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Academic Planning Council Minutes of October 15, 2007

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ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL
Minutes of October 15, 2007
3 p.m., Holmes Student Center – HSC 505

Present: Alden, Anderson, Bose, Cassidy, Fox, Freedman, Gay, Gorman, House, Jeris, Marcellus, Marsh, Molnar, Prawitz, Reynolds, Seaver, Singh

Guests: Ardeshir Dalal, Director, Graduate Studies, Department of Economics; Carolinda Douglass, Director, Assessment Services; Stephen Karlson, Director, Office of Economic Education; Eliakim Katz, Chair, Department of Economics; Chris McCord, Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Jamie Rothstein, Assistant to the Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m. It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of October 8, 2007, and the motion passed unanimously.

Chris McCord, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Jamie Rothstein, Assistant to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Eliakim Katz, Chair of the Department of Economics; Ardeshir Dalal, Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Economics; and Stephen Karlson, Director of the Office of Economic Education were introduced.

McCord provided some introductory remarks regarding the Department of Economics. The Department of Economics offers undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees; provides service to the general education program; and houses the Office of Economic Education. The enrollments dropped a decade ago or so and now we have seen them rebuild quite significantly. The undergraduate enrollment has doubled. The Department of Economics is doing more with less, and the research mission is steadily evolving and refocusing. The master's program is very vibrant. At the undergraduate level the department is doing a good job to ensure a quality degree, and it pays attention to written and quantitative skills.

Marsh presented the subcommittee report for the Department of Economics. The new faculty hires should be reflected in the report. The subcommittee noted the increased emphasis on writing skills and encourages the department to think about assessing these skills. In the report the department talks about using interviews to collect assessment data, and the subcommittee noted some opportunities for broadening the sample. The number of women in the undergraduate program has declined.

The learning objectives for the M.A. in Economics are very clear. The subcommittee had a question about whether the enrollment was declining or stable. At all levels the department is handicapped because it was hard to track where their students went when they left the university. When students are admitted into the program, they can be admitted into the master's or the Ph.D. program. Some students start out in the Ph.D. program and after a period of time they want to pick up a degree so they switch into the master's program. After receiving the master's degree, these students switch back into the Ph.D. program. Other students start out as master's students, and after a year or so they decide that they want to continue on into the Ph.D. program. This transition is seamless for the students. When it comes to saying how many students are in the master's program and how many students are in the Ph.D. program, this is a little fuzzy. Apart from record keeping requirements, this process works pretty well for the doctoral program. On the average, can you tell us how many Ph.D.s you are producing? Some Ph.D. students are getting job offers after they have finished the master's program. Having the master's degree

in hand opens up doors for these students, and many students don't want to work in academia. Over the last five years the department has produced three to four Ph.D. graduates per year. For the timeframe 2000-2006, the department produced 14 Ph.D. graduates. In FY07, there were three Ph.D. graduates, and we have another student scheduled to defend the dissertation later this semester. There was a period of time where students were taking a long time to complete the degree for a variety of reasons. This has been addressed, and now we are probably close to Iowa State University in regard to time-to-degree. There are 125 Ph.D. programs in economics in this country; what is the average graduation rate? We have compared productivity of our department with the average of some other institutions, and in some cases we do better than them and in other cases we do not do better than them. Southern Illinois University (SIU) is among the best. SIU has the same faculty size as NIU, but it produces twice as many Ph.D. graduates. The doctoral program may be a victim of our own quality. If ABDs can get a job, they tend to take the job and not finish the degree. The department doesn't know what SIU is doing. Is it our business to know? It is our business to do the best we can with what we have. Our location may be mitigating against us too. Then the question may be do we continue our Ph.D. program or should we put these resources into the master's program. The department has looked at other Ph.D. programs, and a large number of those programs have one individual who serves in an endowed chair position and devotes the majority of time to overseeing dissertation students. This department does not have an individual who can devote the majority of time to this endeavor. If the department had more resources, then it could do more. SIU has more resources to do some of these things, and it is also reflected in the release time given to faculty. We have also lost Ph.D. students when we lost a couple of our faculty members.

