Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back to another eventful fall semester! The academic year began with memorable floods and tornado warnings, and I am heartened by the very warm welcome and student-centered response you gave to our students.

We spent time at the annual State of the Division presentation reflecting on our past. A video illustrated the differences in student engagement and service in the late 1960s and 1970s versus the twenty-first century. Past chief Student Affairs officers joined us as we recognized their significant contributions to NIU’s Division of Student Affairs.

We also reflected on last year’s successes, and it was amazing to watch our core values in action in the accomplishment of these goals. Inclusive communities were created with the groundbreaking for Northern View, which provides housing and services for students with dependents. Partnerships focused on student learning were created with the establishment of learning outcomes and related assessment tools. Student-centered service remained a primary focus with the creation of a four-year benchmarking schedule across the Division, development of new revenue streams through grants and sponsorships, and the design of a marketing strategy to introduce the Leadership Academy to the NIU community. Finally, collaborative relationships were built as we made important progress toward a six-year residential renovation plan that will begin with Gilbert Hall.

While we celebrate our past successes, I look forward to our future with great excitement! I want to reiterate my gratitude for the dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm each of you provides daily. Student Affairs is a team of talented and committed professionals who continue to provide innovative programs and services for our students. As we proceed into the 2007-2008 academic year, I hope each of you is empowered by the work you do—work that inspires students and enhances their intellectual and personal development. THEIR success is OUR success!

Forward, Together Forward!

Brian O. Hemphill, Ph.D.
Vice President for Student Affairs

Students’ Legal Assistance

Students’ Legal Assistance (SLA) provides services to over 1,000 NIU students annually. Assistance includes advice and consultation, legal advocacy, and (in appropriate cases) court representation. Areas of practice include landlord/tenant relations, criminal misdemeanor, ordinance and traffic violations, consumer, tort, discrimination, public benefits, domestic relations, and employment. The office is funded by the NIU Student Association through student activity fees, and services are free to all fee-paying students.

Students’ Legal Assistance also has an active legal education program focusing on debt counseling and budget planning, apartment renting, buying a car, interacting with the police, and other topics of interest to students. The office maintains a comprehensive Web site, offers workshops, and makes available forms and brochures advising students of their legal rights. The office also provides notary and voter registration services.

The department continues to respond to new legal issues affecting students as they occur. Last spring SLA counseled nearly 80 students threatened with lawsuits by the RIAA (Record Industry Association of America) for illegally downloading music. This summer and fall, the office assisted students whose apartments were damaged by flooding.
Bridge Builder Award Program

The Bridge Builder Award Program (BBAP) is an initiative of the Diversity and Equity Office. This pilot program will recognize the year-long efforts of student organizations that support the Division’s commitment to promoting an inclusive campus community.

Participants will demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of human differences through the following learning outcomes: knowledge acquisition, interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, and civic engagement. Student organizations must commit to participating in four events and helping to sponsor at least one program. Participants will maintain journals that document their active involvement.

Designated programs include the Unity in Diversity Steering Committee Twentieth Anniversary Kick-Off, American Notions Fine Art Series, American Roundtable Series, and the Diversity and Equity Forum. Past Multicultural Curriculum Transformation Institute participants will be involved in this initiative. Student organizations that successfully complete the Bridge Builder Award Program will be recognized at the Diversity and Equity Awards Gala in April.

Northern View Community

Northern View Community is the first residential facility built at NIU in 38 years. The community serves students with partners or dependents, graduate, law, non-traditional, and upperclass students. Northern View officially opened three of its six residential facilities on August 22. Although there were a number of delays, Housing & Dining staff did all they could to welcome students and begin building community within the new facility.

Every effort was made to ensure that students were not only heard, but well-informed and part of the process of resolving concerns and issues. Meetings were held with all residents to inform them about relevant information regarding construction. Vice President Hemphill, Associate Vice President Jones, and the Housing & Dining Staff also held meetings for students to express their concerns and provided follow-up meetings to relay information relative to those concerns.

Despite the staggered move-in, all residential buildings were open as of September 7. The Community Center, which contains offices, study rooms, a computer lab, and a play center, is expected to open on October 15.

Northern View is staffed by a veteran residential life team. Melissa Burlingame, a former Lincoln/Douglas Hall Director, serves as the Community Director. Minh Chau Nguyen, the former Graduate Assistant Director of University Apartments, has joined Melissa as the Graduate Assistant Community Director. The staff also includes a secretary, two community development assistants, and student office assistants.

Thank you to all who have supported this project. Despite some opening challenges, this facility is not only beautiful, but also houses a strengthening community that meets the specific needs of its residents.
The GA Experience Has Begun!

For graduate assistants, the practice of assisting fellow students in their development is common. While we advise others, however, we also seek to easily transition into our new roles. The GA Experience was specifically created to assist graduate assistants with their personal and professional development at NIU. During the inaugural Orientation hosted in August, graduate students in the Division of Student Affairs met with GAs in other areas of NIU. The GA blackboard community was also launched to provide an additional means of communication. The intention of the online community, the professional development series, and position review guidelines, is to ensure graduate students receive support and guidance to become outstanding new professionals.

Whether graduate students are transitioning or developing purpose, these supportive environments will assist in their growth by offering the following relationships: direct supervisors providing insight and guidance, peers providing friendship, and the GA Experience providing professional development, resources, and social programming. These encouraging relationships will help Graduate Assistants excel in their professional endeavors.

Advising Students on Campus Safety

The first year of college can be exciting, but while many students transition to campus without difficulty, some will have adjustment issues. One issue students face is personal safety and security. In providing student-centered service, it is essential that staff recognize that some students may have such concerns. The following tips will help you provide support about safety concerns:

• Listen. Allow the student to express the concern. Even if you do not agree, the act of listening is beneficial for the student.
• Try to understand the concern from the student’s perspective. What may frighten one person may not scare another. Some students are exposed to experiences for the first time when they attend college.
• Assist the student to brainstorm possible solutions.
• Explore the student’s relationships on campus. Provide information on departments, student groups, and activities where students can interact and feel connected.
• Avoid dismissing the student’s concern with statements like, “You have nothing to worry about, so forget it.” Work with the student to find ways to feel safer.
• Stay informed about campus issues that may impact student safety.
• Recognize that some fears are justified. Help the student identify choices that can ensure safety.
• Encourage the student to “trust your gut.” If a situation feels unsafe, then it probably should be avoided.
• If a student reports being threatened by an individual, refer the student to Public Safety or Judicial Affairs.
• If the student’s concerns are overwhelming or interfering with daily activities, refer the student to the Counseling and Student Development Center for further assistance.

Remember, in your role as a Student Affairs staff member, students may turn to you for assistance. Steps you taken can have a significant positive impact on students’ lives. If you are unclear about how to respond to a student, please contact CSDC for consultation.

2007-2008 Division Priorities Include:

• Conduct Phase I of the Living & Learning by Design Project
• Identify and respond to students’ needs and expectations regarding technology
• Design and initiate a division-wide, competency-based training and employment program for students and Graduate Assistants
• Appoint a Task Force to review and recommend enhancements to current Academic Residential Programs
• Operationalize the recommendations made by the First Year Experience Task Force Report
• Establish NIU Student Affairs as a leader in the profession via documented professional development activities