Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

152nd Meeting
Tuesday, October 14, 2014

MINUTES

APPROVED

Present: T. Bough (VPA), S. Barrett (HHS), S. Friedman (CAB representative); M. Kolb (Associate Vice Provost for Vice Provost Birberick), V. Krishnan Palghat (BUS), D. Lonergan (ULIB), J. Stafstrom (UCC), J. Stevens (Student-LAS), M. Tucker (Ex-Officio, Student Affairs & Enrollment Management); J. Zambito (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development)

Absent: M. Cravens (Student-LAS); K. Gasser (LAS); A. Martin (SA student representative); M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services),

Guests: UNIV Pilot Section Professors: Dan Gebo (ANTH), Kristen Myers (SOCI), Taylor Atkins (HIST), First & Second Year Experience: Director, Denise Rode and Assistant Director, Kelly Smith

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Bough asked for a motion to adopt the agenda, moving the discussion of UNIV to precede other business, J. Stafstrom made the motion, seconded by D. Lonergan. The motion passed unanimously.

II. Approval of Minutes from September 9, 2014 meeting.

S. Friedman made a motion to approve the minutes from the September 9, 2014 meeting, seconded by J. Stafstrom. Motion passed unanimously.


A motion to approve the 2013-14 CUAE Annual Report was made by J. Stevens, seconded by V. Palghat. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

The professors teaching the pilot sections of UNIV 101 were invited to provide the committee with feedback on their experiences. The objective was to add some additional academic elements into the course. Gebo said it was the first time teaching the course. His section is at 4:00 pm and so it is very important to make it interesting for the students. There has to be some elements of fun to keep them attentive. The class is only one credit and you really need to balance the content. He and Michael Kolb are doing some work together with their
sections. The course book has a lot of material and trying together trying to infuse some additional academic elements is challenging. His main issue seems to be the constant juggling of the schedule. A lot of people want to come to the class and make presentations. Denise Rode said that Gebo was touching on a common difficulty of packing so much information into a one credit hour course. Tough decisions about what to cover have to make all the time. You cannot allow everyone who wishes to speak to the class to come. Atkins said he had the opposite problem of inviting a couple of resource centers to attend and received no response.

Pilot sections were designed to allow for additional writing assignments; adding academic content to the course. Myers said UNIV is expected to do too much. It cannot be the fix all for any improvements that viewed needing improvement. Gebo added there is a lot of material in the book and everything cannot be covered, but needs to be there for the students to have access to. Rode added that what they are experiencing is typical when redeveloping a course. She said that the one-on-one conferences are a very integral part of the course and can change its complexion. Smith asked the pilot instructors about their connection with the students and how do they perceive the experience. Gebo said the most difficult part is learning the names - once they are known it is easier to engage the students; call on them, etc. He feels that the students are connecting. The evaluations will show what the students think.

Stafstrom suggested that the pilot section professors are acknowledged, strong instructors. One possible outcome may be that the pilot section students "do better" than students in other sections. He asked if there was any way to look at that and what would be the measures of achievement. Smith said they collect student feedback at the end of the semester which includes delivery method, organization of the instructor and whether they felt connected for an instructor effectiveness score and that is provided to all instructors. Myers suggested collecting longitudinal data going forward. Rode said they could collect information pertaining to retention and GPA; stating they could compare these sections with the traditional sections.

Bough asked the pilot instructors if they would be willing to teach the course again. Myers indicated she wasn’t sure. She said half of them are failing. She feels she is letting them down. The students are willfully not doing the assignments. She said she feels her strengths are not meshing with what the course requires. Atkins said for the amount of work that has gone into the course - he should teach it again but there are other factors. In principle he thinks its great PR for the university to have senior faculty with fancy titles greeting them when they embark on this journey. A room of 18 year olds is an intimidating audience. Myers brought up the President’s mandate for retention and how she feels the added pressure to not let a single one fail. They all commented on the benefit of having the peer instructors and how fabulous they are. Kolb added he is familiar with teaching freshmen and he identified three at-risk students and tried to intervene, talking to advisors, etc., and trying
to help however they still all dropped. There was discussion regarding the university’s retention efforts.

Kolb said the role of UNIV at the institution is something for the committee to focus on. What is UNIV’s purpose - orientation to the university; adding academic content? Rode showed the committee the objectives of the course. It was a long list.

Kolb added that he and Gebo have an alum working with their sections and he has a lot to say to the students. The alum is a very successful man who received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees at NIU. Kolb said the alum told the students the three most important things to take away from NIU are, 1) make the connections (getting to know students and working together), 2) problem solving and critical thinking and 3) writing. Kolb suggested perhaps the objectives could be whittled down or put into a hierarchy. Kolb also indicated the PLUS Task Force, in its discussion felt that it is important for students to understand the baccalaureate process; why is it important to come to college and what can they get out of it. How can they best take advantage of their time here.

Discussion continued regarding what students need; what are their concerns. Myers said that based on her individual interviews students are concerned about friends; making friends, etc. - that isn’t something that the instructors can help with but there are other things that can help the students. Myers said the students expressed that they thought they would be a different kind of student coming to college - they wouldn’t procrastinate any longer, etc.

Atkins added that they indicated the biggest change is they don’t have the structure they were used to - no one tells them what to do, when to study, go to bed, - balancing time to socialize and time to study. Kolb concurred that going from the unstructured environment of college is a big adjustment for students; time management skills and setting priorities is something that can be offered. Stafstrom added that sometimes those skills are not established earlier in students’ academic life and the need to improve them now.

