

# Engaging Families to Support the Transition of First Year Students



Dr. Frank E. Ross, Ph.D., Vice President for Student Affairs  
Jermaine F. Williams Ed.D., Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs

21<sup>st</sup> National Conference on Students in Transition  
*October 2014*

# Northeastern Illinois University

- Public Hispanic Serving Institution located in Chicago, IL that serves more than 10,000 students and grants baccalaureate and Masters degrees.
- In a 2013 report, *Newsweek* magazine identified Northeastern Illinois University as the sixth best investment among all universities in the nation and number one in Illinois.
- The institution is also identified as one of the most diverse universities in the United States and is consistently recognized as “the most diverse university in the Midwest” by US News & World Report.
- NEIU is federally designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution.

# Vision for the Future

- The Division of Student Affairs will be a national leader in urban higher education and among Hispanic Serving Institutions through its promising practices to support student success (NEIU Division of Student Affairs Strategic Plan, 2013)
  - Excellence in Student Engagement
  - Excellence in Educational Partnerships
  - Excellence in Innovation
  - Excellence in Professional Practice



# Vision for the Future (cont)

- Excellence in Educational Partnerships
  - Action Step: Develop strategies to engage parents and family members as our partners in student success.
- Office of New Student and Family Programs (July, 2012)
  - First-Year Orientation, Transfer Orientation, Family Orientation, Testing Services, Summer Bridge, Family Programming, New Student Welcome (2013), and AskMe Campaign (2013)
  - Development of Departmental five-year strategic plan (2013)
  - FY14 goal of conducting a comprehensive needs assessment for parents and family members of Northeastern students

# Importance of Identifying and Studying Needs of Parents and Families

- Parent interaction with institutions has been increasing (Howe & Strauss, 2000)
- Higher education has been bolstering efforts to support parents and families since the 1970s, increasing dramatically in the 1990s and 2000s (National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, 2013)
- Lack of attention given to roles, beyond financial support (Brozick, 2007), families may play with student development
- Social support that is inclusive of family units is one main component of transition (Schlossberg, 1984)

# Importance of Identifying and Studying Needs of Parents and Families

- Studying parents and families acknowledges the role of the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), which are environments and interactions that may impact student development and include parents
- “Among the many important factors that drive Millennial’s decision to go to college are family, financial considerations, and postcollege aspirations...For example, a larger proportion of Latina/o Millennials (52.1%) as compared to a generation ago (40.0%) report that parental encouragement was a “very important” reason for deciding to go to college. On the other hand, a slightly larger proportion of these same Latina/o Millennials relative to their Generation X peers are choosing their college because they want to live close to home” (Bonner, Marbley, Howard-Hamilton, 2011, p.101)

# Comprehensive Needs Assessment

- Multi-faceted (i.e., quantitative and qualitative, with different instruments)
- Empirical original research
- Sustained (year-long during essential times)
- Formative and Summative

# Data Collection Via Leveraging Programs and Services

- Family Orientation
  - Programmatic Survey
  - Interest Form
  - PECTAC (Parent Expectations of Collegiate Teaching and Caring, Alger 2011)
- Family Brunch
- Family and Parent Council
- New Student Welcome
- Collaboration with Other Programs and Departments



# Analyzing Data – One Instrument

- Instrumentation - PECTAC (Alger, 2011)
  - Constructs of Teaching and Caring introduced and defined
  - Developed based on Five Benchmarking Concepts of College Student Report of the NSSE
- Procedures
  - IRB Approval
  - Data Collection
- Sample relatively representative to student demographics
  - 31.2% (n=20) Partial Response Rate
  - 21.8% (n=14) Completion rate
- Limitation:
  - Potential reasons for non-response
    - Education
    - Cultural Bias
    - Internet Access

# Analyzing Data (cont.)

## Respondents

- 75.0% (n=15) Fathers
- 70.0% (n=14) Married
- 50.0% (n=10) Female students, 50.0% (n=10) Male students
- 45.0% (n=9) Hispanic
- 60.0% (n=14) Hold Associates Degree or less
- 65.0% (n=13) First Time College Parent
- 95.0% (n=19) were A Little Involved or Not Involved at All in the college selection process
  - Of (n=9) who identified as Hispanic parents, 1 responded A little Involved, 8 Not Involved At All

# Analyzing Data – Family Needs Instrument

- 119 family members responded to the following request, “Please rate your level of concern with your student's ability to effectively manage personal finances”.
  - More than 74% of respondents indicated that they were somewhat concerned or extremely concerned with their student’s ability to manage personal finances.
- 98 family members responded to the following open-ended question: “What type of information would you like to receive about the University? For example: Financial aid deadlines, class registration dates, finals, withdrawal dates”.
  - A little more than 38% of respondents identified that they would like to receive financial aid information from the institution.

# Lessons Learned

- Communication (e.g., verbal, written, and electronic)
- Types of programs and services
- Timing
- Appropriate institution administrators
- Types of information needed/ questions asked
- Partnerships (internal and external)



# Systematic Approach to Support

- Major developments in the past three years:
  - Dedicated department for family programming
  - Enhanced opportunities for family involvement to support student success
  - Increased communication from the University to family members, and strengthened family orientation—including Spanish-language sessions

# New and/or Enhanced Programs and Services

- University Family Guide in English and Spanish
- 15 first-year student orientations during the summer
  - 7 first-year student orientations include a concurrent family orientation
  - 4 family orientations are held in Spanish
- Parent and family council (iterations)
- Family brunch
- Family newsletter
- Bilingual FAFSA Completion Family Workshops
- Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) workshops
- Consistent Spanish voice in publications
- Noche de familia
- Events for admitted students

# Final Takeaways

- Support of Senior Leadership
- Espoused and Enacted Division Mission and Vision with Clear Goals and Objectives
- Assessable Programs and Services Aligned with Mission and Vision
- Dedicated Resources
- Data Informed Decision-Making by Leveraging a Culture of Evidence and Inquiry

# Questions?

Frank E. Ross, Ph.D., Vice President for Student Affairs  
[f-ross@neiu.edu](mailto:f-ross@neiu.edu)

Jermaine F. Williams, Ed.D., Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, Northeastern Illinois University  
[j-williams26@neiu.edu](mailto:j-williams26@neiu.edu)

