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## Academic Planning Council Minutes of April 7, 2008

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ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL  
Minutes of April 7, 2008  
3 p.m., Holmes Student Center – Room 505

- Present: Alden, Anderson, Bond (for Bose), Cassidy, Fox, Gorman, Gough, House, Marsh, Molnar, Prawitz, Singh
- Guests: Donna Askins, Research Associate, Office of the Provost; Gary Burns, Assistant Chair, Department of Communication; Carolinda Douglass, Director, Assessment Services; Shevawn Eaton, Director, ACCESS; Brent Gage, Assistant Vice Provost for Enrollment Services, Office of the Provost; Andrew Krmenech, Chair, Department of Geography; Chris McCord, Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Steve Ralston, Chair, Department of Communication; and Bob Self, Acting Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

The meeting was called to order at 3:10 p.m. It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of March 17, 2008, and the motion passed unanimously.

Christopher McCord, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Steve Ralston, Chair of the Department of Communication; Gary Burns, Assistant Chair of the Department of Communication; and Bob Self, Acting Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences were introduced.

The follow-up reports being discussed today were requested from past program reviews, and the reports should address the concerns raised by the APC. There are several follow-up reports that were requested.

The B.A./B.S. in Communication Studies report was reviewed last fall, and the department was asked to provide another follow-up report this spring. The report contains information on the exit declare issues. This is a limited admissions program, and the exit declaration is awarded to students who are not admitted as majors, but complete the degree in communication studies. The main issue is that the admitting practices are not in sync with the catalog, and there are concerns about some students progressing and others not progressing. Also, students who do not know about the exit declare option are disadvantaged. The program has come up with two possibilities for admitting students into this program. The decisions this program makes will have a university-wide impact, and these decisions need to be made in careful collaboration. Another aspect for this program is the heavy general education requirement.

One scenario is to change the limited admission criteria by basing declaring the major on satisfactory grades in key courses early in the student's program, and this is the scenario that the faculty prefer. This would allow students to know if they have a chance early in their academic careers to be successful in this program. Another scenario is to have a small number of courses that are limited to declared majors. The data needs to be looked at to estimate what the right size of the program should be.

One reason the exit declare process was put into place was to keep the courses full. The program needs to look at the set of requirements and the likely impact on course capacity, graduation rates, etc. The enrollment implications need to be looked at before a decision can be made. The program wants to work with the Office of the Provost to look at these decisions and what the impact would be, and the practice and catalog need to be in agreement. Do we change practice to match the catalog, change the catalog to match the practice, or some combination of this? This is where the department is at at the moment. This, of course, ties into university discussions about success. There has also been some discussion about looking at alternative spots for these students, and probably creating some alternative landing spots as well. The modeling should take place this summer, and the data should be presented to the program in the fall for policy discussions. Hopefully, within the next academic year the program can vote on policy changes. It will be important for the program to keep the Academic Planning Council informed of the progress on this task.

The department has been working on the advising process and has a new undergraduate director who revised all of the information that is distributed to students. There has also been progress made on sending consistent messages to the advisors, and substitutions have been limited.

Students are currently admitted to the program when they obtain the qualifying GPA. Many of the courses are not exclusively for communication majors. The program was encouraged to address this concern as quickly as possible because this is good for the students. There will be curriculum implications know matter what is decided.

The pre-communication major has a huge number of students. They are students who don't meet the GPA requirement, and sometimes this fluctuates. These students are models of persistence. Their has to be another place for these students to go that appeals to them.

A question was asked about what is limited admissions in this program since students can complete all the requirements without declaring the major. These are students who are filling in the cracks in the discipline. These students are last in line to get into courses. There are no courses that students can't get into unless they are majors. There are many tracks in this department. The policy in place was not what the department faculty set down and decided upon. The Department of Communication has been backed into a corner because it grew so rapidly so the faculty decided to increase the standards.

