COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT (CUAE)
Meeting #146
Minutes of April 9, 2013
2 p.m., Altgeld – 225

APPROVED


Absent: T. Bough (on sabbatical), D. Cho, K. Chung (UC meeting), C. Fugate, R. Layfield, E. Rodriguez

Guests: B. Bingle, Center for NGO Leadership and Development and L. McAllister, Student Involvement and Leadership Development

Meher made a motion, seconded by Krishnan Palghat, to adopt the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Lilly made a motion, seconded by Krishnan Palghat, to approve the March 19 notes. The motion passed unanimously.

Pitney thanked Zambito for lining up the speakers today.

We learned that a lot of our student engagement initiatives are certainly working; however, NIU seemed to score lower against benchmark institutions with respect to enriching educational experiences, which include things such as community service, study abroad, capstone courses, civic engagement activities and those sorts of things. Our two presenters today will share some information with us regarding those topics.

McAllister from Student Involvement and Leadership Development will provide a presentation on Community Service. In our area we look for ongoing and one-time community service opportunities. Through these opportunities we are looking to help students become active in the DeKalb community as well as when they graduate to be active in the communities they move into. To do this, we work on the academic citizen continuum that has four stages (member, volunteer, conscientious citizen, and active citizen). Members are not typically concerned with the world around them. Volunteers see that there are opportunities; they are well intentioned, but not well educated. Conscientious citizens are concerned with discovering why we are doing this service, what does it mean, and how are we helping people. Active citizens are where the community becomes the priority and that is how the active citizens frame their world views. We try to identify members, and we do this through our sororities and fraternities and other organizations. We have volunteers who participate in NIU Cares Day and Rake across DeKalb. We have about 1,300 volunteers for NIU Cares Day. This is a great opportunity for us to try and move our volunteers along the continuum. We have events that engage the conscientious citizens like the Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week and Huskies Paws for a Cause. The Greeks are conscientious citizens, and they do the reflection piece of the process. Our active citizens are involved in Huskie Alternative Breaks. During spring break these students give their time to help others. One of the opportunities was disaster relief after tornados had hit in Missouri. So how do we move these students
along this continuum? We do this by involvement in quality community service through direct service, reflection, and education. Where do we go from here? We collaborate through partnership programs, such as, First Year Transition Programs, Service Learning, Interdisciplinary Courses, Cultural Programming, and Community Service.

Currently these areas work in silos, so if we can collaborate across academic affairs and incorporate the education piece, then we could work with Student Involvement and Leadership Development to incorporate the reflective piece.

The University of Maryland has a program like a living learning community that is more ramped up than our program. At the University of Maryland they have found that 77 percent of the students involved in this program have graduated compared to 64 percent of the general student body.

In the living and learning communities at NIU, faculty are available to students in the resident halls.

The students are more attracted to the volunteer programs, such as, NIU Cares Day and Rake across DeKalb. Students do not have to make a huge commitment to be involved in these types of programs. This year 20 students were involved in the Huskie Alternative Break. Getting students involved in these types of activities is more challenging. Birberick indicated that she would like to see this program grow.

Pitney asked what some of the barriers are/why students aren’t engaging in these community service opportunities? McAllister explained that there is a cost associated with the Huskie Alternative Break program. Opportunities and supports aren’t always available. Getting students to know that these opportunities exist is one of the barriers.

Meher asked if special presentations were made to Honors. What is the optimal size for the Huskie Alternative Break program? McAllister said that right now this is not an issue for us. At other institutions some of these programs are totally student run and a large number of students participate in the programs. These programs are self-sustaining.

