

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Bender, Guevara, LaCost, Nickerson, Reisbig, Rinkevich, Schubert, Woodman, Wysocki

Absent: Anaya, Purdum, Ruchala, Zoubek

Date: Wednesday, March 27, 2013

Location: Faculty Senate Office

Note: These are not verbatim minutes. They are a summary of the discussions at the Executive Committee meeting as corrected by those participating.

1.0 Call to Order

Schubert called the meeting to order at 3:03 p.m.

2.0 ASUN Academic Committee – Student Comments on ACE Program (Micah Wullschleger and Tim Lundy)

Wullschleger reported that the ASUN Academic Committee has a vested interest in the ACE program and wanted to conduct a review to get some student feedback on the ACE program. He noted that the ASUN Academic Committee is responsible for investigating issues pertaining to the standards of academics at UNL. He noted that he and Lundy are members of the first class to enter the university with the ACE program.

Wullschleger stated that the ACE program was supposed to be different from previous general education programs because it focused on outcomes and with the idea of making the program more efficient and beneficial for students in their academic career. The program seeks to provide students with broad exposure to multiple disciplines and gives them a much greater perspective which will serve them in their general life. He stated that the ACE program promised to drive a cultural shift at the university and change how the university functions.

Wullschleger reported that students in the ACE 10 courses were surveyed. He noted that 42 students responded to the survey. He noted that a lot of students do not seem to know what the ACE program is and what the goals are of the program. He reported that 15 students thought the program was limiting, 12 thought the program meets its own purpose, and 15 thought ACE was beneficial to their education at UNL. Lundy noted that those students who thought the ACE program was limiting felt that it was not an engaging educational experience and was a waste of time and money. They also felt that there were not enough ACE classes in specific majors and that the program was an unnecessary imposition. Wullschleger stated that some students felt that the program forced them to have to work more hours because the time in the ACE courses took away time for classes in their majors and extended their time at the university. He reported that some students responded that both students and instructors were unmotivated in these classes.

Wullschleger stated that the second group of students saw a purpose to the ACE program and view it as a benefit and that it should better prepare students for their future. Some of the students felt that the courses expanded their experience, but while some students felt that their courses were more enjoyable, they were concerned that it would prolong their time to graduate.

Wullschleger stated that the third group of students felt that ACE expanded their education and facilitated encountering new ideas that got students out of their comfort zones which they thought was beneficial.

Wullschleger stated that what can be taken away from the small survey is that ACE has its merits, but there are some students who dismiss the goals and some who say that it just isn't meeting their needs. He pointed out that there needs to be more education about the ACE program and why it is beneficial, both during their academic life and beyond. He noted that some students struggle with having to take courses because they feel like they are being forced. He pointed out that some of the responsibility falls on the faculty to help students understand the program. He suggested that students need to buy into the program if they are going to get the full benefits of it. Lindy stated that the university needs to get people to understand the program and to convince them that the goals of the program are valuable.

Nickerson stated that those students against the ACE program seem to want to focus on hard core disciplines, but he wondered if the same 42 students were quizzed five years from now what their opinions would be on it. He pointed out that he didn't appreciate the liberal arts program he had until later in life.

Woodman noted the comments about the program extending the time for students to graduate, but in reality it doesn't, and if anything, the number of required credit hours to graduate has been reduced. He wondered where the misperception comes from. Wullschleger suggested that some students don't want any general education, but he does not think that the majority of students think that way. He stated that he hopes students are forced to put some work into the ACE courses otherwise they won't have the appreciation of the program. Nickerson noted that advisors in Biological Sciences have stated that programs can be designed for students to get their degree in four years. LaCost pointed out that UNL is a land grant college and is intended to be a more comprehensive program. She stated that some of these students might be looking at the program strictly from their own needs.

Schubert asked how many students were asked to do the survey, was it the entire student body or just all seniors. Wullschleger reported that the survey was to be given only to the students in all of the ACE 10 courses. Woodman asked if the contact information for the students was obtained through Registration and Records. Lundy stated that the instructors of the ACE 10 courses were asked to distribute the survey to their classes. Schubert asked what the total number of students was in these classes. Wullschleger stated that they did not have information on the exact number and noted that the survey

was more qualitative than quantitative. Woodman suggested that the number of students graduating could be used as an estimate. Schubert pointed out that this would be about 2500 students. He noted that the majority of students might not have any problems with the ACE program and that is why they didn't get more of a response on the survey, or they are too upset with the program and don't want to respond. He stated that the question would be how much room for improvement or action needs to be taken. He noted that it seems from the responses that most of the students are okay with ACE.