There are some students who are in good academic standing and they can't get a major. This maybe systematically a bigger problem. There are a lot of students who leave the university in good academic standing, so this is a big university problem. It is important that students are informed early if they really don't belong here. The gate keeping mechanism should be placed early in the process. Part of the modeling is asking the questions and how this affects all groups. Another key piece is the advising.

The next item of business is the Ph.D. in Geography proposal. The department has been working on developing a Ph.D. in Geography for the past 18 months by thinking about structuring the program with specific purposes to meet the needs in the state. One of the things adopted by the university was that all new doctoral programs would have an application piece in them, and this is outlined very nicely in the document (Appendix 1). The doctoral program would focus on the high-tech, high-demand areas in terms of the market, and this makes it a very marketable and desirable

doctoral program. The program will not have a hard time finding students. The learning objectives in the assessment section have been very carefully laid out. The college is looking at the resources in terms of staffing if the department offers a Ph.D., and the undergraduate programs have been looked at as well. One thing that may need to be addressed is that the state may ask if the university is going to do this, then what are you not going to do. We should be prepared for this question. The university can say that it does have some new resources. The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) will have a set of external reviewers look at the proposal and the strengths of the program. Both the undergraduate and master's programs enrollments have grown, and developing a doctoral program is the next logical step.

Andrew Krmenc, Chair of the Department of Geography was introduced. The department is currently supporting a record number of graduate students. The applications for next year have almost doubled from the previous year, and the Graduate Enrollment Committee has evaluated many of these as very high-quality students. Out of the 13 applications that we currently have, the program will probably only be able to admit 4 students. Northwestern for a variety of reasons basically eliminated its program in the early 80s, and for all practical purposes the University of Illinois is the only other institution in the state that produces these types of graduates. For a state the size of Illinois there should be two or three programs in the state.

There was a period of strong growth in the undergraduate program, but enrollment is now starting to level out. Geography in general is a small discipline. The program at NIU is one of the largest in terms of undergraduate enrollment, and for a science-oriented program, NIU's program is by far the largest in the state.

A motion was made to endorse the Ph.D. in Geography proposal, and the motion pass unanimously.

The APC members were updated on the Strategic Planning initiative.

In the past couple of years a survey has been sent to all elected APC members asking the members to review the council's duties and the extent to which these duties were addressed each year. Several years ago the information reported on this survey indicated that there were two responsibilities that the APC was not performing, so the duties of the committee were revised to reflect what the committee's recommendations were. The last couple of years this survey has been distributed, the response rates have been very low. The recommendation is to discontinue this survey at this time. If there are any concerns or suggestions for changes, please let the Office of the Provost know.

Every spring the council is asked to make recommendations on the guidelines for the program and center reviews. There are typically some suggestions for changes, and the Office of the Provost is certainly open to any suggestions you have. The plan is to add a question on strategic planning to the guidelines. Programs will be asked to look at the university's strategic planning imperatives and how they fit into the plans in the college and department. This information will be inserted into the program review guidelines, but the APC will not see this information until 2009-2010. The format has already been distributed to the 2008-2009 programs undergoing review.

The budget priorities that were submitted to the IBHE this year are very similar to what was submitted in previous years. The priorities include health care professions education, nursing and clinical laboratory sciences education, high needs areas in education, and STEM areas. NIU hasn't

received any money for these initiatives lately, and this has been pointed out to the IBHE. This year the university does not expect to see any increase in funding.

Historically in the spring the APC reviews the previous year's Performance Report that is submitted to the IBHE in September with an eye toward information that can be included in the report. This year the IBHE is again not requiring universities to submit performance reports because they are involved in a strategic planning process, and the *Illinois Commitment* has been eliminated. The IBHE still wants information on the licensure pass rates for law and nursing majors and the number of undergraduates meeting initial teacher certification requirements.

Shevawn Eaton, Director of ACCESS and Brent Gage, Assistant Vice Provost for Enrollment Services were introduced. They provided a presentation on enrollment patterns to the APC members.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn A. Craddock

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