I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

W. Johnson made a motion to accept the agenda, seconded by M. Mehrer. **Motion passed.**

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

M. Mehrer made a motion to accept the minutes from the October 9, 2012 meeting, seconded by M. Lilly. **Motion passed.**

III. OLD BUSINESS

Pitney presented the committee with a statement he had prepared following the discussion after the facilities tour last meeting. He said it praised the positive things they saw but also pointed out the disparities they observed. After review by the committee it was agreed that the statement would be forwarded to Michael Stang as well as Kelly Wesener Michael.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

**CHANCE** – Denise Hayman, guest speaker

Denise Hayman, Director of CHANCE was a guest speaker at the meeting. She gave the committee information pertaining to her background, both education and employment. Having a diverse employment background, she indicated she believes that Student Affairs and Academic Affairs must work together in order for students to be successful.
CHANCE will celebrate its 45th anniversary on campus in March of 2013. The CHANCE acronym stands for Counseling, Help and Assistance, Necessary for a College Education. NIU admission standards are currently an ACT score of 19, high school GPA of 2.75 and being in the top half of their graduating class. CHANCE admissions consist of students with an ACT score lower than 19 but who may have a high school GPA ranging from 2.0-4.0. (i.e., one CHANCE admission this year was a student with an ACT of 18 but HS GPA 3.75). The CHANCE program is open to any student who doesn’t meet the traditional admission standards. In addition CHANCE admissions are based on individual assessment of the student, a personal statement, whether the individual has overcome some adversity, their achievement potential and they must participate in an interview and take a math test. They are also required to complete a special enrollment agreement which outlines the programs expectations.

She spoke of the student model used for CHANCE students which is based not only on the ASTIN Model College Impact Model but also Terenzini’s (2006) Model in EC 2000 and Swail’s (2005) variables in geometric model of student persistence/achievement. The students personal characteristics: socio-economic, group identity, high school, cultural background, values, career knowledge influence various components of their experiences on campus such as financial aid, social academic integration, academic preparation, campus climate, commitment to educational goal, and professional development. These are factors for all students not just CHANCE students. If these things are done successfully then the potential outcomes will be graduation, employment, graduate school, active alumni and professional careers.

Academic preparation focuses on the preparedness of entering freshmen and transfer students. Research shows that 30-40% of entering freshmen and transfer students are underprepared for college-level work. Because of being underprepared they also enroll in developmental courses especially in mathematics. The summer math program was established in 2009 to increase success of students prior to them coming to NIU and increase the first and second year retention rates of at NIU. Participants who had a 2.4 or above math GPA were enrolled in the Saturday program (9a-3p). Individuals with a math GPA below 2.4 were enrolled in the M-Th 9a-3p program. Many times the lack of preparation was an issue for the students. Hayman showed the positive comments that students who participated in the program made. Many indicated they learned more in the math summer program than they did in high school.

Hayman also spoke about ALEKS, an on-line math utility that was initiated in 2011. Hayman stated it is an assessment tool that provides students with feedback regarding what they are learning and aids them in retaining information learned. The system is available 24/7 and students use their own computers.

She spoke about the PROMISE Scholars Program. This program was designed to increase the number of students interested in pursuing degrees/careers in the STEM fields (science,
technology, engineering and mathematics). The program is committed to increasing the retention and graduation rates of these students as well.

Hayman highlighted the evaluations of the CHANCE counselors who teach UNIV101. They are very high. She also talked about the amount Financial Aid services that the CHANCE program provides. She talked briefly about the Leadership Conference that was initiated in 2010, which aids in the transition from high school to college.

**FOUNDATIONS OF EXCELLENCE** – Denise Rode, Director of Orientation & First Year Experience and Earl “Gip” Seaver, Deputy Provost – guest speakers

Rode explained that Foundations of Excellence is part of a national initiative for self-assessment to develop the best possible first-year experience for freshmen. It was a recommendation from the NIU Strategic Plan and a collaborative effort of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs & Enrollment Management and the National Policy Center on First Year of College. More than 200 institutions have participated in this project.

The centerpiece of Foundations of Excellence is a model comprised of a set of principles called Foundational Dimensions. There are nine dimensions and they were developed by John Gardner and his staff at the Institute for Excellence. An NIU task force was comprised of faculty and staff as well as students. There was a committee for each of the dimensions.

The study took place over a couple years. First an audit of existing programs for first year students was done, then a set of recommendations were created. Surveys were given to first-year students in the Fall of 2008 with a response rate of about 40%. A similar survey was presented to faculty and staff in the Spring of 2009 with a 31% response. In addition approximately 17 focus groups, consisting of faculty, staff and students were given “mini-surveys” or were observed in orientation sessions, campus tours, etc.

