NIU BOLD FUTURES WORKSHOP

Understanding and Enhancing Student Experience

Task: Transform NIU from a ‘Suitcase’ Culture into a 7 Day/Week Collegiate Experience

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Findings: Our goal was to find out why students don’t stay in DeKalb on the weekends. After interviewing various majors and age groups, we discovered some interesting connections across all of our students. Almost every student said that he/she went home on the weekends to be with family. Some were more specific about home-cooked food, good beds, and free laundry. As a matter of fact, laundry was the other connection across most students. What is interesting, however, is when asked what would make them stay on the weekends, none of them mentioned better laundry, nicer beds, etc. Instead, they were focused on ‘stuff’ to do. Most wanted to see better entertainment venues that did not involve alcohol, affordable restaurants that were not fast food, interesting shops in downtown DeKalb, and more recreational activities. Many students pointed out that late night offerings are dismal, both in entertainment and food.

Insights: NIU and the surrounding communities need some places besides bars where students can go, hang out with friends, meet new friends, show off their talents and basically have a good time without alcohol. More traditions could keep students here over the weekends. Some colleges have seasonal events that students have to prepare for, which keeps them around campus to get ready for the event. Additionally, parents may visit more often to attend these events, rather than students going home.

Ideas: NIU and/or DeKalb need to consider opening underage, late night venues on the weekends. Late night bowling, movies, dancing, bands, and open mic performances should be the focus with the understanding that late means after 10pm.

RHA needs to rethink planning events on weekdays only. They know students go home on the weekends and want people to show up for their events, which is understandable. However, the opposite needs to happen. The RHA events should entice students to stay.

Lastly, NIU could better connect with “Corn Fest” and “Kite Fest” but should also consider creating new traditions, especially late in the fall and early in the spring. Some suggestions: “Taste of NIU”, “Campus Block Parties”, and “Survivor – Dorm Style.”