

Minutes of the
NIU Board of Trustees
**ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, STUDENT AFFAIRS
AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**
November 11, 2010

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chair John Butler at 8:34 a.m. in the Board of Trustees Room, 315 Altgeld Hall. Recording Secretary Sharon Banks-Wilkins conducted a roll call of Trustees. Members present were Trustees Robert Boey, Barbara Giorgi Vella, Student Trustee Robert Sorsby, Committee Chair John Butler and BOT Chair Marc Strauss. Trustee Cherilyn Murer entered the meeting in progress. Not present was Trustee Myron Siegel. Also present were Committee Liaison Ray Alden and Board Parliamentarian Davidson. With a quorum present, the meeting proceeded.

VERIFICATION OF APPROPRIATE NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING

Confirmation of Open Meetings Act public notice compliance was provided by Board Parliamentarian Ken Davidson.

MEETING AGENDA APPROVAL

Trustee Murer made a motion to approve the meeting agenda. Trustee Sorsby seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Trustee Vella and seconded by Trustee Boey to approve the minutes of the August 26, 2010 committee meeting. The motion was approved.

CHAIR'S COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

On today's agenda, under University Reports, Chair Butler said, we have three information items: Agenda Item 7.a. concerning the recent Higher Learning Commission Off-Campus Site Visit; Agenda Item 7.b. the Oversight of Academic Programs; and Agenda Item 7.c. initiatives focusing on Student Success.

The Chair recognized the representatives from the University Advisory Committee, Dr. Kerry Freedman and Dr. Ferald Bryan. Dr. Freedman, who coordinates the Art Education program in the School of Art, read the following statement:

As you know, Toni Keller was a student in the School of Art. Her tragic death caused grief and anger among the school's students and faculty. However, I'm glad to say that we are working through the shock and the sorrow. We have installed a wall honoring Toni on which our students have drawn and painted images in her memory. And our sculpture department is creating a bronze cast plaque with a sunflower, Toni's favorite flower. The students are responding to the situation as a safety reminder and an opportunity to come together. Our community, the students and faculty has drawn strength from each other and gained a greater awareness over the value of every individual. We would like to thank the President and the rest of the higher administration and the university for their support. Our loss has made us stronger.

In regard to the student success presentation on the agenda, Dr. Freedman asked the question, "Will faculty be asked to reconsider academic standards in order to improve retention?"

On behalf of this committee, Chair Butler said, our condolences to the School of Art as well as to the rest of the academic community. Your statement is appreciated. He assured her that her question regarding academic standards would be asked after the presentation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Chair asked Board Parliamentarian Kenneth Davidson if any members of the public had registered a written request to address the Board in accordance with state law and Board of Trustees *Bylaws*. Mr. Davidson noted that no timely requests had been received.

UNIVERSITY REPORT

Agenda Item 7.a. – The Higher Learning Commission Off-Campus Site Visit

Dr. Alden stated that the recent visit of the Higher Learning Commission was the first round of focused visits looking at off-campus centers due to a new focus by our regional accreditation body on those kinds of enterprises that are not located on the main campus. He asked Vice Provost Virginia Cassidy to report on the visit.

As the Provost indicated, Dr. Cassidy said, on October 11 and 12, we had a site visitor from the Higher Learning Commission who made visits to our regional centers at Hoffman Estates, Rockford and Naperville. During that visit, the evaluator engaged in conversations with individuals who are responsible for providing services to students and facilitating the operations of those centers. I believe that the visit went very well. The centers speak for themselves in terms of the facilities and the state-of-the-art instructional capacity they provide. Comments from students were uniformly positive. We had a meeting with the Provost and Vice President Kaplan and individuals who work at the facilities, who work with students in terms of scheduling programs or who provide advisement or other services, such as library services, and all of them spoke eloquently to the kind of work they do and reaffirmed the information that we had provided in the report to the site visitor. We will not hear officially from the Higher Learning Commission until the spring, but I am very confident that our report will be positive.

In answer to a query from a Trustee, Dr. Cassidy explained that the Higher Learning Commission was looking to insure that, as an institution, we provided appropriate oversight for programs that were not delivered on our campus, that they were being delivered in properly appointed classrooms, and that students were well served in terms of their needs and the educational resources that were available to them. So we provided a ten-page report, as requested by the commission, outlining the kinds of services that were available. Four students talked about how students have access to the university library resources, to computer support, to the Blackboard course server platform, to advisors who are routinely out working with students individually, meeting them in classes to provide general information, or contacting them by e-mail or telephone or whatever. It was making sure that the quality of the programs delivered off campus is the same as the quality of our programs on campus.

