or the same. Grady answered that, actually, the crime rate is pretty much the same. In 2001, the crime rate was high overall, comparatively speaking. At that time, the resident hall program was instituted almost immediately, along with some other programs, and became much more community oriented. In the first six months of instituting those programs, the crime rate dropped 59.32%, and, since that time, things have stayed about in the same place, although highs and lows have periodically been seen.

Grady emphasized that our campus is a very safe, very secure campus. Response time of officers is very good, and every officer is an EMT. Fifty first aid boxes are located in numerous areas around campus. Twenty-three new officers were recently hired, and there will soon be a total of ten licensed paramedics on the force. In addition, every police officer is trained in investigative practices.
Chen asked what CUAE could do to help Grady’s unit make the campus safer. Grady answered that he would ask the committee to make a commitment to work to educate everyone on this campus to work as a community to make campus safe and make certain that everyone is educated to be responsible for his/her own safety and security.

Grady thanked the committee for inviting him and encouraged anyone to call upon him at any time. Downing also thanked Chief Grady for attending the meeting and expressed the sentiment that he appreciates all that Chief Grady and his unit and officers do for the campus.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 14, 2012, beginning at 2:00 p.m., in Altgeld Hall 225.

Respectfully submitted,
Mollie Montgomery