Topic: Place all students on a positive career track journey, including mentoring connections with alums.

Our team had several ideas that came from their interviews with NIU students, but the theme of mentoring came up the most. We discussed mentoring on two levels:

A. Mentoring to help students with acclimating to campus and taking advantage of resources available to them that they might not recognize immediately. The university could develop a mentoring program in which students are assigned mentors from day one. The mentors could be undergraduate students in their junior or senior years. Some of the students we interviewed identified other students as being valuable mentors. It would be beneficial but not completely necessary for these mentors to come from the same major or career background as their mentees. What would be more important would be having students who were well on their way to academic success at NIU who could serve as outstanding role models to new students.

B. Mentoring to help students progress toward entry into their selected career fields. These mentors would most likely be alumni connected through the Alumni Association, and a direct link between the student’s career path and the career held by the alumnus would very much be necessary. Both the Alumni Association and Career Services conduct this kind of program but on relatively small scales. One difficulty identified with this kind of program is the lack of a direct match of students or alumni. For some academic programs, there may be a good number of students and alumni to connect, but for other programs there would be the risk of either too many students and not enough alumni or vice versa. A concentrated marketing effort to both populations as well as buy-in from faculty and staff, who could serve as referral sources for the program, would be necessary to increase the chances of success. Another potential risk for the program would be if volunteers – either students or alumni – do not participate at the level that they initially commit to. That is, students or alumni may drop out prematurely or not live up to the commitments that they make. This risk can be lessened by 1) keeping obligations to a manageable level, 2) establishing clear instructions to all participants about what is required, and 3) providing incentives for participation.

Other ideas that came from the interviews included:
- Getting alumni involved in the recruitment process
- Increasing the variety of internships available to students
- Providing solid information about career placement statistics and an insight into what careers in students’ chosen fields are like
- Making sure that faculty and staff are aware of services available to students to help the referral process