Chair Butler mentioned that in the conversations with him earlier, Dr. Cassidy had indicated that it was important there be evidence of strong integration of the departmental activities and asked her to expound on that.

From the questions that were asked, Dr. Cassidy said, it is very clear that the Commission has concerns about some institutions that may have a separate set of programs and/or faculty that are delivered sort of “out there” as opposed to on their campus. So they are looking for parity in terms of how students are served. For us, that is not an issue because the programs we deliver out there are the same as the programs that we deliver here. It is the same faculty, the same oversight, the same curriculum, the same measures of student success, the same types of services for students off campus and on campus.

I want to give credit to our Vice President for Outreach, Anne Kaplan, as well as our academic folks, Dr. Peters remarked. Several years ago when I first arrived here, Anne and I sat down and we talked about the potential of our great service area. We had made significant investments in educational sites in the Greater Chicagoland area, and Anne was charged with leadership of integrating those sites, to bring together a coherent program so that our courses are the same at all sites. She has done a remarkable

job of blending that administration. So when accreditors come, that is what they look for. It is not separate entities doing their own thing; it is fully integrated. The number of people we serve is an ever-increasing number of people, and many are adult learners. We have invested wisely in those education sites. So I want to thank Anne Kaplan because she has worked well with the academic units. This does not work if the academic units do not feel that they have a vested interest and are a part of it.

Agenda Item 7.b. – Oversight of Academic Programs

The annual report on the Oversight of Academic Programs specifically involves our review process, the Provost said. We have a very rigorous and comprehensive review process for every one of our degree programs that takes almost two years. Every Board member receives the summary reports on the programs for each year. These reports involve dozens of people looking at programs much like an accreditation team would on a specialized accreditation visit. We have one of the more rigorous and more defensible programs for program review. We keep track of what degree programs are doing and make sure that the quality is maintained. Provost Alden asked Vice Provost Virginia Cassidy to talk about what is involved in the process and which programs are coming up as well as which ones have been reviewed in the past year.

As you know, Dr. Cassidy said, we provide a summary of our program reviews to the Board every year and talk about other processes we have in place. The program review process is on an eight-year cycle. The report dated August 2010 is for 14 programs we reviewed in Academic Year 2009-2010, and this report also went to the Illinois Board of Higher Education. In addition to the program review, we also have annual touch points with programs through our assessment process. All of our programs have a plan that outlines how they will determine that students have met the learning outcomes for that specific program. Then we ask them to take a snapshot of what activities occurred in a year and report it to us so we are assured that the plan is implemented systematically and we know how faculty are using the information to make judgments about the curriculum. In areas where student performance is not at the level faculty want, they have data to act on so that they can make informed decisions about how curricula should be revised, whether it is adding more content in a particular course, reorganizing the way in which content is delivered, or various other approaches to making sure that students' performance is at the program level.

We have other processes that also occur periodically. Some of them occur at the program level. For example, many of our programs have external advisory committees used to help inform them about the performance of students in hands-on experiences, such as internships. Or, when our students become their employees, they tell us about the skill set they bring to the workplace, which gives us a very important source of information for our programs.

In addition, we conduct several different types of reviews for our doctoral departments. We have a longstanding history of selecting a sample of doctoral dissertation reports, which is the culminating experience for students in doctoral programs. Through the Graduate School, we send a sample of those dissertation reports out to external reviewers in the discipline and ask them for an independent critique of those dissertations. They report back to us and then the program has the information to incorporate into the program review. Three years ago, we started a process in which we conduct external reviews of doctoral departments. We invite two experts from the discipline to campus for two days to do a 360 degree evaluation. They have an opportunity to review documents such as program reviews and to interact with faculty, staff and administrators across the campus. We ask them then to provide a written report for us confirming what we have found in our program reviews or providing additional information that will be helpful to us in making decisions and seeing our programs through the eyes of experts who are not directly associated with the program.

We also have approximately 27 programs that have accreditation by specialized accrediting agencies. As part of the accreditation process, those programs also engage in a self-study process where they produce a report based on the criteria for accreditation. Site visitors from the accrediting agency come for a several day visit and, again, do a 360 degree evaluation and engage in conversations with multiple constituencies on campus. They then prepare a report to the accrediting agency, which will be used as part of the basis for making a decision about whether accreditation should continue or not. Currently, all of our eligible programs are fully accredited by their specialized accrediting agency.

Some programs also have licensure they can use as a benchmark. For many of those disciplines, we can get either national or state data to help us understand how well our students are performing on those licensure exams in comparison to those benchmark groups. The table we provided, beginning on page 14, gives you a visual picture of four of those external processes: accreditation, having an advisory committee, licensure and certification examinations, and external reviews of dissertations and departments. You can see that many of our programs have multiple types of external input and evaluation, in addition to the program review we do on the eight-year cycle and the assessment touchpoints and information that we receive from them annually.

