Northern Illinois University

**UNDERGRADUATE COORDINATING COUNCIL**

192nd Meeting
Thursday, November 1, 2012
Altgeld Hall 203

MINUTES

**APPROVED**


Absent: W. Baker/LAS, S. Conklin/HHS, W. Hung/EDU, C. VanderSchee/EDU

Guest: D. Smith, Catalog Editor/Curriculum Coordinator; Alan Rosenbaum, Executive Secretary of the University Council/Faculty Senate President; Michael Theodore, Student Association

I. Adoption of Agenda

A motion was made by A. Keddie, seconded by C.T. Lin, to adopt the agenda with the change of the presentations by Alan Rosenbaum and Michael Theodore, regarding plus/minus grading, to follow the approval of the minutes from the October 4, 2012 meeting. **The motion passed unanimously.**

II. Announcements

A. Approval of Minutes

On a motion by L. Matuszewski, seconded by C.T. Lin, the minutes of the October 4, 2012 meeting were approved with corrections on pages 4 and 5 replacing C.T. with Lin. **Motion passed unanimously.**

III. New Business

Birberick announced the two visitors who asked to speak to the UCC; Alan Rosenbaum, Executive Secretary for the University Council/President Faculty Senate and Mike Theodore, Chairman of the Student Association’s University Oversight committee. The reason for their visit is due to an action taken at the University Council meeting held October 10, 2012. The University Council voted to return to the UCC the plus/minus grading issue. Birberick distributed the pertinent information from the committee’s bylaws. She pointed out that UCC accepted the minutes from APASC and in those minutes was the plus/minus grading policy.
amendment. Being a substantive change in policy, Birberick had to send written notification to the University Council that the issue was coming forward. The University Council returned the matter to the UCC citing “insufficient student input” “work with the student association”.

Stafstrom asked who has the final decision in this matter. Birberick explained that the language the committee is working under is contained in 14.5.5 of the bylaws. When the University Council sends something back to UCC there are three options; agree with University Council and rescind prior decision; modify the policy and notify the University Council or reaffirm the decision. If the decision is reaffirmed by UCC, it is sent back to the University Council and indicate that UCC is not making any changes. The University Council has a procedure whereby they must attain two-thirds vote in order to take further action.

Birberick said that it is important to understand why the matter got sent back. The discussion is not about the merits, pros/cons of plus/minus grading. Birberick stated she has no stake in this discussion one way or another. She is here in her capacity as Vice Provost and chair of UCC to see that procedures are followed and everyone gets an equitable and fair opportunity to present their point of view. This discussion is about the procedures. She said it is not the time for UCC to reopen the discussion on whether or not a plus/minus system is desired. It is about whether UCC agrees with University Council that there was insufficient student involvement in the process or not.

Aase asked if the consequence of agreeing with University Council is that UC gets to set the policy however they want. Birberick stated that if UCC agrees with UC then the issue would go back to APASC. She stated that if UCC doesn’t agree with UC then it is returned to UC then UC must follow the procedures she indicated in 14.5.5. Keddie said that if she understood correctly, the only issue UCC is being asked about is whether there was sufficient student input. Birberick said that was the rationale given.

Rosenbaum stated Birberick covered the majority of the information he was going to discuss in his role as Executive Secretary of the University Council. He indicated that he wanted to give the committee a better idea of the discussion that led to this being sent back. He stated that the only reason they could come up with to send it back was that there was insufficient student input into the process. He said that he felt that was not an accurate statement. This matter was not sprung on the students all of a sudden. The students have been well aware this has been going on. They conducted a survey back in 2010. They have conducted another survey recently. Rosenbaum has not been able to obtain the results of this most recent survey.

The original process was very thorough and conducted by the Faculty Senate Academic Affairs committee. The grading systems of universities all over the United
States, especially in the Midwest, in MAC and Big 10 schools were examined. The students involved at that time brought up that Ball State had a bad experience with plus/minus grading. Rosenbaum said that the Registrar from Ball State was interviewed by the Academic Affairs committee and got a series of written responses to questions relating to plus/minus grading that contradicted what the students presented. Rosenbaum indicated that there was great consideration for the students which is why the system selected ended up not having a C-. That was in consideration for students seeking teacher certification.

Rosenbaum asserted that this was not a hasty process undertaken without student representation. He stated that there are six student members on UCC and asked how many were present? There was one student present. He pointed out that there are also student members on APASC – three. He stated there is lots of student involvement. He continued by saying if the students choose not to come to the meetings and choose not to participate that is not something that has to be taken into account.

Speaking in his capacity as President of the Faculty Senate, Rosenbaum stated that university grading system is the prerogative of the faculty. It is not a shared governance issue. Rosenbaum pointed to the Constitution and Bylaws – “University Constitution provides for university governance as a shared process with faculty predominance in all policy decisions relating to the university curriculum, student admissions and academic standards..” He stated “this is a faculty prerogative; it is not; one of those things we are required to get student cooperation”. The Faculty Senate voted very heavily in favor of this; polled the faculty to the extent possible. The faculty senators took the issue back to their departments for faculty consideration. He stated that one of the responses from this committee, in sending it back, first of all – it is not true that student input was not considered but if it weren’t – student input is not essential to this decision as the issue falls under the faculty’s prerogative.

