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Academic Planning Council Minutes of December 3, 2007

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REVISED AND APPROVED

ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL
Minutes of December 3, 2007
3 p.m., Holmes Student Center – Room 505

Present: Alden, Anderson, Bond (for Bose), Cassidy, Freedman, Gorman, Gough, House, Jeris, Marcellus, Marsh, Molnar, Prawitz, Reynolds, Seaver

Guests: Donna Askins, Research Associate, Office of the Provost

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m. The 2007 University Writing Project Report Analysis of College-Level Writing Ability/Skills was distributed. The writing project was formerly called the Junior Level Writing Project and is administered by the Office of Assessment Services. The report has been discussed by the UAP. We wanted the APC to have this report because some program reviews make reference to the writing project. It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of November 19 and 26, 2007, and the motion passed unanimously.

Reynolds's reviewed the subcommittee findings for the Bachelor of General Studies (B.G.S.). The report was very comprehensive, and there is nothing akin to a departmental level section. The degrees are spread across all colleges (except law and business), and each college sets its own requirements. The program relies on course work in a particular college, and the program provides an academic home for students who do not fit into other majors. There are 150 students in the program, and these students are exposed to the whole college curriculum.

Students enrolled in the Contract Major design their own program. There are only two to three students doing this right now. One of the students is studying music and Japanese culture.

Recommendations for the future include a more centralized focus on accountability, particularly with respect to tracking, advising, and assessment. The B.G.S. program may want to reconsider its mission; it is likely that the original purposes of the program have changed. The program may want to consider other models, such as the University Honors Program or the model at the University of Las Vegas (UNLV). The UNLV program is a true interdisciplinary major that students opt for and is reviewed and assessed.

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of African-American students pursuing the B.G.S. Are the students in the program there because of advising failures? Since the enrollment growth is among our African-American students, are their interests unique and diverse, or is it because these students can't connect with their advisors. The director for the Center for Black Studies might have insights about how African-American students are advised. This should be looked into. Financial issues might be part of the problem. We will look into this, and also look at where our students are coming from. The advising issue is part of the problem. The B.G.S. is different things to different colleges. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has the highest number of students in this program, and it is a liberal arts degree in that college. In the College of Health and Human Sciences the B.G.S. is a focused degree for practicing professionals who want a bachelor's degree. At other universities (Illinois State University) this degree is sometimes a backup degree for students who can't get into the student teaching practicum. The Colleges of Engineering and Engineering Technology and Visual and

Performing Arts use the degree infrequently. The program is interdisciplinary within the college, but it is not multidisciplinary across the university

The sections on assessment and accountability do not have outcomes focused goals. This program is meeting a need, but the question becomes can this degree be better utilized for students who can't seem to find a major to pursue. The program at UNLV is an integrated university-wide degree. Students have to complete general education requirements, 48 hours of electives, 12 core hours, and two 18 hours of areas of study. There is a capstone course at the end that ties everything together. There were a number of students who were in good standing who couldn't get into courses, so this degree was developed at UNLV. These students wanted to pick and choose their major because they already had a job or knew what they wanted to be, or students came back from the military and already had 100 hours of course work and didn't want to start over. This college is run like a graduate school for undergraduate students with a strong core. The first year the college was opened at UNLV there were 1,600 majors from a student body of 29,000. The basic advising staff was transferred to this college. About a third of the students were undecided, but then chose a specific degree program. The structure was formed by a faculty committee, it was supported by the provost, but it was not top down directed by the provost. We may not want this type of set up here.

There are a couple of things going on; it is important to distinguish between the Contract Majors and the B.G.S. majors. NIU is limited on the number of Contract Majors it can graduate according to public law, and this is about five students per year. We want the flexibility for students to put together their own programs, but a backdoor degree cannot be created. The B.G.S. program is different; NIU received approval to award this degree. Historically the B.G.S. has been handled through the colleges, and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences signed on early to offer this degree. The B.G.S. in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the largest off-campus program at NIU. Students enrolled in this program may have a lot of hours, and it is a structured program. Students in this program are required to complete the general education and upper-division hours required by the university.