We tried to provide a calendar to show what the program review process encompasses. It is very hard to get a full picture of that from the simple one-page summary of each program that you get in the program review report, so we tried to outline the steps that lead to the development of a program review document – the review process itself and then the feedback that we provide to the programs on the information we have about the program and then report to both the Board of Trustees and to the Illinois Board of Higher Education. Years 1, 2, 3 and 4 occur simultaneously every year in my office. We are doing all of these things every year for a different set of programs, so it really is an ongoing process. Even though an individual program only appears in this report once a year, we have a systematic way of making sure that all of our programs are reviewed critically so that we can monitor what is happening with them and work with the departments and the college offices to continue to insure that our programs are of the highest quality.

Obviously, a lot of work goes into program assessment, Trustee Strauss said, yet we continue to be barraged by people who appear to be critical of whatever the outcome is of our programs. Over the past year I personally received literature from one group who seems to have a different vision of what ought to be included in the core curriculum; and just recently we have had what seems like a blanket indictment of the results of every College of Education. He asked if there is some sort of consensus as to what the outcomes to be measured should be. In reply, Dr. Cassidy stated that within a certain sector, she would say yes. For example, she explained, in our Teacher Certification programs, we have national standards that are set by an accrediting agency, and all of our programs are well aware of what those standards are. They work toward meeting those standards to ensure that students have the best experiences that they can have. When we have a site visit from the accrediting agency, they give us feedback on the extent to which we have met their criteria. If there is another group that has a different opinion, that is not recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an accrediting agency, that is part of the reality of the situation, but it provides us with some perspective on perhaps how much credibility we would lend to their opinion.

Anybody can set up a not-for-profit organization and push a political perspective from the guise of saying we are evaluating programs, giving report cards and so forth, Provost Alden said, and it is unfortunate that most of those go in with an agenda and are not looking at outcomes. We just went through our teacher certification site visit and came away with the site team saying we passed all standards, which are all outcome based. As Vice Provost Cassidy has indicated, the ones we pay attention to are the ones that are recognized by the Department of Education and are outcome based.

We just went through two major accreditations, President Peters commented, and these are systematic, long-term, rigorous, formal assessments where the outcomes of our programs change over time to protect, in some instances, public health and safety and making sure that the criteria are there. The system of accreditation in this country is what has made American higher education, public and private, the best in the world. The standards are rigorous. This year, we went through ABA law accreditation, and the standards are rigorous. They not only include how much space is allotted faculty and how much funding goes into the Law Library, but also what the quality of the program is, what kind of lawyers we are graduating. We just went through the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) engineering yesterday. I have been on 190 formal accreditations plus hundreds of internal programs, and I have never seen better ones than are at this university. It is systematic, it is rigorous, it is universally respected, and it never gets any media attention. But when some group with an ideological or a political view does a study, the media picks right up on it. I blame the media for this in large part because they do not take the time to understand the rigors of the processes we have in place.

Trustee Boey asked if there was a simple answer to what the threshold was for deciding that a program should be discontinued because of enrollment or otherwise. Those are complex questions, Dr. Cassidy replied, and so, necessarily, the responses have to be complex. It has to be contextual. If it is enrollment, we need to look at why enrollments have declined. We need to look at our program in the context of state and national trends. We need to look at the curriculum, at the faculty, at how the program is supported in terms of its resources, etc. It has to be specific to a given program. The baccalaureate degree in Russian was deleted last year because of enrollment issues.

It is not just enrollment, Provost Alden said. Obviously we have a number of mission areas in research and service, and some of our most active research departments are not necessarily the ones that have the largest enrollment. It is a shared governance process, much like starting a new program. The decision to eliminate a program goes through multiple layers of review at the department, college and university levels and comes to this body for a final decision.

It is human to get frustrated by multiple bodies examining processes, Trustee Murer commented. But that is how we become stronger, individually and collectively, as a university. I want to make sure that we do not lose sight of that. These external bodies, internal reviews and self-examination in terms of quality, is really what will continue to make us strong, regardless of the lack of fairness in the world, and we have seen that, especially with the media in all different sectors. Being true to oneself and continuing to internally set the bar higher and higher, is the mark of a strong university.

Following up on Trustee Boey's comments, Trustee Murer continued, when I was chair of Academic Affairs, the issue of deletion as well as addition was something I had great concern with, and I hope we will continue that, not just by whether or not we have sufficient enrollment, but as we move into a new decade and into a different horizon, universities have to stay on a cutting edge and be responsive to society. That means we need to look at our programs and classes. Because we have fiduciary responsibility, we do not have an infinite amount of money and we have to continue to reevaluate our resources. Provost Alden has really led that charge to continue to self-examine, to continue to set the bar, and to also look at the validity and the veracity of programs, looking at them over a multiyear perspective.