J. Stevens asked the instructors about the first set of MAP-works data that is available and how they feel about that. Myers said that she is pulling the information up during her interviews with students. She indicated she is somewhat surprised at how some things are marked. She mentioned a red light for not having picked a career - she doesn’t think that is appropriate; that adds pressure for them to do something they aren’t ready to do. Another thing she mentioned was students whose parents didn’t attend college, receive a red light for that - they can’t do anything about that and she feels that reads like an insult. Atkins added that a lot of his students didn’t recognize their responses. It has been almost a month since they were taken - some things have been resolved already. Atkins commented that he feels that his students are adjusting well. Zambito commented that in her five years of teaching she has felt the same as the others. Zambito said there are assumptions made about what the students know. She was working with a senior who is involved in leadership roles in several organizations but was unaware the Counseling Center existed (which is in the building where the student works!).
Bough referred back to the goals, saying they were all worthy/important but agreed that some hierarchy needs to be created. Lonergan commented that there is no room on the list for introverts - the list speaks to "joiners" or extroverts. Bough pointed the committee toward the syllabus asking members if they had a chance to review his or Rode's template. He commented that there is information in the course book about learning styles, however the syllabus is basically written for a specific learning style. Bough said that in his observations of approximately 40-50 sections of UNIV he makes the same comment to most instructors and that involves elements of kinesthetic learning. Bough asked Rode/Smith how that could be handled. Rode said she thought the best way would be in the training modules by example.

Smith added that the delivery method of instruction is one of the most flexible aspects of the course. Bough seemed concerned that individuals were simply lecturing. Myers said she has only lectured twice. Most of her class time is interactive. Rode indicated that the one-on-one conference is the time when instructors can affirm what is important to the students and their interests. She added how valuable it is to conduct them early in the semester.

The PLUS Task Force is recommending that UNIV be required. Rode/Smith provided budget information to the committee for UNIV 101 as well as a development and budget information for a required Junior-level transition course (301). Smith indicated that they didn’t find a lot of information for that type of course but found limited amount of information on some career initiatives for juniors. She said that NIU would definitely be in the lead if attempted. The curriculum would need to be developed and what would be the most important items for the 301 course.

Smith presented information about the course offering cycle. Fall semester UNIV 101 would be required for first-semester freshmen and UNIV 201 for first-semester transfer students (keeping that as an elective). Smith said they are running 10 sections and they are the fullest they have been. Rode added that there is a high level of satisfaction in 201. The transfer students are valuing the course more than they have in the past (approximately 16-17% of transfer students are enrolling in 201. This spring there will be 10 sections of UNIV 101/201 (specifically for transfer students). In addition there is talk of a few sections being offered in the summer.

Smith went over the projected budget figures showing income and expenses for UNIV 101/201 and 301. The staffing requirements include not just the UNIV courses but all staffing related to First and Second year experience programs. It includes the addition of one graduate assistant, one office support, one program coordinator and a title upgrade.

Another topic discussed was pay for peer instructors (PI) who Bough pointed out were basically donating their time. The committee supported pay for the peer instructors in their proposal to the Vice Provost last year. Friedman said he did it mainly for the experience and that he also benefitted from the experience via contact with administrators, faculty, etc. Other
ideas for the peer instructors included using the UNIV experience as an internship or compensation in the form of a credit hour. Rode pointed out that remuneration in whatever form requires accountability on the part of the PI.

Myers indicated she would advocate for the course to be more than a one hour course based on the fact that it meets 15 weeks, she feels in order to cover the required content, keep continuity going as well as building community it has to be greater than one hour. Rode said that the amount of time spent in the course is 1200-1300 minutes and a typical one-hour course meets for 800 minutes.

Bough asked Kolb to speak about the possibility of UNIV counting as general education credit. Kolb said that the Task Force has discussed that but how does it fit into general education – that is the question. It may fit better into a baccalaureate requirement, which is how the Task Force is presenting it. He added that the Task Force has recommended a decrease in the number of general education hours required.

Rode said another variable to consider is that beginning this summer NIU is going to a two-day Orientation program and that some content of 101 may be covered there. Kolb added that if there is a 301, that focuses on career success some content can be rolled over there as well but an introductory career piece should remain in 101.

Stafstrom asked Rode to provide the committee with the PowerPoint presentation. She said that she would do that. She also reiterated that if the course is made mandatory that there are administrative tasks that would come about. Bough asked Kolb about when a decision would be made. Kolb indicated that the Task force is making recommendations only via their report. He added that the implementation and catalog language regarding what is a requirement, etc. must go through the curriculum committees, specifically APASC, since it is an academic standard. He said that is why it is important for this committee to deliberate on it and perhaps make its own recommendation to APASC.

Bough indicated that the November meeting will be focused on putting together some recommendations. He asked members to review the syllabi and come to that meeting with possible suggestions. In addition some other issues to discuss are: a) how to engage multiple learning styles, b) how to accommodate student who aren’t joiners, etc. Stafstrom suggested reviewing the goals of the course and selecting those items that are of greatest importance. Kolb suggested the committee members review the list and prioritize the items.
V. ADJOURNMENT

D. Lonergan made a motion to adjourn @ 3:40 p.m., seconded by S. Friedman. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Ratfield