**Bold Futures: March 31/Table 9**

**Problem/opportunity:** Place all students on a positive career track journey, including mentoring connections with alums.

Students like the mentor concept and want mentors; part of this stems from dissatisfaction with academic advisers. Most students who have already had mentors, whether at the peer level or working professionals, enjoyed positive experiences. Others, however, experienced a lack of contact from their mentors.

Meanwhile, some students who want mentors are unsure where to find them. This is especially true of students who are not in the University Honors Program or in colleges that already have created internal mentoring programs.

To ensure that every NIU student who wants a mentor receives one – and to guarantee that this program works as designed to create Student Career Success – we believe **NIU must create an Office of Mentors.** The office would need a director and staff members.

Office of Mentors staff would:

- recruit, screen and register potential mentors (and we believe this pool would include not only alums but **professors, annuitants and members of the community**);
- pair mentors with students; and
- monitor mentor-mentee progress to **ensure that both sides are contributing** actively and appropriately.

NIU also should **offer course credit for taking a mentor at no additional charge** – neither tuition nor fees. This will further promote participation.

**Incoming freshmen should receive personal invitations to participate.** Then, during the “front door” of **summer orientation** sessions, students and parents should hear more about the program while they are separated. This will build excitement on both sides, and during the drive home that day, parents are likely to encourage their students to participate.

For freshmen in the program, the mentors must function not only as academic/career advisers but also as pseudo parents. Sometimes, freshmen just need their moms or dads – someone who can lend an ear or a shoulder to cry on, or to help with a laundry emergency – as they try to balance newly found freedom, academics, social life and homesickness.

**Mentors should receive no financial compensation**; their reward is the knowledge that they made a difference in the life of a college student.

While there are added costs for NIU in terms of staffing and free-of-charge credit, **improved retention and the tuition and fees that brings will possibly recoup those dollars.** Also, word-of-mouth from NIU’s good mentoring experiences might boost enrollment and revenue.