

**MINUTES**  
**May 1, 2024**

**University of Nebraska – Lincoln**  
**Academic Planning Committee**

**Members Present:** Ankerson, Bloom, Boehm, Button, Clarke, Cressler, Doll, Jones, Jemkur, Latta Konecky, Minter, Mowat, Ourada, Pechous, Russo, Theiss-Morse, Tschetter, Vuran

**Members Absent:** Davis, Heng-Moss

**Guests:** Director Larkin Powell, School of Natural Resources, Associate Dean Adam Wagler, College of Journalism and Mass Communications

**Note:** These are not verbatim minutes. This is a summary of the discussions at the Academic Planning Committee meeting as corrected by those participating.

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**1.0 Call**

Vuran called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m.

**2.0 Proposal to Create the Wildlife Habitat Management Undergraduate Certificate (Cressler and Russo)**

Cressler reported that he and Russo revised the proposal and addressed some questions with Powell which were answered. He noted that the proposed undergraduate certificate would be complimentary to an existing program offered through the School of Natural Resources and it would expand opportunities for students in Fisheries and Wildlife, Agronomy, Plant and Landscape Systems, Grassland Systems, and Biological Systems Engineering.

Cressler stated that he and Russo found the learning objective and course objectives were well aligned. He noted that a compelling aspect of the proposal is that the specific requirements for the program were tailored to meet certain qualifications which some agencies in the wildlife management field require. He pointed out that this certificate is a great option for students coming in with degrees from other fields because it would provide them with an additional qualification when seeking employment. He noted that the program would not require any additional resources.

Bloom pointed out that most new certificate programs don't require any additional costs, but he questioned what happens if a program becomes so popular that additional faculty and resources are needed to meet the demands. Powell stated that the forestry and fishery programs have grown in the past twenty years and as a result there are a multitude of courses that could be used by students in the wildlife habitat management certificate program. He stated that he did not think there would be a large number of students in the program, and he believes that SNR can handle any growth. He noted that the program would be successful if there were 10-20 students taking the courses needed for certification. Jones asked if there were 30-40 students wanting the certificate would priority be given for degree seeking students first. Powell pointed out that he does not anticipate that this would be needed but it could be done if necessary. Russo asked if

the classes were full now. Powell said no and that the classes could grow by 10-20 students without there being any issues. Boehm pointed out that as with any program if growth occurs you add resources if needed.

Cressler moved to approve the proposal. Latta Konecky seconded the motion. The APC moved to approve the proposal.

### **3.0 Review of the Esports Undergraduate Certificate (Doll and Minter)**

Doll reported that the proposal is coming from the College of Journalism and Mass Communications and calls for a five-course undergraduate certificate in esports which is a form of competition involving video games. She noted that there were conversations with the College to clarify which courses would be required and noted that three of these courses focus on esports and are already offered. She stated that the proposal seeks to provide an avenue that would allow people outside of media communication to obtain a certificate in esports.

Doll moved that the proposal be approved. Motion seconded by Latta Konecky.

Clarke asked what the plan is for advertising this program since it seems like to would be attractive to many people. Wagler stated that some of the advertising students would be leveraged to help with advertising. Minter pointed out that the College of Journalism has a robust advising program and thinks that the esports certificate will quickly be advertised through the advising network at UNL. Tschetter pointed out that there is a large esports club on campus whose members could be interested in the undergraduate certificate.

Wagler noted that there is a new faculty member in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications that does research in the esports area. Theiss-Morse pointed out that when certificate proposals are considered there are already jobs that need to be filled with people that have the needed certificates. She asked what the jobs would be for this certificate. Wagler pointed out that majors in Journalism cannot minor in this area, but they could obtain this certificate which would provide them with the knowledge and training that would allow them to develop their own brand in esports. He noted that students from other fields could add this skill set and non-majors could develop the communication skills they would gain from obtaining the certificate. He pointed out that local high schools have esports teams, and the college has been having discussions with them which could inspire students to eventually obtain the certificate.

