Bold Futures Assignment: Transforming the Huskie Shuffle – From March 31st Workshop; Table #7
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Students Interviewed: AP (Male, Jr./Marketing); WG (Male; Sr./Phys.Therapy); CW (Male, Sr. Pre-Phys.Therapy); X1 (Male, Jr./Comms); X2 (Female/Law); X3 (Female,Jr./Speech Path.); X4 (Female,Sr./Comms); KB (Female); AF (Female); X5 (Female/Grad Student); X6 (Female/Grad Student) (Total of 11 students interviewed)

Six of the 11 students interviewed knew students who had left or were planning to leave NIU. Reasons given included disappointment with academic programs, financial concerns, and social isolation. Other issues that concerned those interviewed included distance of dorms from classroom buildings, poor signage / lack of wayfinding assistance, confusing or absent student services, need for more student activities on or close to campus, problems with financial aid, unhelpful staff, inadequate parking.

Academic Programs: AP – “My GPA didn’t transfer from my community college, so I was starting from zero. My first semester here I had a nine-hour class that I didn’t do well in, so my GPA was trashed right from the beginning. Also at my community college the teachers actually taught and I absorbed the information well. Here we just get reading assignments and then spend the class time discussing what we’ve read. I expected more.”
KB – “Some teachers are indifferent” re: student needs. AF – “Some students are consistently late to class and disruptive, making it difficult to learn.” KB and AF – Application process needs an overhaul; should be easier.

Financial Concerns: Law Student – Experienced “Shuffle” getting financial aid together and almost gave up. Financial aid was “lost” for two weeks; grad assistant money was tied up; went back and forth with several departments by phone and in person to work it all out. X3 – Problems mostly with Bursar’s office. In general, NIU offices often don’t understand the problem students are trying to explain; also students don’t know what each office does so they waste time going back and forth between different offices. KB – “My friend left because of student fees – she felt they were too high and she wanted the opportunity to opt out of those she didn’t use, like athletics, recreation fees, etc. I felt ‘shuffled’ over student insurance, which I didn’t want. I kept having to fill out paperwork each year to opt out of it. The first year I ended up paying $500 for insurance because I didn’t get help on how to opt out.” Several students interviewed talked about their financial aid forms “getting lost.”

Social Isolation: AP – “The first week here was good because they had lots of structured activities. After that I felt lost, partly because the dorms are so far away from everything. I ended up joining a fraternity – without that I would have no social life. We need more of a ‘college town’ on campus.” Grad Student – “I feel connected to my department but not to NIU as a whole. The West Campus can feel very isolated.” KB – “Colleges should be more like small communities and have events together to help students bond with others in their majors. Finding people with common interests helps you feel connected. Not everyone wants to go to a football game or bonfire.”

Proposed Solutions: One prevailing theme throughout these interviews was students not knowing where to go for help and not understanding what different offices do. Suggestions for improvement include:

- Complete overhaul of campus signage. Include name of major student support departments/offices in each building (i.e. Swen Parson: Financial Aid, Bursar’s Office, Law School)
- Better training for all staff members. Create materials to help those answering phones with FAQs, key offices with contacts, phone numbers and locations. Train staff to ‘close the loop’ by always giving students their name and number and invite them to call back if they haven’t received an answer.
- Centralize core student services on central campus. Have key offices operate temporary set-ups in HSC during first few weeks of each semester (Bursar, Financial Aid, Parking, etc.) Easier on students, and forces these offices to interact with each other.
- Hold a Clubs and Activities Fair each semester to encourage student engagement.
- Create a mini ‘campustown’ on campus with stores and restaurants, coffee shops, etc.
- Improve student parking and explore other ways of getting from dorms to classroom buildings. Several students said they were constantly late to classes because of distance (walking) and lack of parking.