Zambito said that as the program grows, we need faculty and staff to help us. McAllister pointed out that faculty are involved as advisors, and they also help drive students to where they need to go to participate in this program. Meher asked how faculty and staff function. McAllister said that faculty spend a couple of weeks going to meetings for team building, then they participate in the service, and they are also involved in the reflection piece. They help with the logistical side of the project. Lilly asked how involved are faculty in the other activities? McAllister said that they have just enough volunteers for NIU Cares Day. When we ask for faculty involvement, it is there. Not many faculty come to us. Zambito said we need help on how to better reach out to faculty. Meher said that the Department of Anthropology has recently hired a faculty member who has a joint appointment with NGOLD who has worked in Haiti for years. He might be a good resource.

Bin Bingle the program coordinator for NGOLD and an instructor in the community leadership and civic engagement program was introduced. NGOLD was established as a temporary center in 2010, and its mission is to enhance civic society through the work of non-profits and other forms of public service by involvement in:

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- Research—We try to bring students into these projects
- Program and Outreach—mostly through the DeKalb County Non-Profit Partnership and on-campus activities
- Civic Engagement

The B.A./B.S. in Community Leadership and Civic Engagement was approved by the IBHE in August 2012. There are currently 55 majors in the program. This is an interdisciplinary degree that is tailored to student interests. The program has five emphases:

1. Advocacy
2. Arts and Humanities
3. Enterprise
4. Environmental
5. Global

There are 41 students enrolled in the Certificate of Undergraduate Study in Civic Engagement. A minor in community leadership and civic engagement has recently been approved by the Board of Trustees. Students must complete 18 hours for the minor. Students involved in civic engagement are working to make a difference in the civic lives of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community through both political and non-political processes.

Civic Engagement Activities:

1. Service Learning Activities—are course-based credit bearing educational experiences in which students participate in organized service activities that meets community needs.
2. Reflect on the Service Activity to gain a better understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibilities.

Challenges:

1. The process can be difficult for students. This is not a typical classroom setting, and this can be hard on some students.
2. There may be uncertainty. Ambiguity and lack of control of the process can be difficult for some students. The students must remain flexible, and the course objectives are still imperative.
3. Motivation. Civic engagement tends to work best with engaged, energized, active students that want to make a difference.
4. Group work. This process is implemented through group work and there are the typical challenges with group work.
5. Recruiting community partners. This is complicated by the lack of time and resources, the lack of project ideas that are good for the students, and poor previous experiences with universities.
6. Managing the process. Group interactions must have oversight. It is important to facilitate a positive experience with our community partners.

Students tend to enjoy engaged courses. They are unique, they make a difference for the students, and the students build experiences they can put on their resumes.
Pitney asked if a faculty member wanted to create a component in a class that engaged students in a civic engagement, are there resources to do this. Bingle replied that the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center provides workshops that focus on this topic. The Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning is also a great resource, and we (NGOLD) would be happy to talk to you about this too.

Bingle indicated that there are a couple of models for civic engagement. One is to have multiple groups work on different aspects of a problem in a class. A second model is to have a class work toward one goal with one organization. This seems to be a more sustainable model. Stang said that one of the challenges is that we have so many people doing similar things. Our community doesn't have enough of these organizations to provide all of our students with some of these experiences. I don’t know that this is coordinated at some level within the university. Bingle responded that we are going to have to start casting a wider net. Meher asked if NGOLD has a way to coordinate with Student Involvement and Leadership Development. Is there any official coordinator? Bingle replied that NGOLD works closely with the Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning and partners with Student Involvement and Leadership Development. The charge to these two groups is to make this come together.

Chen asked if there was a list of the courses available to students in the undergraduate certificate. Bingle responded that there are required courses and then students select one elective. Other departments are relied on to offer these courses. For example, the non-profit management course is taught by a faculty member in the Division of Public Administration.

Meher asked how the civic leadership and community engagement program dovetails with NGOLD. Bingle explained that civic leadership and community engagement is the undergraduate major, and NGOLD is the center. Pitney said we are at a point where we are encouraging students to involve themselves in community engagement. Some institutions identify students who have done this by using badges and by indicating this on students’ transcripts.

