**Group theme:**
"Place all students on a positive career track journey, including mentoring connections with alums."

**Overview:**
Our group was able to interview four students, and interviewers tried to focus in on our assigned task of how we can place students on a positive career track that includes alumni connections. All four students indicated that they have enjoyed or would like to see more opportunities to meet or talk with alumni and to seek internships. They seemed most interested in meeting alumni who are from their very specific areas of interest or majors, rather than general alumni from different areas of expertise or backgrounds. While appreciative of the opportunities they have had in these areas, they did not seem to fully grasp how valuable these might be, and a few had not pursued alumni networking opportunities that were available to them. One suggestion that seemed helpful would be to build an alumni networking experience or event into their student path, so maybe have that be on an advising checklist with a list of on campus resources that could help set those up. Certain programs at the university already require such things, so a model is in place (the NIU MPA program is an example of that, and most graduate programs require that in the form of a colloquium).

**Student interviews:**

**Lea**
Lea is an Elementary Education major but has not been invited directly through her major to network with alums. She said if the Elementary Education program had an alum network set up for students that she would benefit from seeing the optimism that previous students have that would prove that getting through college wasn't that bad. Sometimes you need that kind of help mid-way through a program and she feels that is lacking. She looks to others because it is calming to know that you are walking in someone’s footsteps that survived that same journey you are currently struggling in.

She would like to be able to ask questions about classes and get ideas for lesson planning. It would be a big help to have someone mentor her through graduation and that she would participate in a mentoring program once she graduates to help others out.

**Jackie**
Jackie is a graduating theatre tech. She is planning on teaching in Korea for the next two years, and then continuing grad school at U of I. She tells me that at U of I, the portfolio review takes place in Chicago, with a broader review base. She is aware that some NIU alums work locally for Upstaging and the Organic Theatre Company, which was her best connection to alum. She keeps in touch with recent grads on Facebook and other social media sites. Jackie is currently in a class called "Theatre Business". She said they do spend time discussing the next step after graduation, and she participates in monthly design meetings. She did not seem particularly concerned about connections/alum/mentoring or her career path.

**K**
K is very much a non-traditional student. She is a part-time, second semester student who is also a wife and mother of three. She moved years ago from South America and English is her second language. She also utilizes services from the Center for Students with Disabilities. K started at Waubonsee Junior
College and transferred to NIU because of her particular program and because of location. Initially very concerned about the size of NIU and the competitiveness of her program, she found much support from professors and counselors and the Center. She felt that NIU offered what she needed, especially with regard to computers and the library, but that there was a need for more up to date lab equipment so that students could work on equipment like they would be expected to use in the field. With regard to how NIU alumni could help, K thought that they might help with fundraising for equipment, and that they might provide students with some supportive insight as to what it would really be like in the working field along with practical tips from their experience.

Sarah

Sarah is a hospitality major who technically finished her degree work in December but is taking two final classes and will be completely done in May. She was offered a job this week by Marriott and will begin working there in a few weeks as a catering manager and is very excited. Her ultimate goal is to work as an interior designer for hotels and restaurants. She had a good experience at NIU overall. She did not take advantage of opportunities to meet and network with alumni, but said that she did feel that those were available to her and the network was accessible and welcoming. She said she did not take advantage mainly because she was trying to balance a demanding class and work schedule. She helps her mother run a bed and breakfast in a historic home when she is not at work, and she also took up various catering gigs at nights and on weekends. She chose NIU because she grew up in Elmhurst and her mother moved here a few years ago, and she wanted to be able to continue working with her mother on their business while going to school full time. She had a lot of interviews and job offers following her graduation and is happy with how she was prepared. She has been working as a design intern for the College of Education and has been able to do interior design work for a hallway renovation and department branding project, and she feels that was very helpful in building her portfolio and was equally beneficial for the college. She was invited to have lunch with two alumni who have worked in her specific career path but she did not pursue those offers.