Team Members: Janet Love-Moore, Tracy Wescott, Joseph King, Alan Rosenbaum, Andrew Otieno, Ken Mundy.

Findings:

Based upon our student interviews it became obvious that those students who made an effort to take advantage of opportunities such as career counseling, internships and mentorship opportunities tended to have a better, more satisfying experience at NIU and feel better about their prospects for success in the future.

Nearly all of the students we spoke to said that they would have an interest in learning about such things. However, it also became apparent that not all students are aware of, or feel compelled to pursue existing opportunities of that type. We concluded that this was often due to lack of awareness or a lack of motivation to pursue them. Commuter students in particular seem to feel less involved and are less aware of these opportunities.

Insights:

Upon reflection, our team agreed that the university could improve upon communicating these opportunities to all students – those living on campus, off campus or commuting.

Ideas:

The team concluded that the most comprehensive way to expose students to these types of opportunities would be to build them into the base experience offered to all NIU students from the day they arrive on campus - whether as a new freshman or transfer student.

Our specific recommendations would be:

- All incoming students, freshman or transfer, should be given the opportunity to be matched prior to their arrival with a mentor to ease their adjustment to campus. These mentors could be peers, faculty, staff or community members. Regardless, all mentors should be trained to provide basic information and expected to adhere to basic guidelines for frequency of contact, topics covered, etc. – while at the same time striving to develop a relationship that allows them to be not only a resource, but also a compassionate guide.
- Very early in their career on campus, students should be exposed to the career services center to learn about the variety of services offered and how they can be of benefit long before graduation.
- Students should receive some sort of internship counseling to help them understand the value of internships, the benefits they offer and specific instruction on how to find those opportunities.
- Students should be actively recruited to participate in mentoring relationships with alumni who work in their fields of interest and a formal program should be created to do this on a large scale.
- On-campus employment opportunities should allow for potential mentoring experiences. Employers should be encouraged to participate in a mentoring relationship. Guidance would be provided for all interested mentors/mentees to ensure effective mentorship.

While we hesitate to say that all of these experiences should be “required” of students, the group agreed that they should be offered as part and parcel of every student’s experience. In other words, these mentoring opportunities would be offered to all students throughout their NIU career. Simply put, participating in mentoring programs should become part of the “NIU way” and marketed as such.