Wullschleger stated that from his personal experience he likes the outcome focus of ACE although he does see some room for improvement. He stated that the goal of the survey is to get the conversation going to possibly make some improvements to make the program even better. Woodman pointed out that Biological Sciences has one ACE 10 course scheduled for next semester and the course is already filled. He suggested that increasing the number of these classes might be needed. Schubert stated that this is a technicality. The real issue is whether there is something wrong with ACE itself that needs to be fixed. He noted that the distribution of the responses is typical and he says that it seems like the responses are right in the middle of the distribution.

Wullschleger stated that the goal is not to scrap the ACE program, but he does not think students take it seriously and that it is not well integrated. He stated that the goals of the program are worthy, but more effort needs to be made to achieve these goals. Reisbig asked if ACE could use a better marketing campaign. Lundy said yes and that students don't always buy into the goals of the program. He pointed out that students should understand what the goals of the program are, not just be aware of the program. Griffin asked if information on ACE is presented to new students, perhaps in new student enrollment. Wullschleger stated that the only thing he received was a card with some information on it about the program.

Woodman asked if, from a personal experience, whether the ACE program met the goals of the courses. Wullschleger stated that it would be helpful if instructors start a course off by first discussing what the outcomes are that the course is going to meet. He pointed out that with the mixture of different majors and all of the courses that can be taken the ACE program is often stuck down at the bottom of the list of courses that are available.

Schubert suggested that there needs to be an independent discussion on ACE, how it is structured and evaluated. He asked if Wullschleger and Lundy have a sense that ACE courses are handled differently in various departments and how departments value these courses. He noted that some departments try to reach all students while others are more provincial. He asked whether the courses are valued equally across the campus and whether they receive the same support and rigor. Lundy stated that it varies from faculty member to faculty member and he does not think he could align how it is taught or valued with any particular departments. Wullschleger reported that his personal experience is that ACE has been well valued. Wysocki asked if all of the negative comments were made by students taking a particular course or if they were all from the same department. Wullschleger stated that the responses were from across the departments. He stated that it would be interesting to see if students with a higher GPA

appreciate the program more. Woodman pointed out that while one might assume this but it is not necessarily so.

Schubert stated that this survey is a good beginning point and suggested that the administration should take up the effort to see how ACE can be improved. Lundy suggested that the goals of ACE need to be explained better. Guevara asked when they last spoke with Professor Mitchell, Director of Undergraduate Studies. Lundy stated they talked to her in the fall.

Wullschleger asked if it was possible for the Senate to do a more thorough survey of students. He suggested that departments that conduct exit surveys could include questions about ACE. Guevara stated that he thought this might be possible and departments could provide the information gathered to the administration.

2.0 Announcements

2.1 Conflict of Interest Committee

Schubert reported that as President of the Senate he has asked to serve on the Conflict of Interest Committee that was created to conform to federal regulations from the NIH and Department of Health & Human Services. He stated that the Committee reviews cases of possible conflicts of interest; some are minor cases while others are more complex and take a longer time to resolve. He noted that he was asked by Maria Funk, Conflict of Interest Coordinator, if he could remain on this Committee for another year as an Executive Committee member of the Faculty Senate needs to serve on it. He reported that he is willing to remain on the Committee. The Executive Committee agreed that he should remain on the Committee.

3.0 Approval of March 13, 2013 Minutes

Wysocki moved for approval of the revised minutes. Rinkevich seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

4.0 Unfinished Business

4.1 Executive Committee Elections

Griffin reported that Professor Sollars, Veterinary & Biomedical Sciences, has agreed to run for election to the Executive Committee and two other people are considering whether to run.

