Bold Futures – Responses to the assignment:

*Ensure every student knows and is known by an academic advisor who is tracking their success*

21 April 2014

Report I

I interviewed 2 students. Here is the summary of their response.

NIU Experience:

Both students were commuter students, and in their first year on campus full time. Both were college juniors. They spend roughly 20 hours per week on campus. They were attracted to NIU primarily for financial reasons, close to home and relatively affordable. They rated the quality of instruction from average to slightly above average. Both took advantage of some on-campus resources, such as the Student Center, Library and Rec Center. They thought NIU’s physical appearance was average, but both felt it was a safe environment.

Their feeling was that NIU’s priority is on student retention and student involvement.

NIU as a whole, doesn't seem to prioritize getting the students ready for the marketplace, but that came more from the individual instructors and community exposure through their classes.

NIU as a college town was average. There was no sense that the surrounding community was involved on campus. One believed you can be from Dekalb and be totally oblivious to NIU being there. Friends of theirs know something about NIU, and generally have a favorable opinion about the university.

Both more connected/engaged withing their college, as opposed to the NIU as a whole.

Challenge question: That every student knows or is known by a student academic advisor.

Both students did believe they were getting proactive assistance from their advisors. Unless the student seeks out the advisor, they don't hear from them and the only assistance they offer, is making sure the student has enough credits to graduate.
Report II

I interviewed 2 students.

1st student: Senior, Computer Science major lives near campus
2nd student: Freshman, Marketing major, lives on campus

NIU Experience:

Both thought that NIU was a good school to attend.

Both thought that the academics and instructors were good, but the freshman would like to see more office hours later in the afternoon and evening.

The senior liked the smaller size of campus because it allowed for students to see classmates on campus often, making it easier to get help with classes.

The appearance of NIU was described as clean and pretty good.

Each student participated in one student organization on campus.

DeKalb was not seen as a college town by the senior. It was seen as a small with little to do, not many stores, and rural. The freshman hadn't explored the town yet.

One chose NIU because it was cheaper in some aspects compared to other schools, and the other chose to go here because it was close to home and affordable.

Both feel NIU has a safe campus environment.

When asked about their advisors, the senior hadn't seen their advisor for a couple years, because it isn't required. Their entire class schedule is decided in the first year with their advisor. The advisor does e-mail job openings, however. The freshman has not had any contact with an advisor yet.

Report III

I interviewed 2 students, both were international students. One from India one from China.

Both of them are graduate students and thought that NIU was a good school.

Both thought their academic advisor were helpful, friendly, reply email very quick.

The Chinese student emphasize that academic advisor is really important to graduate students, especially for international students.
The India student said it would be nicer if their academic advisors become more active, instead of only replying students question. What he said reminds me when I was a graduate student in Indiana; I regularly receive emails from my advisor. Those email contains a lot of information including campus event, interview opportunity, career fair, job opportunity and so on. Those informations helped me a lot and I still really appreciate my advisor for doing that.

When asked about whether NIU is a safe campus, they said the safety issue never occurred to them. Because they thought campus is supposed to be safe.

Report IV

I interviewed one student who had the following feedback:
She is a junior with a major and a minor in CLAS. Full-time student who commuted for first 2 years but now lives near campus.

Attracted to NIU by the proximity of campus to home and the number of friends who were enrolled here. The icing on the cake was the Honors Program, which both the student and the parent thought were outstanding.

The student rated the quality of instruction as generally above average, with some exceptions in the general ed courses which were considered below average.

This student has taken advantage of many campus resources, including the Writing Center, Career Center, OSEEL (has a USOAR and had a URA).

She feels NIU is a safe environment.

Perception is that NIU's priority is student research.

No real comment on DeKalb as a college town. Student thought the size of Dekalb was nice. And she has taken advantage of off-campus internships in Dekalb County.

Student didn’t really engage with NIU outside of classes when commuting; after moving nearby however, student has jumped into many campus organizations and really engaged with NIU. Student learned of these opportunities from flyers posted around campus.

Parents are both alums of NIU who value the education offered here. Student's hometown has similar perception, of NIU as a good commuter school.

Does not know academic advisor and is not known by him/her either.
Report V

I talked to five students, two of them commuters, three in-town, three of them are transfer students.

The response I received from them seemed to be across the board. One of the students talked regularly with her advisor and she said she had an excellent rapport with her. One only saw her advisor when things seemed to come to a head in terms of problems and even then, she admitted, she had to be prodded into doing so. The other three saw their advisors a few times, but again it was typically for key times—making sure their final year's classes were the correct choices for example. Most of the time they were able to get the same advisor, but because they didn't see them too often, it was only through the notes and paperwork (ready on hand because the students made appointments beforehand) that the advisors could be said to really know them was their feeling, though it didn't seem to be an actual complaint on their part. They did seem to all feel that there was a lot of people needing to see the advisors, hence their having to make appointments, and as one of the students phrased it, it was a little like a cashier at a supermarket feel to it.

Only one of the people had a problem with the advisor themselves, feeling that the person they had at the beginning of their time at NIU led them astray on a couple classes, but that advisor has since left and the student hasn't had a problem since.

When asked about how to make things better, there was a lot of shrugs and "don't knows" and a little of people saying that they wished they had known how to work with the system better when they started at NIU. I asked them if they were never told, but they said, no, it wasn't that, they knew, they just didn't "know."

So, after that, I have to admit I don't know what would be any solution on how to make things closer to the challenge without adding a lot of people to the advising staff, communicating to the students not just better but more persistently (almost nagging) to use the resources at hand.

Report VI

I interviewed two students from my own large freshmen class. And the results were quite apart from each other. One student did not know (or "was not sure" as he said it) that there even was a student advisor, did not talk to anybody, was not getting any advice. And, looking at his in-class scores (no part of the interview, as we do not have that for others), there is certainly a parallel in his state of being informed about the general affairs of the university and affairs of one particular class.

The second student was just in the process in figuring out her major and she wants to be chemistry major. Her contact with her primary advisor resulted in an advice "to see a chemistry advisor" without being told who that might be. Of course, I was able to point her in the right direction and a few days later she thanked me and reported that she got
From this one might conclude that a motivated student gets the advice needed, the non-motivated may not. Maybe the question should not be so much whether the students seek the advisors, but whether they are sufficiently ready to tackle the demands of the college life as we have it now. In my opinion, the first student will flounder in a large class; his introduction to demanding academic process, for him to be successful, would need immersion in a small class, where he would be getting regular attention.

Just like Tony, I do not know where to go with this. The students are just people, with all the idiosyncrasies people will have. We were asked about students' interaction with advisors, but the question could be posed in many different ways:

- Do you come to class?
- Do you do the homework?
- Do you balance your checkbook?
- Do you use turn signals?
- Do you eat five servings of fruit?
- Do you ever talk to your class instructor?

And we would get just as broad answer to any of them as we got to our assigned question. The goal of the Bold Futures in our exercise was to figure out how to increase interaction between the students and the advisors. But the real goal is student retention. Maybe the path to higher retention is not even through providing more advising.