TEAM MEMBERS: Student, Ricco Ramos – NIU Staff, Cherie Hauptman, Bill McCoy, Anne Hardy, Gail Taylor, Andy Small – Alumnus, Pete Walton. – Six Interviewing Questions were asked of each Student – Here are the Responses:

1 - What is the first year residential experience?
Overall it appears to be positive. The CA is a key ingredient. CA gets the student exposed, involved and is a resource. Social interaction and the CA is a common theme. Meals are important part of the experience. Security and convenience were points mentioned.

2 – What do you like about it?
Responses were mostly positive. They do have opinions about which residence hall they live in - mostly new verses old. The CA is an integral part of a positive or negative experience. The social aspects of meeting different people and sometimes being forced to do so and also making new friends. Food and the meal plan, convenience of location, laundry, and labs are important. Being on your own, learning independence were important points. An important remark was “NIU treats you like an adult while Community Colleges treatment is like an extension of High School”.

3 – What do you not like about it?
It was unanimous that the bathrooms are a problem with descriptions like – nasty – gross – etc. and this applied to all residence halls. The CA not performing their duties is a problem such as not enforcing the rules. Food in all of the residence halls except Gilbert was referred to as unsatisfactory. Neptune and Douglas have room temperature control problems. Relationships with other students were seen as a negative by some. One remarked about students dropping out of school in their residence halls. Expense was also mentioned.

4 – How can we improve the first year residential experience?
Establish a roommate pairing and matching system (i.e. STEM) and have themed learning floors. Create partnerships/mentorships with upper class students to help freshman. Have specific events for 1st year students so they get involved. There are fun and social ways other than Fraternities and Sororities. Make sure CA’s do their jobs concerning rules and getting students involved. There is a need for amenity improvements i.e. Bathrooms – lighting – room temperatures plus more healthy food offerings.

5 – How does this experience contribute to student career success?
The residence hall experience is a make or break for student retention. The student is involved in social networking and collaborating with peers, establishing lifelong friendships and relationships plus making social adjustments. There is a need for more focus on making the freshman experience more memorable. Interviewees said social environment and decent food keeps the student positive for studying. One student noted that their CA cares and wants residents to be successful. The CA has floor meetings and provides recognition for studying – the Model CA.

6 – How should this experience contribute to student career success?
Should help the student transition to the real world, to mature and grow up. The experience needs to lay the foundation for what you want to study, what organizations to be involved with and what it takes to be successful. The importance of the CA comes up again and again along with roommate pairing and floors based on majors will help motivate students. Quoting one student “freshmen have television/movie expectations of what fields and jobs are like and not realistic ones”. Another quote “the residence hall experience should be so good that students want to stay more than one year”.

HERE ARE OUR OPPORTUNITIES FOR NIU TO EXCEL

Part B: The responses to our survey clearly show the importance of the residence hall experience. Many factors make this a good experience or not which includes, the CA’s, the infrastructure, dining provisions and cleaning services. Unfortunately students have come to expect less than quality at NIU and other colleges. How to change the impression?

1 – A comprehensive outline, “The Housing and Dining Residential Curriculum”, appears to be in place. The Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management plan would engage our students, but no mention was made by anyone during our interviews with them. Where is the disconnect? How to bridge this gap?

2 – Why not make NIU residence halls the “BEST” of all Universities? The CA is the key for the student experience. Why not make them the “BEST” in the College business.

3 – Establish the residence hall as a Living and Learning Center based on like curriculum or shared outside interests not tied to academics. The theme of the hall would forge relationships; establish a buddy system, and other ideas to enhance the student experience. This is an opportunity to develop the role of the CA, who should relate to the theme of the floor or hall. They can be developed into mentors and success coaches.