Rode stated there are only two policy requirements for first-year students at NIU. The first, is attending orientation (including first semester advising) and the other is living on campus the first year (unless 21, married or commuting). There are very few common experiences for first-year students at NIU. It was discovered that NIU does offer some excellent programs, services and opportunities for first-year students but they are not well coordinated or organized comprehensively.

There are few initiatives aimed at freshmen beyond the first three months. She indicated some progress is being made on that aspect but work still needs to be done. Rode reported that UNIV 101, which is taken by 55-60% of first-year students, is generally viewed as an effective tool. She reported they have seen statistically supported evidence that retention and GPA of those that who have taken UNIV 101 are higher than those who do not enroll although those numbers are becoming closer.
Rode pointed out that quite a bit of assessment is done on the first-year students through the freshmen survey. That data tends not to be widely disseminated throughout campus. She also stated that in comparison to institutions similar to NIU, our students view their first year experience more favorably.

Seaver talked about the results and recommendations that came out of the study. He indicated there is a need for leadership of first-year experience on campus. There are areas that handle parts of it throughout the university but lack of a real leadership component. He stated there is a need for an organizational structure of some type and first-year experience must be an institutional priority. He mentioned a recent seminar he attended at APLU that focused on degree completion and trying to improve degree completion and two of the model institutions that presented, ASU and San Diego State, make student success a priority. He stated that NIU needs that philosophy incorporated into its culture. First year experience should also be aligned with the university’s baccalaureate goals as well as coordinated with the retention efforts of campus.

Seaver indicated communication was another big issue. It is necessary to communicate at all levels regarding the importance of the first year experience. The first year, particularly for first time freshmen, is a critical transition period in the students’ lives. Institutions put a lot of focus on the first year and are now learning that they need to spend some efforts focusing on the second year not to mention transfer students. It is about communicating the importance of student success; so that students know prior to enrollment that their success is important to us and hear how we are going to address issues related to first year - what resources are available. It is important that the transition is more than just the first three weeks or three months – that it is a 12 month effort.

Programming is another issue. Seaver indicated that there are good programs in place. What needs to happen is getting the students that need the programs connected to them. It requires a campus wide effort. He said that examining the results of the various programs is needed with elimination of programs that are not effective and moving resources to those programs that are. Generally there has not been a lot of assessment.

The environment is another important aspect. Not just the living environment, but the learning environment and the resources available.

Academic advising was another issue. It is important to identify the best practices on campus as well as off campus; focusing on those students that are at risk – that really need assistance. Rode pointed out that there is no requirement to see an academic advisor. Rode indicated that if this committee was interested, this could be an area that could be worked on. Seaver indicated Arizona State University has what they refer to as critical points in their majors and students must seek advisement at those milestones or they cannot remain in the major. They also cannot be undeclared majors.
Seaver also touched upon the subject of faculty reward and regard. Faculty members are not typically rewarded for participation in first-year experiences. It is also not part of the promotion and tenure consideration. A lot of times it is a student's connection with a specific faculty member that encourages them to continue on with their studies. He suggested rewarding the people who really go out of their way to really help freshmen transition.

Seaver indicated the next step is to identify a central advisory committee to help coordinate the implementation and recommendations. This is where he thinks CUAE could participate in some aspect. The task force established a philosophy statement and they would like that to be adopted and disseminated to campus. In addition action statements were created and those are the areas that could be focused on.

Seaver talked about the number of freshmen NIU loses each year. He said many believe that those students leave because they are not prepared. Seaver pointed out, when you exam the data, anywhere from 38-44% of freshmen leave the institution in good standing. They are simply not making a connection. A focus on keeping these students here is needed – ensuring that they make the connection.

Rode mentioned that this year a new event sponsored by Student Involvement and Leadership Development, called Bark until Dark was initiated. This was a way to encourage students to remain on campus for the weekend. It consisted of activities on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. She also mentioned some second year experiences were piloted. They are attempting to do some bridging from the first-year to the second year.

There was a discussion about retention and efforts to improve retention. Seaver talked about using the data available to understand what makes students leave. The discussion also covered the role community colleges play. When students leave NIU for community colleges is there something that can be done to assure that the students will return to complete their baccalaureate degree – right now when they move to a community college they are not returning.

Pitney asked for a pdf of the Philosophy statement for the committee to discuss at a future meeting.

V. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Johnson, seconded by Mehrer the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeanne Ratfield