Aase brought up the matter of the students that were on the committees during the time that plus/minus grading came up again. He stated that the student members of CUC were strong representatives of the students. Other committee members agreed. Birberick indicated that this discussion should take place when the visitors have left the meeting. Birberick asked for any questions for Rosenbaum and having none, turned the floor over to Mike Theodore.

Theodore apologized to Rosenbaum not receiving the current survey results he had requested. Stafstrom asked about the new survey. That survey consisted of the one question – should NIU adopt a plus/minus grading system. Theodore indicated the survey done this year was a very informal survey that was done prior to the University Council’s last meeting. Questioned by committee members, Theodore...
indicated that the survey was done in person with as many students as could be reached.

He indicated the referendum that was done almost two years ago was more successful, advertised and well known. The turnout wasn’t that large but the results of that one was yes – 217, no - 707 and unsure - 140. That asked a single question – should NIU implement a plus/minus system. Theodore pointed out that this was before the A+ and C- had been removed.

Theodore stated that the survey held two years ago, that took into account Student Association input was based on the original idea of the plus/minus, one that was discussed before they took the A+ and C-. The discussions were based not just around the pros and cons of plus/minus but many people were concerned about the C- and that become part of the compromise that was added this past year. He stated the Student Association really hasn’t had the chance to get the input on a system without A+ or C-. One thing he has learned from talking to many of his constituents, talking to many students, and in Senate when they voted on their opinion of the plus/minus system, many people are generally for the plus/minus system when they first hear about it but then have doubts when they hear more about it. He feels the students need to learn more about it.

Theodore acknowledges that there are student representatives on the UCC for this issue. The issue the Student Association has is the fact that there should be a representative from each college. Most of the representatives don’t report back to the Student Association. That is a problem they run into over and over again. It embarrasses him when students are not showing up to the meetings. However since most of the students are not part of the Student Association they can’t do anything about it. He therefore reiterated, that because of that, students didn’t really have input into the debate of the plus/minus system without the A+ or C-. He indicated that they haven’t actively seen what people really think about it.

Theodore stated that although he heard that grading is at the faculty prerogative he still feels this is a student issue. He stated it was fairly important to think of who is going to be affected. It will affect the students. It is important to get their input. He stated this subject has been debated for years now; he spoke with one professor who indicated this discussion began in 1968. He stated he didn’t see the need to rush through, trying to get this into the catalog for next fall.

Keddie questioned what exactly the students are asking for. She asked Theodore if they wanted more input into the grading system with the A+/C- removed and he indicated that is what they wanted.

Birberick thanked Rosenbaum and Theodore for sharing their points of view. After they left the meeting, Birberick opened the discussion to the committee. She
restated that the discussion was not about the grading system itself but does the committee think, as the process unfolded, the students had the opportunity for input.

Birberick provided the committee with information about student committee members from 2010/2011 as well as 2011/2012, for UCC as well as APASC. She examined the minutes from meetings where plus/minus grading was discussed this year as well as last. She asked the committee what information they wanted regarding what she found. Stafstrom asked if APASC was the only subcommittee of UCC that would be involved in the issue; Birberick confirmed that was the case.

She indicated that APASC has the capacity for three students and when this issue originally came forward in 2010/2011. She stated that on the December 8, 2010, one student was present, the March 2, 2011 meeting, one student was present. That meeting was when it was decided that student feedback had to be solicited. APASC sent a request to the Student Association, the College Student Advisory Council, the college advising offices and also the College Curricular deans and committees. On March 7, 2011 and March 11th letters were sent to the groups mentioned asking for feedback. She stated that the letter provided information pertaining to the proposed changes. APASC also indicated their position on the matter as a committee. There was reference in the letter regarding the 2005 deliberations and what the level of support was.

Keddie asked if all the student input was received before they made this compromise. Birberick indicated the information came at the beginning. She stated as a result of the student information, and information from the other groups that is how they ended up with the compromise. Birberick indicated there was student representation during the time of the compromise discussions. Kot asked if the compromise was a result of the comments by students. Birberick explained the compromise arose out of issues brought to light both by faculty and students. Concerns about the A+ were raised during this period. Maintaining a 4.0 was one of the issues brought out by students. The issues related to the C- were concerns from both faculty and students because of programs where a C or better must be earned. Kot asked if during this compromise period another letter was sent to students seeking input. Birberick indicated that no official letter was sent to any group regarding discussion of the compromise. Bottenberg indicated that the LA&S Student Advisory Council did discuss the issue last month prior to the University Council meeting.

Stafstrom brought up something that Rosenbaum had said – that according to the Constitution, the grading policy is the prerogative of the faculty and that being true they were not required to seek input from the students. There was a brief discussion.
Isabel made a motion that UCC reaffirms its policy decision students had sufficient opportunity for input in the grade change policy, seconded by Snow. **Motion passed unanimously.**

**Reports/Minutes from Standing Committees**

**A. Admissions Policies and Academic Standards Committee**

There were no minutes from APASC.