Trustee Vella inquired who would report that the pass rate for teachers is not good or that the number of teachers passing and getting their licenses is not what it should be for our university. Generally, Dr. Cassidy said, faculty know that before we do. If that occurs, it is something they find very distressing because it is a reflection of their work. Many times, as that information comes forward, the faculty already have discussed it, looked at the data they have and identified ways in which they think they can improve performance. It becomes a monitoring process. If students move into teacher certification, we get those reports every year so we can look at trend data. We talk to students and to classroom teachers. It is something we cannot wait to do in a program review because that is too long. Due to new standards that came out for the baccalaureate program in nursing, the School of Nursing recently underwent a major overhaul of their curriculum and had to modify and/or create 30 courses so that students would be eligible to sit for the licensure exam, etc. So, curriculum review is part of the ongoing work of faculty.

We have a very unique model for teacher certification in this university, the Provost stated. It is not just the ownership of one college, we have five colleges involved in teacher certification, and we have committees looking at both initial certification and recertification or endorsements at the advanced high quality level. It takes a while when we have NCATE, which is the national group that was here just two weeks ago, to try and explain how that kind of model – where we have five deans with ownership of teacher certification rather than one depending on the goodwill of the others – works well for our kind of shared governance culture on this campus. As was indicated earlier, the site team from that group said we met all standards. So, if you look at outcomes, rather than some group sitting in Washington looking at syllabi and looking for particular tick marks that their agenda says should be on every syllabus, we look at outcomes: We look at how many of our graduates pass their teacher certification, and we do well in that area.

In reply to a query from Chair Butler regarding the relationship between the review of a particular program versus the review of the performance of a department, Dr. Alden replied that when we do a review, it is actually a review of all of the degrees, certificates and other programs that a department offers. One

component of the review report looks at the department specifically, and then we look at the various degrees individually in the context of what was reviewed for the department. It is a very holistic sort of evaluation, much like the specialized accreditors when they come on site visits. They do not just look at one degree if they are responsible for multiple degrees. They look at the university support at all levels, the department and the context within the college.

Agenda Item 7.c. – Student Success

In answer to the question Dr. Freedman asked earlier, Provost Alden said, the simple answer is no, we will not be asking individual faculty to reconsider their academic standards. The more complete answer is much more complex and would probably take an hour to answer, but much, if not all of what you will hear today, is prevention – preventing students from getting into trouble whether it is academic or financial or social pressures, and for helping those students who are leaving the university in good academic standing to stay here and find an academic path that satisfies their unique needs. Almost all of the best teachers I have ever known are among the most rigorous, but they also know that student success and student learning is not a one-way street. It is not just the students' responsibility, it is a departmental responsibility to make sure that students achieve the learning objectives that have been set by the collective knowledge and will of the faculty. I see an unfortunate bifurcation in higher education. You have real push right now for attainment – get people credentialed and do it as quickly and as cheaply as possible. Yet the employers, both in the public and private sectors, want people who have much higher level competencies, what we are talking about in our baccalaureate goals – people who are life-long learners, who are critical thinkers, who communicate and who work in teams and have an international perspective. There is a big push nationwide of pay for productivity, and we are going to see those pressures over time of not just how many students we graduate but how well they do in individual majors, how well they do in individual courses perhaps. We have to be wise in making sure everybody understands that this is a pressure that comes from beyond this Board or even this state in many cases. The Provost then asked Vice Provost Gip Seaver to give an overview of all the various programs that are available.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to come and talk about student success, Dr. Seaver said. Provost Alden has set the stage pretty well in the sense that this is something that has been very important to us all along at Northern. Part of that is because of our real focus on our students and how important they are to us. We saw in the strategic plan that this is a very engaged institution that really appreciates the fact that we have the opportunity to work very closely with our students, not only in the classroom, but outside the classroom as well.

We could spend a lot of time talking about this very complex issue which, unfortunately, is approached in a very simplistic way by many institutions. I am not going to cover everything we do because there is so much that we do, it would take forever to get through it, but I want to talk about how we have shifted our focus primarily as a result of the work that came out of the strategic plan and how we want to approach student success. I borrowed a quote from the Educational Advisory Board, “We provide help to those who ask, not those who need it.” We have a great number of programs at Northern Illinois University that focus on student success. The problem is that you can have a lot of programming, but if you cannot get the students who need the help to utilize them, it is really a waste of capacity. So our focus has switched to how we can make better use of what we have. The Educational Advisory Board, of which we are a member, is made up of a large number of institutions. It starts with the Provost's group. This is an organization which does best practice research at universities all across the country. We have been working with the Educational Advisory Board information for almost two years and trying to incorporate as many of the best practices from other institutions as we can into what we do here at Northern. At the heart of what the Educational Advisory Board is trying to say is that progressive universities are raising their success rates through proactive intervention with at-risk students, not through investments in expensive new programs. We can build as many programs as we think we need; but, again, if we cannot get the students to those programs, then we have invested in programs for students who are probably going to be successful anyway. So we have to talk about those students who are leaving this institution in one of two ways – because of poor academics, or in good academic standing but have been unable to make the connection to the institution either by way of their major or with other aspects of it.

