**Bold Futures Team Survey Results**
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**Background and Context**

"Imagine ways to address the needs of students who conclude they can't afford to stay."

The student interviews and other information gathered for this project revealed a myriad of financial challenges faced by many students as they struggle to complete their programs at NIU. Some of these challenges were associated with costs such as tuition, room and board, books, and other mandatory fees. Others were associated with university processes, services, and policies, including the scholarship application process, advising, and difficulty gaining admittance to desired programs and/or completing an undergraduate degree within a four-year timeframe (both of which elevated feelings of financial risk associated with a college education at NIU). Below are brief summaries of the major challenges voiced by students, along with possible solutions from students and interviewers.

**Challenges and Proposed Solutions**

**Room & Board Costs**

Many students voiced the opinion that the cost of on-campus housing is high. Several stated that they could live in off-campus apartments for half the cost of the least expensive dorm option, including utilities and groceries. Moreover, some students felt that the meal plans offered by the university are not cost effective, causing students to pay for more food than they need or want.

Solutions:
- Lower on-campus housing rates.
- Work with the DeKalb community to increase low-cost local housing options.
- Support the development of residential co-ops.
- Offer a “pay-as-you-go” meal plan that allows students to pay only for what they want.

**Other Fees & Costs**

Similarly, some students voiced concerns with other mandatory fees that they say inflate the overall cost per semester and may be for services not necessarily used by all students.

Solutions:
- Offer more “a la carte” options and waive fees for students who don’t use specific facilities and/or services.
- Encourage instructors to eliminate “required” textbooks that are never, or minimally, used.

**Scholarship Information and Application Process**

Many students voiced frustration with the scholarship application process, stating that the process was cumbersome and difficult to navigate. Further, some said they were given inaccurate information by or treated rudely in the scholarship office. Finally, some noted that information on available scholarships is often inadequate, causing students to miss scholarship opportunities for which they may have qualified.

Solutions:
- Streamline the scholarship application process.
- Provide more accurate and complete information on available scholarships and the application process.

**Financial Assistance**

A general opinion voiced by many students was that additional forms of financial assistance need to be made available. This was particularly true for students who noted that the financial assistance they received in the form of loans, grants, scholarships, and other sources during their freshman and sophomore years was no longer available during the final two years of their college experiences.

Solutions:
- Provide more scholarship opportunities during the junior and senior years.
- Find ways to inspire more scholarship giving by alumni.
- Advocate for more MAP funding at the state level.
- Create on-campus job opportunities that include financial need as one basis for applicant evaluation.

**Other Assistance**

While financial assistance was an important concern, students also voiced a strong desire to complete their degrees in a timely manner, thus eliminating the cost of additional semesters. Some mentioned that the advising offered to them has been lackluster or ineffective in this regard or that their inability to gain admittance to required courses has required them to unnecessarily extend their undergraduate programs.

Solutions:
- Provide four year paths and excellent advising.
- Develop more on-campus work opportunities that count as internship credit.
- Provide experienced and engaged mentors for students to help them stay on track.