**B. Committee on the Improvement of Undergraduate Education**

Stafstrom indicated that there were two items from the meeting, which really reflect the major activities of CIUE. He pointed out under Old Business, the issue of Instructional Research Grants. These grants normally include some summer salary for faculty and also requests for equipment or other short term needs to better certain programs and improve education. Last fiscal year there was a budget of approximately $25,000. There were seven grants awards. He stated that Birberick had indicated that due to the budget recission that funding for the grants for the upcoming academic year were not going to be possible. He indicated the committee discussed whether some kind of program could be continued on a smaller scale or simply give recognition.

The second item, the Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching and Excellence in Undergraduate Instruction awards, there is normally three Teaching and one Instructor awards. Stafstrom explained that last year they had excellent nominations but there were some issues with the nomination forms format. They decided they needed to put together a better, clearer nomination form. A sub-committee which included Stafstrom, Brian Mackie and student member, Kyle Bak got together to address the changes that the committee wished to make.

Stafstrom made a motion to receive the minutes from the September 10, 2012 CIUE meeting, seconded by Wiemer. **Motion passed.**

**C. Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment**

Lilly reported that this committee has a bit of an identity crisis. There is a lot of frustration for having done a lot of work on different issues and not having an impact. The committee talked about their goals and missions. Lilly indicated Birberick presented information to the committee regarding Foundations of Excellence report. Birberick explained that a study of the first year experience was
done and one of the recommendations from the report was that it would be good to have an advisory board. Birberick suggested to CUAE that they may want to take on the advisory board role. After some discussion, the committee decided to invite Gip Seaver and Denise Rode to provide more information regarding Foundations of Excellence.

M. Lilly made a motion to receive the September 11, 2012 CUAE minutes, seconded by C. Snow. The motion passed.

C. Committee on the Undergraduate Curriculum

Aase highlighted the committee minutes from CUC. He indicated there were some issues with the major in special education and some of those items were sent back. He said minor changes were approved for the College of Engineering and Engineering Technology. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences proposed a new minor in Community Leadership and Civic Engagement. Under Old Business, he mentioned the revisions to the APPM that are being worked on by the committee chair, Birberick and others. In particular, work on what constitutes a certificate and he indicated similar discussions would probably take place for a minor or a double major.

G. Aase made a motion to receive the minutes of the October 11, 2012 CUC meeting, seconded by Snow. Motion passed.

E. General Education Committee

Wiemer indicated that everyone was probably aware that the General Education Coordinator had been hired and she indicated this was his first meeting. He told the committee what he had been working on. Wiemer indicated one of the first things he did was update the General Education website and she encouraged everyone to look at it. She pointed out the resubmission process for gen ed courses is now online.

Wiemer indicated the GEC is still working on the assessment data collection issue in regard to the HLC visit. They are focusing on what kind of data can be gathered.

They are also working on revisions to the bylaws and APPM. They are attempting to add language that would give the committee authority for course revisions, etc.

K. Wiemer made a motion to receive the minutes of the September 20, 2012 meeting of GEC, seconded by Demir. Motion passed.
F. University Honors Committee

Birberick said that Honors is making lots of improvements and they are really reaching out. Birberick also mentioned that she and Stafstrom participated in the Honors Course presentation night, which gave individuals an opportunity to learn about the honors courses offered at the 300 and 400 level. Stafstrom stated that the Honors website does contain a link to all courses taught through Honors and the posters that were created for the courses are posted there.

A motion was made by C. Snow, seconded by M. Lilly to receive the minutes of the September 7, 2012 meeting of the University Honors Committee. Motion passed.

IV. Other Reports

A. University Assessment Panel

J. Isabel mentioned taking a look at the College Portrait website – it gives information about NIU.

She talked about assessment for Gen Ed. The University Assessment office is willing to assist anyone who is having trouble.

At the October 5, 2012 meeting, there were several status reports that were looked at. She pointed out that the status report is not the annual assessment report but a mid-program review summary.

V. New Business

A. Syllabus Policy

Birberick indicated that while working on the credit hour policy it was discovered that a course syllabus policy was also required. NIU does not currently have a course syllabus policy even though most faculty provide syllabi for the courses they teach. She indicated that typically non-traditional courses, thesis, independent study, etc. might not have a traditional-looking syllabus. She presented the syllabus policy that had been crafted. She indicated the policy was constructed by looking at NIU’s Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center resources as well as syllabi policy other institutions use. Birberick indicated once approved by UCC the policy would then be submitted to University Council and the APPM subcommittee for review and consideration.

Birberick indicated that some of the items in the syllabus policy are tied into the credit hour policy. There was a discussion regarding the policy, in particular, the
wording of some of the items. Some committee members indicated their concern over the great detail that needs to be included in some of the categories.

It was decided to table discussion of the syllabus policy. Birberick indicated she will invite Carolinda Douglass to attend the next meeting to continue the policy discussion.

VI. Adjournment

On a motion by Snow, seconded by Keddie, the meeting was adjourned @ 2:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne E. Ratfield