We are using a two-pronged approach to make better use of what we have. We are investing heavily in early warning mechanisms so we can proactively identify troubled students and then route them to the right sources. Then, we are trying to focus more on keeping students on their course to graduation. We want to reduce their time to degree and improve our completion rates. The longer a student stays, the greater the likelihood that something will happen to cause them to leave – they will lose their job, they will cut back on their hours, something will happen in their family that necessitates their leaving to go home and contribute to the family – and we cannot help them finish their degree; they will leave and likely never come back. One of the things that came out of the strategic plan was the need to establish accountability. Everyone of us here at Northern Illinois University, including our Board of Trustees members, are responsible for making this a successful operation for the student. It starts with the Board of Trustees and moves down and throughout this university to include every single person at this university in the responsibility for keeping students here.

One of the things that became very apparent in the strategic planning is that we need to have a place where we can coordinate all of these activities. We established the Office of Student Academic Success. Their goal is simply to keep students here to graduate. Dana Gautcher is the director of the Office of Student Academic Success. One of the first things we did was implement a recommendation of the strategic plan out of one of the presidential task forces, and that was to start to establish a position that we will call Student Success Specialist. We have hired four and are in the process of searching for two more. Our goal is to have a Student Success Specialist in every college in addition to our Academic Advising Center. That is where our undecided students will start at the institution. We also would like to establish a new position that Anne Kaplan's office and I have been working on who can be a Student Success Specialist with those students who are completing baccalaureate degrees off campus. These are the Bachelor of Science in Applied Management, a new degree we have had for about a year. The role of these people is simply to make contacts with students to keep them here. They are not academic advisors. They are housed in the colleges and work with the college advising staff, the faculty and the college office to identify students who are at risk to leave, and they then develop programs to work with those particular students. I have to introduce my colleague, David Changnon, Acting Associate Vice Provost, who joined our office this year. David has been a key person in helping us develop information, but also to begin to implement this and working with Dana's office.

So, we need to be able to identify students who are at risk and then get them to the services we have. So, how do we identify an at-risk student? If students have these characteristics, our research and research at other universities has demonstrated that they are probably going to leave. So, we are trying to focus on students before they get here. Once we go through the admission process when the student says they are coming, we can dig into their file to try to determine if they are at risk even before they get here, which allows us to do some things, for instance, through orientation, possibly some bridging work, those kinds of things to help make that transition smoother when they come. We have a predicted success formula that is derived on information from our own students, historically, and we can take some factors about that student, the student's high school, and we can predict the success of that student. By success we mean that they will have at least a 2.0 GPA after the first year. We have used this formula over and over again for a number of years, and it is 73 percent accurate, which is absolutely incredible in this kind of research. We share that information with the academic advising offices. We can look at their conditions of admission. Are they sponsored or director review? How do they come through, which may indicate that in the past these students may have struggled. They have no obvious connection to campus. They are not an athlete, they are not a CHANCE student, they are not an Honors student, they do not seem to be connected to anything. We actually have a program called REACH which is run through orientation and First Year Experience where we reach out by calling those students to let them know, "We notice you are here." They are an undecided or undeclared major. We have a math placement test that puts you into the math course you should have based on your background. It is very good at predicting student success in that first year. But if they get a D or an E, that is a placement into developmental math, and we know, based on our research, that if they start out in that math, 50 percent of those students are gone by their fourth semester. So that is a group of students we need to identify and start to talk about what we can do to help them stay here and be successful. They enroll in one or more problematic courses. We look at the 100 and 200 level courses, how many freshmen are enrolled and how those freshmen do. If the students tend to not do well in those courses, we flag those courses for the advisors so that if I am coming in and I have a low predicted score on my predicted success factor, the advisor can talk about choices of classes. By simply doing that, the advisors raised the predicted

formula for success in our first year class by two percentage points; and from the fall 2009 class, the first year retention rate went up about almost two percentage points as well. This also takes into account transfer students. There is a lot of talk about first time, first year students and then we talk about first year retention rates. But we have a large number of transfer students who also leave in the first year. If they transfer without an associate's degree, we know they tend to leave at a greater rate than those who have an associate's degree. If they have accumulated fewer than 60 transfer hours or they have no major at the end of 60 hours, that puts them at risk. If they have accumulated 60 hours and do not have a major, they could be looking at another three to four years. And again, the longer they stay here, the greater the likelihood something will happen to make them leave.

There are also indicators during the first semester, which is a real critical time. They did not enroll in enough hours. Research in the California system as well as the Florida system demonstrated that students who accumulate fewer than 12 hours in that first semester are likely to leave. We do have an early alert system where we try to gather information from our faculty about students who are not performing well or are not going to class. Actually, attendance is probably the best predictor of student success rather than grades, so we reach out to our faculty early in the semester. This semester, faculty recommended to this office 900 students who were struggling. Our Student Success Specialists now are calling and reaching out to them. If they self-identify in MAP Works, a new program that we are using with all incoming freshmen, and about half of our freshmen are participating. They fill out a survey and that information gives us indicators about stress. They tell us if they are having financial issues, etc. and either the instructor or a success specialist can look and say this student is indicating they are having some problems financially, socially, whatever, then the advisor or housing and dining staff, all the people we have trained on this, can work together to try to intervene with these particular individuals. If a student has a registration hold because they have not paid their bills, they have not given us their transcripts, they have not done things for the health requirements, that is sometimes a proxy that the student is not going to come back. If they are not registered for the second semester. In the spring, we are piloting a program that will generate out of the system individuals who are one week late in registering. With that list, our student support specialists will follow up with the students on what kind of problem they might be having.

There are other factors. Many of these come from research and many of them are pretty obvious. We know that if you get a D or F in what we call a core competency class, English, communications or math. That is a red flag and someone should be paying attention to that. If you do not take college level math in your first year, research nationally has shown that is a red flag. Students tend to leave. There is also another one that says if they do not take math when they are a senior in high school, it puts them at very high risk for failing in the first year. They do not take enough Gen Ed courses. Another new program we have is that any student who requests a transcript to another institution through Registration and Records is flagged, and we notify their major advisor or their college so that they can follow up with the student to find out the reason, which will often be an easy fix. If they are taking a course at the community college, we make sure they take the right course so it can transfer back.

The other major part here is keep the students on their path, reduce the amount of time to degree and graduate them. One of the things we were able to do was to develop four-year degree maps for every single major we have here at Northern. This was interesting, because when we started talking with this to the departments and the colleges, we got a lot of pushback about those out-there students who want to advise themselves, etc. These are not advising tools but simply a way to show students basically what a four-year degree would look like. Dana Gautcher's group was able to accomplish that in a very short period of time. In working with the Educational Advisory Board, they are still somewhat in awe of the fact that we were able to do this over a summer period and have them up by fall. We are now mailing postcards to 18,000 students and others telling them where these four-year maps are so they can take a look at them. These can easily be found by the students on a web site in a single place. Also at orientation with the freshmen, we are all saying "Think four years, think four years." Again, this is something we only use with our community colleges, and we promoted this idea of thinking about the students looking at the four-year map to keep on track, and there may be cases when a student should probably transfer at their sophomore year rather than at the beginning of their junior year, because then they can get on path to that degree in four years regardless of where they start.

One of the key parts with the degree maps that we are doing this spring is developing milestones. This could be course progress, this could be a GPA, it could be a course in a class. We would like to do it with a red, yellow and green dashboard so that if I have 150 advisees, I can look at all of my advisees and know who has fallen off the path. I then can reach out and try to get to that person and talk to them about what is happening. It would be the same with the Student Success Specialists or any other person who is really key to that student's progress here at Northern. We hope to have an automated system in place by fall of 2011 that would allow us to identify these students. This would, again, help them with the four-year plan, alert the advisor and get to some kind of intervention to get them to Plan B faster. We do not need students in their junior year deciding they cannot make it in this major and trying to decide what the new major would be and now thinking about an additional three to four years when they could have been making this decision as a freshman, and that is where the Student Success Specialist will come in as well as the advising.

Many students who leave the university who are eligible to enroll, including seniors. Last year approximately 250 seniors who were in good academic standing left the institution. Our Student Success Specialists are looking at all the nonreturning students who are eligible, calling them and asking how we can get them back – what problems are you seeing, is it money, is it advising? We had 75 of our advisors, professional and faculty, come for an all day workshop to talk about how can we improve our advising system here at Northern. We hear good things about our advising system, and we hear positive things from our students. But we think that there are things that can be done to help the student to be more successful.

We do have a college bridge program that was funded out of the strategic plan, working with Aurora, Rockford, Elgin and DeKalb schools identifying rising juniors who have test scores and academic success that qualifies them to be admitted to Northern Illinois University. Then we are in the school working with those high school students in their junior year, they come to campus between junior and senior year, we work with them in their senior year, and then those students who are admitted to Northern come here in the summer and complete six hours before they enroll. This is focused primarily at underrepresented groups in those particular districts. We have our Upward Bound program and CHANCE has been using a summer math bridge program for the last two years. We have data that show this has been very helpful in getting our CHANCE students into a higher level math. We are looking at how we can expand that not only in CHANCE but also how we might be able to use this with other groups, such as the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) working group here on campus. A Transitions Committee, commissioned out of the Provost's Office, is working with three school districts and three community college districts on how we can better align the characteristics of those students at graduation with our expectations here at Northern, and then translate and communicate it to the other groups.

The Board toured the Office of Student Academic Success, not too long ago, and that was when I first started to learn about the work you were doing in that office, Chair Butler commented. I was really interested and impressed with it and wanted you to have an opportunity to present that to this committee.

This is exciting. We just talked about self-examination and the need to set the bar, Trustee Murer said, and that is exactly what you are doing, looking at all the whys and the hows. It screams of caring, which is what the university is about. It seems what one might find more akin to a small private university is being experienced in this larger state university. However, I did not understand the correlation with not taking a first year math course as a risk factor. She asked if there were not a lot of students whose direction and majors will not take them to math and science who still would be successful? Everybody has to complete a math course here, Dr. Seaver replied, that is part of the core competency. It does not have to happen in the first year, but we know, based on our data that students who come right out of high school, take their math placement test and take their math course the first semester are more successful than those who delay it. The conventional wisdom is that the longer you stay away from math, the harder it is to come back in and be able to complete it. Research statistics show that those students who do not take math in their senior year of high school do not do as well. If you get away from it and are not using it, it makes it more difficult. The math placement test we have is highly predictive of success. So one of the things we want to know in the fall semester is what students did not take the math. A red flag goes up and their advisor gets in touch with them to ask if they at least are going to take it the next semester. The idea is to try to be very intentional. This is a very consistent research that is not just a Northern phenomena, it is a national phenomena.

I share Trustee Murer's excitement, Trustee Boey said. I did not realize the degree to which we have been trying to prevent students dropping out. When I was going to school, nobody cared. Your program takes away most of the reasons why they drop out. We have a terrific program for the students who are already here, but is there a program that we can actually look at applicants' information and say they have a 50 percent or 100 percent chance of success? Dr. Seaver stated that we do have such a program derived here at NIU. Greg Barker in Testing Services developed this program over a number of years, actually working with Bob Wheeler, my predecessor, and others. This is a predictive formula that takes information about the student – math placement score, ACT score, high school percentile – and takes into account the performance of the high schools. All of that information tells us the probability that a student will obtain a 2.0 after the first year, and it is 73 percent accurate. An advisor can get a pretty good idea of advising that for a particular major, the student will need to take certain courses. However, rather than take multiple more difficult courses in the first semester, the advisor will suggest that the student spread them out so that they still have 15 hours and make sure the student gets started toward good success. We did the profiles before they registered for courses and again after, and the scores went up two percent. So, they were very successful in getting the students into courses that would help them be successful that first year.

We want all of our students to feel like we are interested in what they are doing, Dr. Seaver continued, but when you look at the human resource power we have, we have to prioritize. So we start with the ones who are at highest risk because there are other students who are going to go through with no problems. There are students who can figure this out. But the students who are not figuring it out are the ones that are going to leave, and they are the ones we have to hang onto.

This is wonderful, Trustee Vella commented, and I have always been supportive of this proactive intervention. This is above my expectations. The difference in my generation and this generation is that they have a lot more distractions, and they are having a harder time finding out what they really can do because of all those distractions. They may want to be in finance, but do not do well in math, or they may want to be a nurse, but are flunking biology. The advisors getting right in their faces and saying this is what you have to do to get through this, in a caring way, is what many of them need.

Students may not know they are headed in a bad direction and may not know that their performance is an indicator of their future success, Chair Butler said. Just learning that could open their eyes to the fact that they have to get rid of some of those distractions.

That is particularly true if they are first generation, Dr. Seaver said. There may not be anybody out there saying this is the way you have to think about education. So, they say I did not do well on my math course, but that is okay. Suddenly, if they are not looking at that four-year degree map, they do not see that they have just added another year to their time to degree.

I am excited that we have initiatives focusing on student retention and making sure that students stay here and graduate, Student Trustee Sorsby said. For the freshmen who are flagged as at risk, are the academic support specialists going to be monitoring their academic progress through the semester, or will it just be a midpoint check?