Reynolds took over the presentation of the subcommittee report. The report was very informative and analytical. There was a disparity of the lack of women in the undergraduate program, but the number of women at the graduate level was very strong. In response to this observation, it was noted that the economics program has become one of the safety measures for students who don't make it into the College of Business, and it might be worthwhile to look at the College of Business data, especially the male students. Over the past couple of years there have only been seven native students per year who have switched from the College of Business to the Department of Economics. The university does not know whether transfer students are migrating to your program. It does not appear that your enrollment increase is coming from students who were in the College of Business. Does the department have specific recruitment activities in place? The department does not advertise, but it does participate in the Majors Fairs. Many of our students choose this major after completing an introductory course in economics.

There is a problem with the low number of respondents to the alumni survey, which is not unique to this department. Some departments have moved toward exit interview with seniors.

The report has a sentence in it about the quality of the doctoral dissertations. Six or seven dissertations were sent out for external review, and two or three of these had some issues or weaknesses mentioned in the reviews. The department should look at this information and share it with the faculty advisors.

In regard to faculty productivity, the department felt it was performing at the national average level; some disagreement with this statement was expressed. Data regarding this issue has been forwarded to the department. One concern is about the number of Ph.D.s being produced by the department. The department needs to figure out what the issues are that contribute to the low number of graduates (i.e., time-to-degree, stipends, etc.). Adjustments should be made that allow the department to produce more Ph.D. graduates if that is the goal of the department. This also relates back to the resource issue. The applied areas currently offered are public economics, labor economics, and financial economics. These are of particular interest to the Illinois region. It is difficult to change the curriculum in a timely manner, especially when there are no new resources. Some students want to specialize in other areas that we don't offer. One such area is international economics, and we don't have the resource to offer this.

There are also many courses in the catalog that are not offered on a regular basis, but we do tell students that these are the fields that we offer. Some students get a master's and then leave NIU to pursue a Ph.D. at other institutions if they are interested in economic development and international economics. This information will be in the plans for future section of the review, but we need additional faculty to offer additional areas. The dean has been discussing this issue with the chair. Also, NIU is beginning to move into the next phase of the strategic planning process, and this will drive resource allocations and hiring decisions. This is in the queue, and we will have to determine where it is in the queue. Sometimes a shift in curriculum occurs as a result of key retirements or individuals accepting other positions. Has the department had discussions about substituting one area for another or adding this area? Currently the department has had to recruit in the three areas, but we would be happy to change this. If we don't increase the number of faculty, a substitution could occur. A shift in curriculum does not necessarily require new positions. These kinds of evolutions move very slowly. The department is providing initial training to graduate students, and then these students are going somewhere else. We need to make changes to keep the students at NIU. Eight years ago we started to phase out the urban/regional economics area, and this has just been finished. When students find out that you are changing things, some students want to leave.

Does the public economics area overlap with economic development? Public economics is about how the economy in the U.S. relates to the role of government regulating the economy. Economic development is associated with the problems of developing countries. There is almost always an overlap, but it doesn't hone in on the major issues.

The Office of Economic Education is part of the department and affiliated with NIU Outreach. The current activity level of the office is minimal, essentially consisting of judging a poster contest. Priorities in the K-12 audience have shifted due to the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act. In the spring, the APC should discuss reviewing an activity that takes up 10 percent of one faculty member's time with an \$800 budget. This office does have a CIP's code, and we have to report on it to the IBHE. The report is self explanatory. Activities have been cut back extensively, and the external agency has gone in other directions due to the No Child Left Behind Act. The department's strength in quantitative economics might lead to the possibility of exploiting the No Child Left Behind mathematics push as a funding opportunity. The subcommittee had a hard time understanding the viability of this office. It is a one person office, run by a faculty member doing several jobs, and the faculty member doesn't have time to pursue other funding opportunities that are available. The office does have the assistance of the Illinois Council on Economic Education, which is part of NIU Outreach. There are also several full-time teachers who are involved with the activities of the office. The office primarily exists to offer college credit for certain activities, and then we have the poster contest too. Another activity that we are involved with is the stock market game for teachers. The question is does this warrant a separate office, or can someone in the Illinois Council of Economic Education organization provide this support. The original agreement for the office was set up by Fred Kitterle and Tony Scaperlanda many years ago. The council thought it would be useful to have some presence in the department. The office is doing something useful for outreach. There should be a conversation with the office and the council to follow-up on this issue.

The meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn A. Craddock