Northern Illinois University

COMMITTEE ON THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

153rd Meeting
Tuesday, November 11, 2014

MINUTES

APPROVED

Present:  T. Bough (VPA); S. Barrett (HHS); M. Cravens (Student-LAS); S. Friedman (CAB representative); K. Gasser (LAS); M. Kolb (Associate Vice Provost for Vice Provost Birberick), V. Krishnan Palghat (BUS); A. Martin (SA student representative); J. Stafstrom (UCC); J. Stevens (Student-LAS); J. Zambito (Ex Officio, Student Involvement and Leadership Development)

Absent:  D. Lonergan (ULIB); M. Stang (Ex Officio, Student Housing Services), M. Tucker (Ex-Officio, Student Affairs &Enrollment Management)

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by K. Gasser to approve the agenda, seconded by S. Friedman. The motion passed unanimously.

II. Approval of Minutes from October 14, 2014 meeting.

V. Krishnan Palghat made a motion to approve the minutes from the October 14, 2014 meeting, seconded by K. Gasser. Motion passed unanimously.

III. NEW BUSINESS

Bough gave a summary of the committee's work for the benefit of the new members. He said the work with UNIV 101/201 began last year and the committee made some recommendations. Some of those recommendations were acted upon. Given the changes that appear to be coming, UNIV 101 will move from being an optional course to one required for graduation. These changes will present the opportunity to focus on for the committee.

M. Cravens talked about his own experience, how important it is for students to get involved with others in their major community - the various groups that exist for majors throughout campus. He said not just for the social aspect but also for assistance academically and support when you’re having a bad day. In addition, introduction to resources, the library, where is the tutoring center - he has received a lot of questions working at the circulation desk at the library. Bough said that UNIV can provide that support network, that group of individuals have that kind of connection or network. Bough said this committee can make
suggestions, prioritizing the objectives of the course and shaping the content. K. Gasser stated there were a lot of recommendations for problem solving, critical thinking, writing but there is only so much that can be covered in a one hour. Writing is something that needs to be taught throughout the degree.

First reading - Proposed UNIV 101/201 catalog language

Bough turned the committee’s attention to the proposed language for UNIV 101/201 and the graduation requirement. Bough asked Kolb if UNIV had yet become a requirement. Kolb indicated it was still working its way through the curricular process. It will need to go the APASC for approval. S. Barrett questioned the "or an approved equivalent course" - what exactly does that mean? Kolb indicated that some community colleges have a college success course that have similar content. Kolb also stated that there is at least one course in Engineering that is taught much like UNIV. Kolb said the Task Force recommendation was for a university experience course and to allow for a department or college specific course to serve as an equivalent for maximum flexibility. V. Palghat asked about the approval process for the equivalent course - Kolb indicated that would go through the curricular process of CUC and APASC.

Bough asked if it is approved for a graduation requirement part - would it fit into the general education curricular or a stand-alone course. Kolb indicated it would be a stand-alone baccalaureate requirement. S. Friedman asked for the difference between a baccalaureate requirement and general education requirement. Kolb explained that the total degree program is the baccalaureate experience. General education is one portion of that. Students can meet the general education requirements at NIU, or a community college or another university. By placing this requirement at the baccalaureate level we are ensuring that every NIU student has this experience, which introduces them to the PLUS program.

Bough indicated there was a question about resources, will there be funding if the course is mandatory to cover the additional costs. Kolb said the budget proposal that developed in the Vice Provost’s office and submitted to the Provost to be reviewed by the CFO, the President and Provost included not only faculty salary monies for the additional sections but also funds for the peer instructors (one credit hour or $500 stipend) and additional support staff for the First and Second-Year Experience office.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

The committee continued its discussion of the UNIV 101 syllabus to prioritize the objectives of the course. A. Martin indicated he took the course and would like to see it be mandatory. He said the course gave him a sense of what was going on at the university but additional focus on resources is necessary. S. Friedman agreed that focusing on what resources are available is important. Teaching students how to navigate MyNIU, signing up for classes,
what to do if you need to drop a class or where to get help. He and Alex both felt that writing should be taught in UNIV 101. Alex said that student involvement and retention are the top issues right now and he feels that UNIV can assist with those efforts by concentrating on resources.

Bough asked for thoughts on the Common Reading experience. S. Friedman commented that when he took UNIV the common read wasn’t required but as an assistant in the course he heard a lot of students indicate having the author speak and participating in the presentation was a positive experience. Kolb indicated he thought the experience was a positive one also. It was a shared experience for the students. It encourages active reading and some sort of reflection, according to Bough. Kolb pointed out that it encourages a sense of community and shared values, whether or not you agree with the content of the book. Kolb added that in his course he worked with an alum and he believed that the most important thing is to learn to interact with peers - network, etc. and secondly college is where you find your voice - how to communicate, verbally and in writing. Bough added that in addition to each other students connect with at least one faculty or staff member. Zambito said she has experience with Themed Learning Communities and they are excelling in specific areas with UNIV 101 and perhaps model that behavior of collaborating with others in similar classes.

So far the priorities seem to be:

- initiate the process of active reading, thoughtful reflection and critical thinking (at least acquainting students with the ideas)
- retention and connection; awareness of resources; connection between students; connections with faculty (Friedman mentioned that retention would be a result of the connections)
- the common read/active reading

Bough stated if the course is going to be required than he feels that it needs to be a little more consistent so that regardless of whose section a student is in, they get the same experience. Friedman commented that from the 11 objectives listed for the course, that the last three can be condensed within the other 8. Friedman questioned if it is possible to make the course non-academically based, giving the instructors the freedom to teach in the style which they prefer, while expecting all students to get the same experience.

Bough asked Zambito what our new students need. She agreed with what Kolb had said about finding your niche - for some students UNIV is where that happens. Students can find that sense of belonging and understanding with their peers in this class because of the way the syllabus is constructed and the way the course is intended to be interactive more so than in other classes. This course encourages students to attend various events and try things out. Bough added that within the syllabus there are credit bearing activities.
Barrett said that she agreed with Friedman about condensing the objectives. She said that she thinks they are all worthy. Bough feels that it is possible to group the objectives in a manner in which encourages instructors to think in categories: make sure you motivate the students, help facilitate some connections, make sure they know where the library is, where their advisors are located, where the writing center is, etc. Could further guidance be given to UNIV instructors? Bough indicated that the vast majority of UNIV instructors are staff members not faculty.

V. Palghat asked if it’s a required class what happens if a student fails it. Since it will be a graduation requirement the student will have to retake it. Bough seemed to think that having a requirement may cut down on the number of students failing simply because it is required for graduation. Kolb indicated that many students didn’t want it to be mandatory because they believed that students who were there were qualified and wanted to be there. On the other hand making it a requirement will get additional students there. There were logistical questions that committee members had and Kolb indicated that APASC will need to answer those.

V. ADJOURNMENT

K. Gasser made a motion to adjourn @ 3:37 p.m., seconded by V. Palghat. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Ratfield
Administrative Assistant to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs