Through interviewing a number of students over the past two weeks, we find the concept of the Huskie Shuffle (HS) is widely known throughout the campus of Northern Illinois University (NIU). In this report, we share the meaning and sources of the HS as discovered through our interviews, other possible origins of the HS brought forth through our group’s discussion of these interviews, why the HS is an issue for NIU, how some students overcome the HS, and possible solutions to reduce the HS at the university.

From a student’s perspective, the HS is a run-around one experiences when interacting with the departments/administration/bureaucracy at NIU. Some causes of the HS are students being told they must complete an online only form when physically at an office, being informed they need an appointment to resolve an issue once at an office, receiving the same information from multiple sources that does not resolve their issue, or being passed from office-to-office around campus without beginning the process of resolving their issue.

Multiple sources of the HS exist within NIU. The most common experience of the HS, however, exists within Swen Parson Hall. Specifically, students identify the offices of the Bursar, Student Financial Aid, Scholarship, and Student Employment as a source of the HS. Students experience the HS within these four offices because they feel each office “pushes” them to a different office to begin any process. Thus, the students’ interaction with these offices leaves them unable to navigate a resolution for an issue concerning these offices. Exacerbating the problem, a student employee of the Scholarship Office – who describes himself as involved and connected on campus – upon having a face-to-face discussion with the Scholarship Office Director discovered the information the front desk gave him was incorrect according to the director. Therefore, the student exposes the director and the staff within the Scholarship Office lack consistency.

While many students identify the HS as existing within Swen Parson Hall, the experience is not limited to that building. A female freshman student was experiencing issues with her roommate. With guidance from her UNIV 101 professor, the student tried to resolve the issues through her Community Advisor (CA). The issues, however, persisted. The student became frustrated with her UNIV 101 professor, the Ombudsman, and her CA, as these sources continued to provide the same advice. It was only through happenstance, by attending an event at Stevenson Hall, that the student ran into the Stevenson Hall Director and was finally able to receive some resolution. Other students also experience the HS when interacting with NIU’s Health Services. Specifically, a student had trouble being removed from NIU’s insurance, as they were eligible to remain on their parent’s insurance, and with providing their vaccination records.

Thus far, the HS has been described specifically as an issue students experience with NIU’s staff. Yet, through our group’s discussion, we believe it is likely that the HS is also the product of miscommunication between students towards staff. It is possible that students are asking staff members a question and receiving the correct answer from these staff members. The students, however, might not understand the question they have asked or the question they really desire to have an answer to. Therefore, it is likely that the HS suffers from an endogeneity problem; the casual mechanism of the HS is looping due to students asking questions that do not capture the issue they wish to resolve while receiving answers from staff that are correct for the questions the student has asked.

The HS is an issue for NIU because many students experience frustration in navigating NIU’s bureaucracy. Some students even eventually surrender in trying to resolve their issues, which might affect NIU’s retention rate. Furthermore, the HS is an issue at the university because students experience it every semester, as they either have to interact with new departments or do not remember how to navigate NIU’s bureaucracy. Lastly, the HS is an issue within the university because some students find there is a lack of understanding between the front desk staff and the
senior staff, which suggests the HS is at least partially due to a lack of communication within departments that can be avoided.

Our interviews, however, find not all students experience the HS. Specifically, students involved in NIU’s Military Student Services have been able to overcome the HS, as Military Student Services staff members find answers for students. Thus, when a student has an issue, Military Student Services takes it upon their own department to find a resolution and then the office directs the student towards that resolution.

Learning from the experience of students engaged with NIU’s Military Student Services, we believe the university can use multiple methods to overcome the HS. First, recognizing students might be unable to ask questions in the exact terminology used by the departments NIU’s staff must be trained to understand what the intent of a student’s question is. Second, and related to the first method, a help desk in a central location should be constructed to help students navigate NIU’s bureaucracy. There is room within Swen Parson Hall to construct a help desk, which can be staffed by individuals whom are trained for interaction with students. The newly constructed Help Desk will differ from the Help Desk located in the Holmes Student Union, as the latter Help Desk’s mission is helping individuals navigate their way physically around the campus. The newly constructed Help Desk’s mission will be to help students navigate NIU’s bureaucracy. Third, any location requiring students to submit printed or electronic forms should have computer access for students within that location, as students should not have to leave an office to complete a form. Finally, NIU needs to produce a map for students, which clearly explains what elements of NIU’s bureaucracy are within what buildings. These maps, furthermore, should provide students with clear and concise information regarding the description, duties, and functions of each element of the bureaucracy.