Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT
145th Meeting
Tuesday, March 19, 2013

MINUTES

APPROVED

Present: A. Birberick (Ex Officio, Vice Provost), D. Cho (Student/SA Rep), M. Lilly (UCC Rep), W. Pitney (EDUC),

Absent: T. Bough (VPA-sabbatical), G. Chen (EET), K. Chung (HHS) W. Johnson (LIB), J. Jones (Ex Officio, Associate Vice President, Student Affairs), V. Krishnan Palghat (BUS), R. Layfield (Student/Campus Activities Board), M. Mehrer (LAS), E. Rodriguez (Student/HHS), M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services), J. Zambito (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development)

NOTE: A quorum was not present at this meeting.

III. NEW BUSINESS

Lauren Mock, Program Administrative Assistant, Study Abroad Office, International Programs was the invited speak for today’s meeting. She gave an overview of the current study abroad program. She stated that they currently have over 300 programs in 80 different countries. Any major at NIU can study abroad. All courses offered through study abroad do transfer back for credit at NIU.

There are two types of programs. Faculty directed programs where NIU faculty members lead a group of students. There are also co-sponsored programs. Those are set-up by third party organizations many of which NIU has been working with for 15 years. This allows NIU to send students to a larger number of destinations. However, they also have the on-site support that students look for. The program lengths vary from two weeks to an academic year. She did mention that STEM majors sometimes have a difficult time fitting a study abroad experience into their program due to the program lay out.

Mock indicated that NIU tuition is not charged when students study abroad. The students are charged the cost of the program. The charges do run through the student’s Bursar’s account.

Mock then discussed the barriers to students studying abroad. They refer to these as the four Fs. Family is the first of the barriers. She indicated she talks to a lot of students as well as family members about the fears they have about going to other countries. Mock explained recently she has run into the issue that students as well as family members have the misconception that certain majors (courses) cannot be found in study abroad programs. She
indicated her office is investigating this to discover how it came about and what to do to clear it up.

The second F is finances, the cost of study abroad programs. The short term programs are less expensive than others. In addition, South American locations are not as expensive as European locations. In addition, she mentioned that since NIU tuition is not charged for the programs, some funding (scholarships) students receive cannot be applied to the costs of the program. She mentioned in particular, the Centennial or the University Scholars. Tuition waivers also cannot be applied to study abroad programs. She indicated that students are hesitant about taking out student loans to pay for the study abroad programs. She said they had over $50,000.00 in scholarship funds within the Study Abroad office itself. Many like institutions have closer to $200,000.00 in funding available. According to Mock, approximately 3% of US students study abroad, however NIU’s rate is only about 1.5%.

The third F is faculty. Many times faculty members are supportive of students studying abroad however students are also sometimes told they cannot study abroad. She said students are told that they will not be getting the best education by studying abroad. This happens more with the co-sponsored programs rather than those that are faculty directed. Sometimes there is an issue determining the equivalency of the courses that are taken abroad. Students often want more than general education credit for their study abroad programs. Some faculty feel a direct competition with the co-sponsored programs so sometimes they deny the Study Abroad office access to make classroom presentation about the opportunities.

The final F is fear, referring to the students personally; the fear of the unknown. There is the fear of being alone in a foreign country, so far from friends and family. For students who are heavily involved here at NIU, the fear of leaving those connections behind or missing opportunities while they are away. Living with another family is a scary thing for students especially the potential of a language barrier. She did mention that over 65% of the courses offered abroad are taught in English. She often uses her personal experiences of studying abroad to help ease the fears of students and parents.

Mock said that if faculty members encourage students to study abroad it is only going to help the dynamics in their courses later. To have students coming in with such varied perspectives and experiences can really enhance the environment.

Mock also mentioned that many of the sponsored programs have scholarship opportunities for participating students. The Study Abroad office also offers a workshop that suggests ways students can locate funding. Cho mentioned that the Honors program has specific funds for Honors students wishing to study abroad.

When asked about the locations where the largest number of students study, Mock indicated Europe has a very high percentage. She also indicated that NIU has a high number of students participating in Southeast Asia.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeanne Ratfield