5.0 New Business

5.1 Report on University Curriculum Committee (UCC) Meeting Discussing Recommended Changes to Ace Procedures

Guevara reported that he attended the UCC meeting and the UCC felt that some of the suggestions made by the Executive Committee to the ACE Governance and Assessment Document were more restrictive than currently stated in the document. He noted that they agreed to clarify that the examples of coursework are from the course, not each section. He reported that the UCC felt that the term “representative samples” as suggested by the Executive Committee would be more complicated to do than providing three samples. He stated that the biggest issue deals with the proposed revisions to the

recertification process. He noted that the current form requests that departments verify that an internal assessment of the courses has been conducted, but the question is what the UCC does with these assessments. He stated that the UCC felt that the proposed changes limit what the UCC ACE Subcommittee can review. Guevara noted that this revision was put in there so the ACE Subcommittee would not have to review every example that was submitted. He pointed out that people on the ACE subcommittee are not qualified to assess work that is outside of their discipline.

Guevara stated that the UCC does not think the Senate has the right to make changes to the Governance and Assessment Document and that the colleges would have to vote on the changes. Reisbig noted that the Governance and Assessment Document states that the UCC ACE Subcommittee shall make formal recommendations to the undergraduate colleges regarding substantive changes in the ACE program, but she questioned how the ACE Subcommittee feels that the changes are substantial. Woodman pointed out that the changes are not to the ACE program but to the procedures. Guevara stated that he pointed out to the UCC that no one has issues about the ACE courses and program the concerns are with the recertification process and if changes are not made it is likely that some faculty members will discontinue offering ACE courses. He reported that he asked Professor DeFusco, chair of the UCC, to suggest changes to the proposed revisions that he thought the UCC would approve. He stated that the UCC questions how courses can be evaluated without collecting samples of students' work, but the UCC's copy of the document had an additional sentence basically saying that they want to know how the courses are being evaluated. He pointed out that this sentence could do away with the need for three samples of student work.

Woodman asked how the UCC's recommendations substantially change what the Executive Committee is recommending. Guevara stated that Professor Ledder, the A & S member on the UCC, suggested that students had to write a brief paper on the course that would indicate the student has achieved the outcome, but he questions how someone outside of a discipline can make an assessment on a course when they are from a different department. Nickerson suggested having Professors DeFusco and Ledder come to an Executive Committee meeting to discuss the problem. He noted that the suggested changes to the procedure will help reduce the UCC Subcommittee's work and will allow them to do more substantive work. Guevara pointed out that the ACE Governance and Assessment Document charges the Subcommittee to do this work.

Schubert stated that the Executive Committee needs to identify a target of what it wants to change. Guevara stated that the goal is to simplify the recertification process. Wysocki recommended that the changes be presented to the Senate for a vote. Guevara stated that the UCC is claiming that the Faculty Senate cannot do this because they feel the changes are substantive. He stated that we would have to make our case as to why we don't consider these substantive changes. Wysocki suggested having two motions, one that states that the changes are non-substantive and another that approves the changes to the document. Reisbig suggested that the changes could be put before the colleges to make the decisions.

LaCost pointed out that the responsibility of evaluating the course should be in the department. Wysocki stated that faculty members have evaluated the process of recertification by going through the process resulting in numerous complaints about it. He suggested that assessments and recertification need to remain in the departments and he sees no problem in shutting down the UCC ACE Subcommittee. Nickerson wondered whether the Senate can simultaneously approve the changes to the document and eliminate the UCC ACE Subcommittee since the UCC is a Faculty Senate committee.

Schubert stated that now would be a good time to review the ACE documents to see where improvements can be made. He pointed out that none of the ACE documents specifically state how changes should be made to the documents. He suggested presenting a motion to the Senate to suspend the UCC ACE Subcommittee and to have an ad hoc committee look to see about making revisions to make the procedures more functional. Guevara pointed out that some guidelines are needed for the program. Griffin suggested not suspending the UCC ACE Subcommittee but to create an ad hoc committee that can address both sides of the argument and present recommended changes to the Governance and Assessment document that would simplify the recertification process. Wysocki agreed and stated that an independent ad hoc committee should be created to look into the recertification process. Bender pointed out that the charge to the ad hoc committee needs to be clear and detailed. He noted that the charge should include making proposed changes to the procedures for recertification to make it easier for faculty members to fulfill this requirement. The ad hoc committee should also draft language about how the ACE procedures can be modified in the future. Schubert stated that he will draft a motion to create an ad hoc committee and present it to the Senate.

5.2 Executive Committee Report

The Executive Committee reviewed and revised a draft of the Executive Committee report that will be presented to the Faculty Senate.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:03 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Wednesday, April 3 at 3:00 pm. The meeting will be held in the Faculty Senate Office. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and David Woodman, Secretary.