Bloom stated that the proposal indicates that the course offerings for the certificate could bring in an additional 50-75 undergraduate students in the first few years with no additional expense. He asked if there were anticipations this program would create new credit-hour production. Wagler thinks there are opportunities for the program to grow and for Journalism majors it would be new credit-hour production. He pointed out that there is a market for students who are not fully majors but who could add this certificate like a minor. He noted that the certificate program would be open to all students across campus and available to non-UNL students which may include students from community colleges, other institutions, or K-12 educators.

Button asked if there were any discussions with any other college programs or whether there are plans to have these discussions. Wagler reported that Dean Vail talked with some other colleges

and with the Emerging Media Center. He pointed out that game designing and engineering is very different because this esports certificate would focus on communications. He noted that the program would complement not overlap with any other courses at UNL.

Russo asked how the certificate program is unique from other universities. Wagler reported that most other esports programs are based out of business or engineering colleges. He stated that the closest overlap would be with a sports marketing program in business but again, the focus here is on communications. Doll noted that while we don't want to rubber stamp any new proposal, it is important that we stay up with the cultural demands for certificate programs like this.

The APC then approved the proposal.

#### **4.0 Approval of April 17, 2024 Minutes**

Vuran asked if there were any revisions to the minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mowat moved and Tschetter seconded approval of the minutes. Motion was approved.

#### **5.0 Biochemistry Academic Program Review (Clarke)**

Clarke reported that the APR was conducted in September and the review team was excellent with members from other universities and industry. She noted that while the department is primarily located in Beadle, there are some faculty members on East Campus. She stated that the review went very well and there were no issues. She stated that the external review team report was very complimentary and noted that the unit has significant strength and is very research intensive with most faculty members having an 80% research FTE and with some teaching. FTE She reported that the department has an NIH pre-training program and oversees two centers.

Clarke stated that the external review team report noted there was a lot of opportunity for growth in teaching and research, but the department is struggling to determine how to do everything at once, particularly when they are getting more service demands. She reported that the department is outgrowing their space in Beadle, and the faculty are trying to do some innovative things with teaching, but this puts more pressure on the teaching faculty.

Clarke reported that Biochemistry is a very collegial and supportive environment, and programs are growing, and the department is considering some additional programs. She noted that there is an accelerated BS/MS program which the review team supported but they suggested that the department should consider additional MS programs that are focused on Plant Sciences or Biomedical Sciences. She pointed out that the review team felt that the graduate program needs to become more of a priority for the department and suggested that there is a need for a Vice or Associate Chair for Graduate Studies to advocate and advise the graduate students.

Clarke stated that the review team pointed out that Biochemistry needs to update their promotion and tenure process to better engage and mentor early career faculty members.

Bloom noted that while the review team made three recommendations, the challenge for the department is to balance these goals. Clarke stated that the review team saw that the department needed to think about these goals individually. She noted that while the department would like

to recruit more students, it means more teaching but there is not sufficient space. And while doing more external service could bring in more funds, it would mean more effort would have to go to service rather than research or teaching so the department must determine what the right balance will be overall.

#### **6.0 Proposal to Create the Sports Promotion Graduate Certificate**

Vuran asked if there were two APC members who would review the proposal. Ourada and Clarke agreed to review the proposal.

#### **7.0 Reports from EVC Ankerson, VC Boehm, Interim VC Jones**

##### Ankerson

Ankerson reported that Dean Hope has been looking at a variety of metrics to get a better idea informing projected graduate student enrollment for the fall. She stated that at this point in time, we are up point-in-time in both domestic and international graduate student enrollment. She noted that doctoral student yields are up higher than last year while masters student yields are flat. She stated that the projection at this point-in-time for fall semester is that we will be flat in graduate enrollment overall, which is in alignment with other universities. She pointed out that we are still recovering from the downward trends of the last few years.

Ankerson noted that graduation is approaching and the number of graduates this year should be about normal, although a higher number of the graduates will be attending the graduation ceremony. She pointed out that this is the undergraduate class that didn't have a regular high school commencement because of the Covid pandemic.

Ankerson reported that our staff have been working to put together their financial packages for first-tiem freshmen who have submitted FAFSAs. She stated that the plan is to have the financial packages ready for continuing students beginning May 8<sup>th</sup> and by mid-May, offers will be out to all students, who will then be encouraged to submit enrollment deposits, which will provide us with a much better idea of fall enrollment. She pointed out that the problems with FAFSA are definitely impacting the timing of current enrollment numbers.

