Bold Futures – Table 1 (3/19/14)

Question: Ensure the first year residence hall experience results in student success

Interviewees
Sophomore – Special Education for Visually Impaired (female, lived in Neptune and is there 2nd year as well)
Sophomore (male, lived in Stevenson)
Sophomore – Chemistry (female, lived in New Hall)
Sophomore – Political Science (female, lived in Douglas)
Sophomore – (female, lived in Stevenson)
Junior – Sculpture (female, lived in Douglas 1st semester and moved to Lincoln 2nd semester)
Senior – Sociology (female, lived in Douglas 1st year and moved to Neptune 2nd year)
Senior – Political Science (female, lived in Douglas)
1st year graduate student – M.A. in English (male, lived in Grant Tower B)
The nine students represented living experiences from all of the residence halls (Douglas, Grant, Lincoln, Neptune, New Hall, and Stevenson) and time periods (last year to 5 years ago), but there are some patterns that span across the board.

**Positives:** A few of the students said that meeting people and getting to know them was the most positive aspect of the residence hall life, as one senior put it, “it provided the true college experience.” Those who said they enjoyed their residence hall experience the most credited the CA with creating an environment that promoted meeting and getting along with the other students on the floor (although there were only 3 positives among the 9 interviews). The grad student noted that his CA found out where all of the students had classes and then took them on a campus tour so they would know where they were going. A senior described game nights and floor trips to the basketball game, and a sophomore described the experience as “a real family atmosphere.”

**Negatives:** However, there were far more negative perspectives expressed by the students.

1. Some complained that the residence halls on the west side of campus were inconvenient. The sophomore male noted that his apartment is closer to his classes than Stevenson was, while three others noted that the bus system was unreliable, especially when they had to get across campus to areas like the Music Building, etc.
2. Others said the construction around the residence halls on the west side of campus changed the traffic flow around the building and, as a result, made navigating difficult and impacted getting to classes on time. One, the grad student, suggested giving a discount on housing to those students who are impacted by the construction.
3. Another concern was the roommate selections process. Several said they had to switch roommates or buildings to resolve the conflicts. They also noted that living in an apartment was cheaper because they could split the rent and live with people they chose.
4. Those who said they were serious students objected to the number of parties, consistent noise, and “pervasive smell of weed” without any attempts to stop the behaviors. These individuals all stated that the apartments are quieter.
5. Dining hall selections, food quality, and schedules were also problematic for several of the students. They noted that being in an apartment was better because they could choose when and what to eat and that it was cheaper because they did not rely on ordering carry out food.
6. By far the greatest complaint was the lack of interaction with the CAs, who were generally unavailable and/or uncommunicative, lacked people skills, were poorly trained, or behaved as friends instead of mentors. As one senior put it, “I still see her around campus and know who she is, but I don’t have the faintest idea what her name is.”

In general, the students did not attribute their success to their residence hall experiences. They said they found support from friends and people they met through campus organizations, from positive academic experiences, and from the realization that they needed to become more mature and responsible. Based on these findings, we offer the following suggestions:

- NIU needs to carefully assess the proposed two-year requirement for living in the residence halls if students can save money and more conveniently access campus from apartments and Greek living housing.
- NIU needs to review the CA selection and training processes since those with more positive CAs were happier with their college experience.
- NIU needs to examine how other universities approach the roommate selection process.
- NIU should provide shuttle bus service more directly from the west side residence halls to central and the east side buildings.
- NOTE: Several of the students said they appreciated that someone had asked them about their residence hall experiences. Perhaps we need to listen to what students are saying more consistently.