The B.G.S. review does not have any statement on learning outcomes; there are only statements of goals. This is the only degree program in the university that does not have an assessment plan, and this is important for us to address, especially since the number of students in the program is increasing.

In most cases these are mature adult students who are working full-time jobs. The students enroll in this program because it will help them advance in their current positions. These students do not need a specific program, they need a credential. The program should be able to say that there is a set of skills that the graduates obtain, and measures should be in place to assess this. Some sort of capstone experience that ties everything together would be good. Ensuring the quality and rigor would be easy if there was a capstone project that included critical thinking, building a portfolio, etc.

The Contract Major is used very infrequently. The Contract Major is fine, and all the subcommittee comments are directed toward the B.G.S. program.

Should there be a recommendation to try and organize the B.G.S. program, or should it not be fixed if it is not broken? Is the program broken, or is just the data lacking? Good stuff is happening in this program, it is just not being measured. An exit interview with the students might be a good way to gather data. An assessment plan is needed and there needs to be student learning outcomes that are assessed. The best practice is an internship type of class that ties what a student is doing academically to the workforce. Data are needed, and it is important to assess if this program is working. Follow-up

with these students should occur, and we need to find out why students are in this program. Faculty should be asked what are the top five reasons you advise students to enroll in the B.G.S. program. Also, someone in the Center for Black Studies should ask why students chose the B.G.S. program. When you look at other schools in the state, it appears that the B.G.S. at NIU is underutilized. The program itself is not broken; the report on what is happening is the problem that needs to be addressed.

A motion was made and seconded to set up an ad hoc group (college advisors, faculty, and other people with insight into why students would move into this degree) to look at program needs, why students choose this program, and who these students are. The goals also need to be looked at and converted into learning outcomes. A capstone or similar type of experience should be discussed; there needs to be some type of common criteria. A report on these issues will be due to the APC in spring 2009. The motion passed unanimously.

There are three interim reports that NIU will submit to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE). The first one is a request to offer an existing program off-campus and the next two are requests to establish permanent centers. When a center is first requested, NIU seeks temporary status from the IBHE for a five-year period. Three years after the approval of a new research or public service unit, the university must submit an interim report to the Illinois Board of Higher Education demonstrating the ways in which the unit has been implemented. Sometimes refinements in strategic directions will be made after the initial three-year period.

The B.S. in Nursing in the North Suburban Region was approved in February 2004 and the interim report to the Illinois Board of Higher Education should demonstrate the ways in which the program is meeting its goals. This is a very active, high-demand program. Currently there is a nursing shortage, especially in the western suburbs of Chicago. In this area there are many community colleges that offer associate programs, and a large number of these graduates want to obtain a B.S. in Nursing degree. For the first couple of years enrollments were below the targeted enrollment. Now they are certainly above the targets. Faculty deliver these courses face-to-face, and the indicators show that the program is meeting the students' needs, and students are satisfied with the program. Are the faculty teaching these courses regular faculty in tenure-track positions who travel from DeKalb to teach? Yes, and these faculty also serve the program offered in DeKalb too. They teach on-campus; they don't serve exclusively an off-campus audience. Some of these faculty live in the western suburbs close to where they teach, and the courses are assigned on-load.

The NIU Institute for Neutron Therapy was approved by the IBHE in December 2004, and it is part of a partnership with Fermi. The neutron therapy unit existed for several years at Fermi, and then it became inactive. When NIU became involved in it, a request for a temporary center was submitted to the IBHE. There were some problems with equipment, so it did not meet its target of the number of patients served. The center seems to serve an important need for its patients, and it is only one of two such centers in the United States. It is also related to the proton therapy unit. The center functions on grant money. There is no explanation of why the priorities changed from research to service. There were some IRB issues; Fermi doesn't have an IRB. The Departments of Defense and Energy were overseeing the research and wondered why the research was being done at Fermi without an active IRB. This was more of a decision based on issues as they evolved. This is also a good example of why the model to seek temporary approval is used because sometimes things like this happen. If the proton center comes to fruition, it may create some unique opportunities for this center. Two types of therapies would provide a unique research niche.