Ankerson stated that 687 students have indicated that they want to be a part of the Honors Program noting that this is the highest number of incoming students who have indicated interest.

Ankerson stated that during the recent CAO meeting, she brought the concerns were raised about the Google certificates by this group, and that other campuses shared similar concerns. She noted that the APC is uniquely positioned to discuss a comprehensive overview of how we want to view educational components as we move forward, particularly in regard to credit-bearing badges and certificates and the demand for these in relation to what is happening in higher education. She stated that we need to establish discussions, so we collectively understand where these different educational credentials fall within the higher education experience, but also who controls these programs to ensure quality. Minter pointed out that we need to be careful how we traverse these things because we want to be a good collaborator but noted that it would have been better if the faculty had been consulted from the beginning about the Google certificates. Ankerson stated that the APC can help develop the framework of how we view the future of programs at UNL.

Vuran stated that with AI we are seeing a surge of foundational models like GPT-4, Gemini, and Llama-3, but in the near future, the capabilities of these models will converge, making the training data most essential. As existing models exhaust the publicly available data, it is not a coincidence that there is a need to access data in specific domains, such as education. He pointed out that it is our responsibility to protect our students and their data and to provide them with teaching experiences that can only be learned through integration with our programs. He suggested AI experts be involved in the decision-making process.

Bloom asked what our Big Ten colleagues are doing in this area. Jones noted that certificates like the Google program run the risk of competing with our programs and she can envision a Google certificate being considered the same as an undergraduate degree in teaching. She pointed out that the potential harm with these kinds of programs is great.

Button questioned whether the Google kinds of program would impact our own online programs. He also pointed out the difference in the speed of the Google program coming online and how long a process it is to get our online programs up and running. He asked if we are doing anything to expedite the approval process for online programs. Ankerson noted that AVC Shriener has over 20 years of experience in the online education field and has been working with units with existing online graduate programs first. She pointed out that the market segment for truly online programs is different than our traditional approach to undergraduate and graduate education. We have developed the definition of what we mean by an online program, have developed the infrastructure, and there are currently programs being marketed as part of a pilot. Online programs will have multiple start dates, fall, spring, summer; and be offered entirely online. She noted that the same strategy will be used for undergraduate online programs. Button asked if we are at a point where we can tell a unit that their online courses are being considered for development into a program. Ankerson stated that this will occur soon. She pointed out that units need to be willing to conform to the way that we know these online programs will work effectively for the market they serve.

### Boehm

Boehm reported that Francois-Phillipe Champagne, Canada's minister of innovation, science, and industry will speak at UNL on U.S.-Canada Trade and Geopolitics. He stated that the Clayton Yeutter Institute of International Trade and Finance and ASUN are co-sponsoring the event.

Boehm stated that on Monday, May 6<sup>th</sup> there will be the groundbreaking ceremony for the USDA National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture on Nebraska Innovation Campus. He noted that our entire Washington D.C. delegation will be participating and 200 people are expected to attend.

Boehm reported that on the evening of May 7<sup>th</sup> the promotion and tenure celebration will occur for faculty who are receiving promotion and/or tenure.

Boehm stated that he will be attending and will confer degrees to students at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at their commencement ceremony.

### Jones

Jones reported that in the past two weeks three more NSF career awards were announced and she said we are approaching 100% approval rate with these awards.

Jones stated that she attended the Graduate Students Recognition Luncheon where she saw all of the graduate students and faculty recognized.

Jones reported that in engaging with different groups on campus she absolutely hears the weight of the uncertainty of the budget constraints and the low morale it is creating. She noted that she will be working to see how we can move forward with our research and creative activities and other actions that can be taken to address the anxiety and low morale. Minter pointed out that she ran into a faculty member who serves on the ORED Advisory Board, and the person was very excited and happy after the meeting. Jones acknowledged that it was a very good meeting, and she is planning to ask the President's office for support with our research efforts.

### **8.0 Other Business**

No other business was discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 4:19 p.m. The next meeting of the APC will be on Wednesday, May 15, 2024. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator.