Northern Illinois University
Bold Futures

Task
“Place all students on a positive career track journey, including mentoring connections with alums.”

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Summary
Overall, students are having a positive experience at NIU but each respondent had a negative comment or two. NIU’s friendly environment appears to contribute to this positive experience. Also, students who are more involved in activities appear to be having a more positive experience.

Knowing someone that graduated from NIU or being from the Sycamore/DeKalb area may be part of the reason for choosing to attend NIU. It certainly increases awareness of and familiarity with NIU.

Overall, mentoring and internship programs will likely be well received by students but they may not be for everyone. International and out-of-state students will most likely appreciate a mentor due to being unfamiliar with the U.S. or not knowing a NIU graduate. Good advisors and mentors will also benefit (smoother career path) students yet to decide on a major field of study. Some students already know what they want to do, how to get to their goal, or have friends and family that already serve as mentors.

Recommendations/Ideas
- Offer mentoring and internship opportunities for those who want it.
- Improve Placement Office services (including networking opportunities).
- Properly train all academic advisors.
- Offer a length of time or number of semesters guarantee. If an advisor tells a student to take a course and it turns out to be unnecessary, the student should not have to pay for expenses related to that course or any other expenses associated with additional time spent at school.
- Capitalize on the friendly campus environment. Increase student activities (especially during the winter months), both within and outside fields of study.
- Improve the campus parking situation.
- Address international and possibly out-of-state students that want to work on campus but may not have references to qualify for on-campus and off-campus (DeKalb, Sycamore) employment.
- Coordinate grading systems and syllabi for multiple sections of the same course in a given semester.
- Determine how to most effectively inform students of available resources and new initiatives.
- Increase awareness of NIU among those age groups likely to pursue higher education.
Interview Results

Respondent Demographics
A total of 8 interviews were completed among a diverse group of students.

**Ethnicity:** 1 Filipino, 1 Asian from India, 1 African-American, 5 Caucasians

**Year in School:** 4 freshmen, 1 sophomore, 2 seniors, 1 Post-Graduate

**Male/Female:** 3 Females, 5 Males

**Major:** Family & Child Studies, Computer Science, Mechanical Engineering, Geology & Environmental Geosciences, Business Administration, Meteorology, Biology, Environmental Geosciences

NIU Experience Thus Far

**Positive Comments**
- Excellent (1 comment), good (2 comments) experiences
- Employed as a campus tour guide and have learned a lot about the campus
- Have made great connections
- People at NIU are very friendly (2 comments) and it feels like home
- Campus is the right size
- Chose NIU based on its excellent curriculum for computer science and feedback from NIU graduate he knew
- Orientation sessions were very helpful and well organized
- Feel welcomed
- Excellent orientation activities
- Attended an internship fair and received a call for an internship
- Enjoy fellow students and activities planned by the department and student groups within
- It has been great. Professors approachable and willing to help. Advisors great at pointing me in the right direction. Lots of activities and opportunities to attend professional meetings.
- Good hanging around with friends
- Getting used to being away from home and being on his own
- Joined cheer squad
- Positive about classes
- Living in Neptune due to its location.
- A good system in place for welcoming students on campus through admission
- There are lots of resources

**Negative Comments**
- Experience with community advisor.
- Improve on Late Night Ride because it takes a long time for them to come.
- Things are expensive
- Some classes are tough
- Need more single rooms in Neptune
- No air conditioning in Neptune
- Some classes are boring
- Need better food in dining halls
- Need closer parking for Neptune residents
- Was ill advised and took classes I didn’t need to take, wasting time and thousands of dollars
• Parking continues to be a problem
• Limited on-campus activities during the winter months
• Frustrated when required to take mainframe classes that are not applicable to him
• Upset at how international students are treated when applying for campus jobs. Scored very high on placement test but not hired due to not being able to provide local references
• Campus appearance. As a tour guide I hear frequent complaints about trash on the ground
• Resources available to students are not well advertised

Knowing Any NIU Alumni
Two respondents do not know someone who is a NIU graduate. The other respondents either live in the area (Sycamore) and are familiar with NIU or have friends, family or casual acquaintances that attended NIU.

Positive Career Track Definition and Where Students See Themselves in 5 – 10 Years
• Graduate and get a good job
• Start a company and possibly work in the U.S. if the opportunity arises
• Improvement in lifestyle based on career
• Working at a well-respected institution
• Good-paying job
• Start/support a family
• Wants to be a veterinarian (NIU needs a vet program)
• Necessary skills & qualifications to succeed in field

Mentoring Connections and Internships
Six respondents like the idea of mentoring and some specifically mentioned internships.
• Could help with career planning, smoother career path, and what to look for job wise
• Could help negotiate American market, better understand expectations, starting a company
• Could be interested and can see benefitting from it
• Would like access to an alumni mentor
• Helpful with getting an internship, learning from professionals, gaining networks
• Form a relationship, get guidance, workout with them, do volunteer work, and internships

Two respondents did not feel the need for a mentor provided through NIU.
• Have uncles who are engineers. It could be an activity without tangible results.
• Has access to enough mentors. Just wants the education and classes to succeed.