Bold Futures Team – “Suitcase” campus

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Background Information
Our team was tasked with interviewing students to determine their impressions of NIU being a “suitcase” school and sought to discover some reasons why this may be the case and whether or not students think it’s a problem.

As a team we interviewed 14 students of which, 13 were IL residents originally from towns within a 100 mile radius of NIU, and 1 is an international student from China. 11 of the students are undergrads and 3 are graduate students. 5 are female and 9 are male. Only 1 student interviewed reported living in the dorms, 8 students live off-campus, but in DeKalb near the University and 5 commute.

Findings
While some students did not understand the term “suitcase school”, the majority of students did state that they think NIU would fit that description. Some directly identified themselves as students who contribute to the label and those who commute didn’t see the label as a problem for themselves, although some did indicate that they can see how it could be hard for students who do live on or near the campus. Those who commute state they do so to save money. Students also as a whole indicated that they do not live in the dorms because they find it too expensive.

Students were also asked about general positive and negative experiences on campus. Overall, the students were pleased with the education they are receiving. Several students indicated that the location and lack of activities were negatives, the one exception who listed community as a positive cited living on campus and the recent success of the football team.

The large majority of the students leave the campus on weekends. Many made reference to lack of activities and shopping, and DeKalb being a small town. The international student interviewed stated that although she doesn’t have the option to go home on weekends, if she did she would from time to time, but she does travel into the suburbs often for authentic cuisine. Many students spoke about busy schedules and lack of money as reasons for not being as active and involved in events and/or the campus community.

When asked if they were aware of events on campus and in the community, many reported that they were aware of events on campus, but not as aware of events in the surrounding community. Some also stated that while there are events on campus many times they are speakers or too academic in nature and would prefer more interactive workshops and fun activities.

Suggestions From Students
Students were also asked if they had any suggestions or ideas of what could be offered by the campus and wider DeKalb community and they had many suggestions.

- Reopen Campus Cinema
- Fix-up the Huskie Den
- Utilize the Convocation Center for Events
- Not just drinking
- Mini Golf & Go Carts
- Transportation to and from Chicago so students don’t feel trapped
- Group trips and Activities
- More resources and Food options etc. in the Student Center can go to many other campuses that have a more vibrant Student Center or Student Union.

Students get a lot of their activity information from the Northern Star, but also suggested text messaging and greater social media presence.