ASSIGNMENT

March 31st (1-4pm) Group #11

Members: Renata Catlett, Jay Fucilla, Kevin Meyer, Samantha Newman, Mary Quinlan and Lynn Slater

Our problem: Imagine ways to address the needs of students who conclude they cannot afford to stay at NIU.

Possible Ideas/Solutions: NIU should be very proactive in providing scholarship and funding information to all students. Many students are not aware of all of the funding sources available. Perhaps all students should have a financial advisor assigned, to communicate all of the information that is available. Also, providing more financial aid workshops for students might also be very helpful.

8 Individual Interviews:

1) The first interview was with Tom, a junior pursuing a COMS major from McHenry, IL. He went to community college for 2 years before transferring to NIU. He lived in Stevenson for one year and now shares an apartment with a friend he met on campus. Tom currently finances his education through a combination of student loans, part-time employment, and parental financial support.

Tom suggested we should become more proactive in providing scholarship and funding information. Tom suggested that many students might assume they cannot afford NIU before they have finished looking at all of the financial support options, including grants and scholarships. He also thought many students need to be pushed harder to explore all the financial resources that are available. Tom and I discussed how proactively sending this information to encourage students via email/text would be very helpful to new and prospective students.

2) We next interviewed Matt a junior COMS major from Burbank, IL. He was a traditional student and came in as a freshman. He lived in a residence hall for freshman year and now has an apartment with a friend. He is from a single parent home and is paying for college through loans, grants, and working two jobs to help with expenses. He was able to get the grants because he has good grades. His response to the question on what do you say to a student who thinks they can’t afford to come to school is to go to a counselor of the Bursar’s office. He was faced with the same dilemma his sophomore year and went to the Bursar’s office and they were able to get him info on grants he was eligible for because he had good grades. He feels they were very helpful and wants students to stay positive and use the resources on campus.
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3) Terry, a non-traditional transfer student, is from Aurora, IL. He is a senior COMS major and expecting to graduate in December 2014. He is 32 years old and came to NIU last year as a junior and transferred credits from SIU he took over 10 years ago. He is paying for school with loans and by working. His advice to students about this issue is to use the resources available at NIU. He feels most students don’t know or don’t use the services available.

4) John, a Graduate student from Aurora, graduated in 2010 with his BA in Communication and a minor in Journalism. He took a year off to work and has returned to NIU as a graduate student in Geography. From a single parent household, his mother worked extra hours to pay for his first 2 years of undergraduate school. He financed the rest of his UD degree with loans and working. During his undergrad he was offered a Pell grant because he had good grades, however, before he received the funding it was rescinded.

John’s answer to students who feel they can’t afford to stay at NIU is for them to actually try and find assistance. He feels many student just use the money issue as a cop-out to leave school. He feels there are plenty of resources at NIU but many students don’t know about them or are too lazy to find what is available.

5) Clay, junior, Time Arts, entered as traditional freshman – His parents are paying for most of his schooling with some small loans and he works 20 hours a week to pay for expenses. He feels there are always ways to find scholarships and grants and different ways to fund your college experience. It’s all up to the student and how badly they want it and how much it means to them.

6) Here are 2 more students, one being an African-American male, junior, computer science major. The other one was a white female, senior, political science major. I started just generally talking about the university and then got into the questions. I kept the interview short because both seemed rather bored and kind of nervous talking about these topics. I share similar feelings with the second person I interviewed. Also, I think the perspective of #1 being in the system is something that is often not talked about. But I’m glad I got to interview 2 very different people on a topic that may stir up some controversy.

Interview one:

Q: What services do you know of that the school offers students that are not able to pay for school?

A: Tuition waivers and reduced tuition

Q: Do you know where to go to obtain or get information on these services?

A: The Bursar’s Office
Q: How do you think NIU should handle students who cannot afford to come here but show the drive and interest to gain a higher education?

A: I honestly don’t. Isn’t that what financial aid is for?

Q: Do you think workshops should be offered to students to learn about services like these?

A: Yes! I found out two years late that I could have been receiving a full tuition waiver because I’m legally adopted and never knew until DCFS worker contacted me and the school.

7) Interview two:

Q: What services do you know of that the school offers students that are not able to pay for school?

A: All I know of is financial aid and getting grants.

Q: How do you think NIU should handle students who cannot afford to come here but show the drive and interest to gain a higher education?

A: Oh wait, isn’t that like kind of what the chance program is? Offer lower tuition or scholarships for those who do show an interest in exchange for them keeping their grades high.

Q: How do you think people who aren’t in that program look at students that do receive that aid?

A: There’s definitely stigma with it. People think it’s unfair they have to pay full tuition and these kids don’t. They’re instantly categorized as ghetto kids and looked down upon.

Q: Do you think the university should take extreme measures to assist students who say that they truly cannot afford to stay?

A: I don’t think EXTREME measures should be taken. It’s unfortunate but sometimes you just need to go to a less pricey school. It’s great to help because it’s encouraging learning, but the school can’t pay for everyone to remain here.

8) The next interview was with Vikas, a current student pursuing his MM in composition. However, he also completed his undergrad degree here. He began as an undecided student for one year, and then changed to Music. It took him 5 years to graduate with a degree in music composition. He left, went to work for 15 years, and has returned for his master’s degree.

As an undergraduate, he lived on campus for his first two years and then did apartment living for his next three. He said he did not receive any financial assistance from the university when he first began since his grades were not stellar. He also did not receive any music awards until his junior and senior years. He paid for school with Stafford Loans, which he has since paid off. There was no e-mail 15 years ago, so he did not know anything about scholarship assistance.
As a graduate student, he is living in an apartment. However, he works closely with many undergraduates and has many conversations with them regarding NIU, especially since he did his undergrad work here. He stated that he thinks the scholarship website is pretty straightforward and all incoming students should be encouraged to check it out in September when they are applying to school. E-mail blasts should also go out, but should be more concentrated to an area: Scholarships for Electrical Engineering Students, Scholarships for Choral Majors, etc. It might make students open their e-mails if they see their area.