The Regional Development Institute (RDI) was approved by the IBHE in August 2004 and is run out of the Division of Administration and Outreach. The center is focused on economic development, regional activities, increasing collaborations with local governments, etc. The RDI is grant funded, and plans at this time are to seek approval as a permanent center. The goals for the center have not changed.

The council turned to the follow-up reports. These are reports that were requested in previous program review years. Reports on the issues from these programs were submitted last spring, and the group decided that they wanted additional reports this fall because the responses were not as complete as expected.

The council requested additional information on the timely declaration of the major (the exit declare process) for the B.A./B.S. in Communication Studies program. Specifically the council expressed concerns about the continuing use of the exit declare process, which leaves the university open to liability and reflects the implementation of admission policies outside those published in the *Undergraduate Catalog*. The students are given permits to classes when they have not been admitted to the program, and there are non-majors graduating from this program. The program was asked to report on how this issue has been addressed to adhere to the existing admission policies and/or the development of other published methods for admission to the program. This practice has not changed since before 2002 when it was identified as an issue.

The current report from the program indicates it is putting off a response until the implementation of the strategic plan. The provost has discussed this issue with the dean. Students find out about this exit declare process through word of mouth, and it is highly subjective. From a departmental chair's position this sounds like a disaster, and my students would be very upset if they found out something like this was happening in my program. The problem is that some people get to do this and some don't. There are a number of pre-communications students who don't meet the minimum requirements and are allowed to take courses in communications and general education to increase their G.P.A.s. The G.P.A. that gets students into courses floats. The department views this as a way to serve and advise their students. Students can complete all the degree requirements without declaring the major, and some students do not declare the major until after graduation.

Progress on this issue has not been made; where is the actual problem? Last year there were a series of recommendations made for program changes. It is a combination of things; this is one of the most impacted majors. The department feels that if they don't serve these majors, these students leave NIU and go to other institutions. This may or may not be true. The department is trying to be student oriented but it isn't being consistent, and this puts us in jeopardy. There were previously recommendations made about possible ways the department could serve these students including exploring a gateway course. Another suggestion was once students have achieved a certain number of hours, they could be admitted at that time. Students would know what the routes were to be admitted into the major. The recommendations have not been followed-up on. The department feels that it is the major of last resort, and if they don't do this, the students would not have somewhere else to go.

This is a program culture problem that the Academic Planning Council can't change, and this is a problem for the dean. The dean is starting to develop an understanding of this issue. Can the council recommend that the department look at the recommendations and do something post haste? There are other ways of dealing with retention issues. One department should not feel that they have to deal with

the university retention problem; this is a bigger university issue. This is a limited admissions program, and the program is playing it both ways. If there are students who are not majors and they walk across the stage at graduation, this is very problematic. The report does not address information on the timely declaration of the major (the exit declare process). A motion was made to have the department look at the recommendations that the council suggested last year or come up with other solutions to address the timely declaration of the major (the exit declare process). Another follow-up report should be submitted in spring 2008. The motion passed unanimously.

The M.S.Ed., Ed.S., and Ed.D. in Educational Administration were asked for follow-up reports that included information on the systematic implementation of their assessment plans, including portfolio reviews, employer feedback, the creation of an advisory committee, and learning outcomes; and the reports should provide information from alumni surveys and comparisons to other programs. These reports were also due to the University Assessment Panel in preparation for the next cycle of program review. The UAP has provided extensive feedback on these plans which are much improved.

For the M.S. in Foundations of Education there were no issues with the assessment plan, but there was information that was omitted from the review. Some of it did relate to assessment, including employer and student feedback. The program seems to have answered the questions asked at a minimal level. As far as the alumni data goes, there is little information available.

The M.S.Ed. in School Business Management program was asked to submit a follow-up report on the information omitted from the program review about their assessment findings. The program did move forward and created some rubrics to use. There is not a lot of information on findings, but the plan includes information about making improvements in the rubrics that the program created.

The agenda committee will meet in January to set up the spring agenda. Any suggestions for items on the agenda could be sent to Dan Reynolds, Aimee Prawitz, Laurel Jeris, Carolyn Craddock, or Virginia Cassidy. Your suggestions will be included in the spring agenda.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn A. Craddock

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