Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

144th Meeting
Tuesday, February 12, 2013

MINUTES

APPROVED

Present: A. Birberick (Ex Officio, Vice Provost), G. Chen (EET), D. Cho (Student/SA Rep), W. Johnson (LIB), V. Krishnan Palghat (BUS), W. Pitney (EDUC), M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services), J. Zambito (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development)

Absent: T. Bough (VPA- Sabbatical), K. Chung (HHS), J. Jones (Ex Officio, Associate Vice President, Student Affairs), R. Layfield (Student/Campus Activities Board), M. Lilly (UCC Rep), M. Mehrer (LAS), E. Rodriguez (Student/HHS)

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

V. Krishnan Palghat made a motion to accept the agenda, seconded by D. Cho. Motion passed.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

W. Johnson made a motion to accept the minutes from the November 13, 2012 meeting, seconded by V. Krishnan Palghat. Motion passed.

III. NEW BUSINESS

Dr. Julia Spears, Director of the Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning (OSEEL) and Dr. Greg Barker, Director of Testing Services were guests at the meeting to report on the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) data. Dr. Spears explained that the survey is administered by the Indiana University Center for Post-secondary Research and is the most comprehensive assessment of effective practices in higher education and includes data from more than 285,000 students at 546 four-year colleges and universities. She indicated that student engagement is a hot topic and the survey focuses on two key components. Those two components are the time and effort students put into their studies and educationally purposeful activities and the ways an institution uses its resources and organizes its curriculum and other learning opportunities to encourage student participation.

Dr. Barker talked about the respondents and responses. Although he mentioned the 12% response rate for the first-year students was not a good return, it was comparable to the response rates of the other colleges and universities that participate in the survey. He
indicated it was also comparable to the response rate from 2009. He also indicated that the race/ethnicity of the respondents was representative of the university’s population.

Barker talked about the five benchmarks focused on in the NSSE. The benchmarks are: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences and supportive campus environment. He explained the multiple components that each category includes.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

Pitney initiated the discussion of how the committee wanted to proceed in terms of the presentations they had heard so far this year. Cho indicated he would be in favor of the committee focusing on engaged learning as that would target a bigger population. He felt the duties of the committee indicate they should focus on impacting the largest numbers.

Birberick brought up the Foundations of Excellence and First-Year Experience Advisory Board information that was presented by Denise Rode and Earl Seaver. If the committee was interested in that it would likely require a Bylaw change to adjust the duties of the committee.

Birberick also introduced the idea of CUAE combining with the CIUE (Committee on the Improvement of Undergraduate Education). Birberick stated that CIUE had two specific duties; awarding grants for course improvement and selecting recipients for the Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching/Instructor awards. With the latest budget rescission, Birberick indicated that the funding for the improvements grants was no longer available and she did not foresee those funds becoming available in the near future. That left CIUE with only one task.

There was discussion about the possibility of the two committees combining. Stang brought up CUAE’s desire for a mechanism for action. There were questions about the composition of the other committee and what the composition of the new committee might be. One member asked whether CUAE should vote to dissolve. Pitney mentioned that if CUAE served as the First-Year Experience advisory board, Student Affairs personnel would need to be included on the committee—that is true of CUAE but CIUE currently does not contain any representatives from Student Affairs. Cho stated he thought the combination of committees made sense. Pitney agreed and Birberick pointed out, faculty and students are already stretched to the limit with maintaining the obligations they already undertake. Birberick indicated that a recommendation could be made to UCC (Undergraduate Coordinating Committee) to take a look at CUAE and CIUE consolidating.
Pitney suggested that perhaps the duties of the committee could focus on engagement initiatives as was pointed out in the NSSE presentation as something that needs to be improved upon. He mentioned taking on the advisory board role for Foundations of Excellence. Chen voiced concern about the being overwhelmed. He felt the number one purpose was to continue to look for opportunities that enhance the undergraduate academic environment.

Chen asked if the Athletics director could speak to the committee. He questioned whether the other committee members thought advocating/increasing the Huskie spirit was part of the Academic Environment. Birberick indicated that recently the Honors program partnered with Athletics to hold a recognition night during half-time at a men’s basketball game.

Birberick indicated that one area that NIU gets dinged in relation to the NSSE data is on the foreign language and/or Study Abroad component. She indicated that private institutions have better results than public institutions in this area.

After further discussion, the topics for the March and April meetings would include student enrichment components such as community service and study abroad. Pitney asked Zambito to assist in providing information about Community Service. Zambito suggested inviting Nancy Castle to speak to the committee. In addition Pitney said he would contact Rode for a copy of the Philosophy/Action Statements for the Foundations of Excellence to discuss further also. Study Abroad will be another item for discussion at one of the upcoming meetings.

V. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by V. Krishnan-Palghat, seconded by W. Johnson the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeanne Ratfield