We ran that predictive formula and identified 328 students coming in, before they even registered for classes, who had a predictive success below 50 percent, Dr. Seaver explained. Those lists were sent to the Student Success Specialists at the beginning of the fall semester and they are following up with them. The Specialists will follow them until that red light goes away and turns to green.

Our community college partnerships are so important, Provost Alden said, and you have heard from Vice President Kaplan about our PASCAL project. I had an opportunity to present to the presidents of public community colleges last year our desire to work even closer with them. We had a retreat where all our deans and the community college academic officers came together to talk about how can we better serve students transferring into our institution since we have such a high percent coming in. Over 40 percent of our students come in from the transfer route, and one of the things we are working on is a dual enrollment perspective so that if a student is in, for example, a STEM area or the arts where it makes more sense for them to come over in a sophomore year rather than waiting until they have their associate's degree, we

can reverse articulate with those community colleges and they can be awarded the associate's degree when they accumulate the courses they need on our campus. That is good for the student, who now has a degree, and it is good for the community college because they have a success rate that is better than most of the community colleges in the country. We are looking for these kinds of innovative ways to make sure that students get along their four-year degree path in as expedient a way as possible and not disadvantage our community college partners.

Chair Butler asked Vice Provost Seaver, as a faculty member what he says to faculty members who listen to phrases like problematic course and challenging course and know that you are identifying those courses and advising students in some cases to avoid them in combination with other courses, and view that as a kind of soft way of suggesting that standards, in some cases, should be lowered in order to retain more students? The better term is challenging courses, Dr. Seaver replied. Problematic courses came out of the work that was done on that originally, but the term we now use is challenging courses. At every university you are going to identify challenging courses. I had one when I taught undergraduate students, and it was always of concern to me. So spent a lot of time trying to figure out why the course was a challenge to the students. What we are interested in doing is not about lowering standards. There is something that makes that course challenging, and there are multiple ways to address this. One of the challenging things we know about math is that students do not take it when they are supposed to or they take it out of sequence. For a student who is going to take Math 110 and Math 155, the best sequence to be successful is to take 110 one semester and 155 the following semester. However, where we see students having problems is those who take 110 their first semester and wait a year to take 155 and then they do not do well in 155. Sometimes faculty say the reason the student is not doing well is because they do not come to class. We can help you with that by calling them on the phone. And our faculty are embracing that. Maybe the course requires a different learning style that most freshmen do not have, and they have to build their critical thinking skills.

I want to say that I am thrilled with the work that the faculty and the Provost's Office have done, President Peters commented. These are really best practices. We need to see the results in the number of students who get through these courses, who are retained and who graduate in a timely manner. There is a real pragmatic reason why this is important besides the ethical. It is the right thing to do. We will see a shift in the next years in the way we are funded from the State. The indicators will not be how many students enroll in a course or in a university. We will be paid on the number that complete a course or complete a degree in a timely manner.

In answer to a question from Trustee Boey, Dr. Seaver stated that parts of this program have been in place for a while, but they were either not very well funded or the timing was off. The bulk of what we are doing here started 18 months ago with the establishing of the Office of Student Academic Success, Dr. Seaver said. Our Student Success Specialists are just completing their second month on the job, so we are, basically, in our first 18 months. We are gathering the IPEDS (Integrated Post-Secondary Educational Data System) data, which basically tracks new freshmen. We now have to find a way to track what is happening to our transfer students. One of the things we started tracking back in 2008 is what we call "leaver" data. So we are looking at which students leave, their ranking – freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and we look at it by department and by college. We saw that the number of students who left in poor academic standing went down from 2008 to 2009. After one year, the number that left was much smaller on a percentage basis. We think part of that is because of more intentional advising and some of the other programs we are offering.

This is one of the major initiatives that came out of strategic planning, Provost Alden said. As the Board knows, because of the hard economic times, we tried to implement our strategic plan in phases. The first year was a faculty based task force getting together, making the plans, identifying priorities. The second was starting a few things. This is really the year that it starts hitting full stride, so I look forward to the next few years seeing some major changes and specific advances in some of these areas.

OTHER MATTERS

Chair Butler thanked the representatives from the University Advisory Committee, Professors Freedman and Bryan, for attending. Thanks to Provost Alden for presenting the University report, he said, and to

Vice Provost Cassidy for her presentations. Thanks also goes to Vice Provost Seaver and Acting Associate Vice Provost Changnon for the hard work on their presentation.

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting of the Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Personnel Committee is scheduled for Thursday, March 3, 2011, on the main campus in DeKalb.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Butler asked for a motion to adjourn. Trustee Murer so moved, seconded by Trustee Boey. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:05 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon M. Banks-Wilkins
Recording Secretary