Bold Futures workshop, April 2nd – Group Nine work

Our group of seven members met and brainstormed solutions to the issue, “What are the needs of students who conclude they can’t afford to stay here?”

We discussed the following comments received from our conversations with students:

1. Students need to find and make academic and personal connections when they are new.
2. Students are concerned about the cost of living in a dorm and the meal plans. They enjoy the variety of offerings on campus.
3. A first generation student didn’t know how to complete the FAFSA, ended up not qualifying for any aid. He was motivated to attend by the success of other students he met.
4. A student from Michigan moved here and his parents attempted to use their 529 College Savings fund to pay his college expenses. His first year worked fine, but during the second year he had to “self-manage” everything and he experienced many barriers and hurdles. He had to borrow money then pay his parents back when he received a refund – due to the timing issues of getting his out of state funds.
5. Another student left and went back to a community college because he didn’t get enough support via his FAFSA and scholarships. How does the college work to ensure he’ll return and finish at NIU?

The following ideas for improvement were suggested by students:

1. Make it easier to find Work Study jobs. It took one student two years, because some postings were very outdated and there was no centralized place to look for them.
2. Can scholarships be more flexible, i.e. the funds can be used for just books versus tuition? Some students didn’t know of deadline dates or requirements to maintain their scholarships.
3. Can some of the money earned from an on campus job (Work Study) go to paying off existing debt?
4. Get information about NIU and financial aid to more high school students. One student commented that the Fin Aid office was very helpful when he was a freshman but not so much afterwards.
5. When a student plans to or must drop, can there be some pre-planning for their exit and their return, i.e. here’s what you’ll need to do to return to NIU.
6. Could student be given the option of waiving specific add-on fees, if they will not participate in those services, i.e. Health Services, Rec Center, etc.?
7. How come Illinois doesn’t have a program for providing more financial aid for college bound high school students who maintain a certain GPA? Tennessee has a program (Hope Scholarship) that pays for students to go to community colleges and Kalamazoo, Michigan has a privately supported program that pays for students to attend any college in Michigan.