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Graduate Council Minutes 2014-02-03

Northern Illinois University

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Bond called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m. and turned the floor over to President Baker.

President Baker thanked the Graduate Council for inviting him to the meeting. He asked members to state three goals the group would like to accomplish this year. Levin responded that Graduate Council would like to see a living wage for graduate assistants. Schraufnagel added that there needed to be more resources, in general, for graduate students, especially international students. Morris stated that the Graduate Council would also like to see more focus on research and its connections to student career success. President Baker acknowledged the goals of the Graduate Council.

President Baker reviewed the current state budget situation. He informed members that there has been a 15% reduction in the budget over the past ten years, which has greatly affected higher education. He indicated that he anticipates another 5% reduction in the state budget. In addition, NIU has seen a 15% reduction in students over the past ten years. He stated that NIU lost one-third of its freshmen last year with only 66% returning as sophomores. President Baker noted that operating expenses for faculty and staff at NIU have remained constant over the past ten years. He stated that faculty costs have decreased by about 3% due, in large part, to faculty retiring because of the uncertainty of the retirement system. Supportive professional staff costs have increased slightly while civil service costs have remained about the same.

President Baker informed members that he has charged Interim Chief Financial Officer, Nancy Suttenfield, and Interim Executive Vice President and Provost, Lisa Freeman, with the task of establishing a new budget model for NIU. The model will be based on four principles: transparency, clarity, alignment, and sustainability. He stated that centrally managed budgets will be moved to colleges and units. He also indicated that the current fee process would be reviewed. L’Allier commented that fees are a major complaint of graduate students. Holm noted that 52% of her tuition bill this semester was
for general fees and that her half-time graduate assistantship stipend did not cover the cost of fees for the semester.

There was discussion about employee retention. President Baker informed members that NIU has an 8-12% turnover rate for employees. L’Allier suggested that exit interviews should be required and that she was concerned about NIU losing good faculty. Arado commented that she feared many departments were rushing searches so as not to lose positions, which may mean hiring less-suited faculty. President Baker suggested that decentralized budgets in colleges should help alleviate that problem for departments. Chown commented that it was hard to recruit good faculty when they learn there have been no raises in years. Morris stated that it was also difficult to recruit good faculty for a research intensive university with a 3/3 teaching load, which affects research productivity. President Baker suggested that departments and colleges need to have conversations about making internal adjustments that would allow for lighter teaching loads.

Bond inquired about the faculty role in student retention at the undergraduate level. President Baker suggested that faculty play a huge role in advising and stated that pedagogy and engagement were extremely important for undergraduate retention. Bond stated that retention is not really an issue at the graduate level because of short, two-year programs. He reported a 93% retention rate for this academic year. The two-year retention rate is 89%; that percentage includes people who graduated. Bond indicated that these are typical rates at NIU at the graduate level.

President Baker indicated that the budget model was the first step in this process and then there would be meetings and discussions about all of these issues to determine the next steps. He thanked members for sharing all of this information with him and encouraged members to participate in future meetings and conversations about these important topics.

Approval of Minutes

Hathaway moved approval of the December 2, 2013, minutes; Walker seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

New Business

**Assistantship Stipend Limits for AY 2014-15**: Bond reviewed a draft memo reflecting a 1% increase in graduate assistantship stipends for AY 15. General consensus among Graduate Council members was that 1% was better than nothing at all. Wilkins moved approval of the memorandum reflecting a 1% increase in graduate assistantship stipends for AY 15. Chown seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Announcement

**APPM Changes**: Bond informed members that he has been working with Human Resource Services on some APPM changes regarding graduate assistantships. He indicated that he would like to remove the maximum stipend limit. Bond stated that the Standards Committee will likely meet this month to discuss the changes. There was a
brief discussion about tuition and fees and the possibility of lumping fees into tuition for graduate students.

**Next Meeting:** Bond informed members that the next Graduate Council meeting on March 3 will be held in Altgeld 203 due to a special meeting of the Board of Trustees.

**Graduate Student Research Association:** Bond informed members that the 6th annual GSRA Conference will be held on April 19 in the Holmes Student Center. Students can register on the GSRA website at: [http://www.niu.edu/gsra/conference/gsrc.shtml](http://www.niu.edu/gsra/conference/gsrc.shtml). Bond asked members to encourage students to participate.

Meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m.