Birberick said there are a couple of things going on at NIU. The College of Business will be doing a presentation on their passport program, which is going to be required for all undergraduate students in the College of Business. There are seven continents, and the students have to do something on each continent. When the students complete this activity, they will receive a certificate. The Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning has worked to put together with Outreach the engagement database, which has both academic and co-curricular activities. This provides us with a sense of everything that is going on around campus. For the curricular piece, we have developed codes for different types of classes. We talked with college senates and department/school chairs and asked them to look at their courses and develop a list of where these courses fall. These types of experiences will be on students’ transcripts. We are very close to rolling this all up and tying it together. Birberick said that this whole year we have done a series of lectures (ex., the RISE Program at Purdue) about this topic. NIU is following the national trend to do these types of things. Stang asked if students know that this is happening. Birberick replied that students in the College of Business know that this is happening. The piece for the Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning and Outreach has not been talked about yet with the students because we are still pulling this together. Stang noted that some of this is expectations for students rather than talking them into it when they get here. Birberick added that
we also see this as a way to get them interested in coming to NIU. A subcommittee is meeting to tie up the loose ends and how we want to present this to the campus.

Pitney said that with these presentations today and the study abroad presentation at the last meeting it certainly gives us some components of our campus environment to think about and the future roles of this committee. I urge us to convey to our departments and colleges about these things. Let’s spread the word.

The last item on the agenda is the review of the Philosophy Statement for Foundations of Excellence. The Foundations of Excellence Task Force wrote this statement and asked us to review and perhaps endorse this statement.

Meher made a motion, second by Krishnan Palghat, to endorse the Philosophy Statement for Foundations of Excellence.

Birberick indicated that this all relates to the first year being a critical part of students’ engagement and some key things that we would like students to experience. We want to:

- Help first-year students transition into, and succeed in, the NIU college experience.
- Stimulate intellectual curiosity, creativity, and exploration of information and ideas as well as mastery of content.
- Encourage students to connect with faculty mentors, advisers, and upper-division students.
- Provide students with opportunities for exposure to and interaction with individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds and belief systems.
- Cultivate a supportive environment through mutual respect, shared responsibility, and a campus ethic of care.
- Foster moral and ethical development that encourages self-reflection and individual responsibility.
- Guide and assess student engagement and recognize students as partners in the first-year process experience.

The Foundations of Excellence is a national organization focused primarily on the first year experiences. They provide universities with a template to do a self-study, and NIU participated in this self-study. We did a series of surveys and answered questions about NIU, and then a plan for moving forward was developed. Quite a bit of what we found out has already been enacted. We want to have guiding principles for the first year and beyond. Think about this as general guidelines for the student experience at NIU.

Meher asked what “guide and assess” implies. Birberick replied that this about the types of things we just heard about. There is guidance. Assess would be to stand back and have reflection on the experiences. Also, was this a worthwhile program. This would be context orientated. You engage in thinking about the activities, deliberateness.

Chen asked if the committee was reviewing this for the Foundations of Excellence and not reviewing it as part of the mission or philosophy in the future of this committee. Birberick said it is for us as a university as whole.
Krishnan Palghat said this is basically for the first year students. I am a little concerned that we spell out first year experiences here; we don’t want transfer students excluded. Birberick said it is applicable, but it is not to say that we wouldn’t want this for all students. The focus is on the first year students. Zambito added that there are other initiatives that focus on the second year experience. Chen asked if we are talking about freshman or in general first year students. Birberick clarified that this is talking about the native first year student.

Pitney asked if there were any other questions or comments. A period needs to added to the last sentence. **The motion passed unanimously.** Pitney will forward this information to Gip Seaver and Denise Rode. Also, please share this with your college curriculum committees.

Lilly made a motion, second by Krishnan Palghat, to adjourn the meeting. **The motion passed unanimously.**

The meeting adjourned at 3:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Cradduck