

To: University Community
From: BarBara M. Scott and Santos Rivera
Re: Presidential Task Force on the Millennium Student
Meeting of April 18, 2007 at Chicago Teachers' Center

Introduction by Dr. BarBara Scott and Dr. Santos Rivera:

- 1) Underscored the commitment to maintaining a diverse student body
- 2) The purpose is not to debate who the millennium student is or the agenda but to obtain input from stakeholders in several areas:
 - a) Recruiting students for success
 - b) Eliminating barriers and enhancing supports
 - c) Developing new matrices for the new student
 - d) Advocating for the new student
- 3) Two State legislators are working with the taskforce: David Miller and Antonia Berrios

FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

Student Retention and Experience

CTC works extensively in high schools. Research and experience show that students stay in school if they feel they belong. NEIU has an outstanding team-building program. Adventure education should be part of the 1st Year Experience. Research also shows that support is very important. Need to look at tutoring, availability of the professors, so students feel they can get support if they need to keep up with the work.

Feeling that one belongs is not the highest priority for some students. Needed to know that they are getting a solid education is sometimes more important. Community is also important to new students.

My son attended NEIU for a semester before he started another university. He was not well treated. First, advisors wouldn't accept that he wanted to be a student-at-large without a major. He took four courses and thought two of them weren't up to his standard and wanted to change. His advisor told him that he had to visit the professors of any other classes that interested him to find out if he could get in. Overall, he felt like there was no place to turn for help or advice. My son would have understood if someone had explained, but no one bothered to. My son won't go back. It isn't just him, either. He's told his entire social network about what happened to him at NEIU.

NEIU needs a better cafeteria – something more personalized. Students need a place to work that is accessible to food and drink. The cafeteria is built to socialize, not work. Maybe smaller, square tables where people can spread out and work, not round tables. You have to go to computer areas to work and there is no food or drinks allowed.

NEIU should bring students and families in for activities. It isn't connected to the community.

Faculty

There are good stories. The same sister was majoring in Spanish. She took a philosophy course and was challenged by the teachers. He told her that she was smart enough to take more challenging courses and now she has a double major. Here is an instance when a teacher encouraged a student to take fuller advantage of NEIU's resources.

Academic Support

I found that having extensive internship opportunities in my selected field was very important. It motivated me to stay focused. It was a way to apply what I was learning.

Student Services

Students need better customer service. There are nice people on campus, but there are abusive and mean people working with students. An example is undocumented student who went to pay for his classes. A cashier insisted that he had to pay the international student rate. Luckily, his sister was there to pay for her classes and she told the cashier that in Illinois, they paid in-state tuition costs. The cashier argued the point with her. If his sister hadn't been there, the young man would probably have left. How many students did this cashier turn away who never came back? Staff should have been trained, she should have known about this. Why didn't she?

There were instances in the past of students being treated badly when they went to get their student teaching placement. This has gotten better.

Time to Degree

Required courses are offered and this delays graduation. This is a frequent problem. In some departments, professors are teaching on an-off semester so that students get the courses they need to graduate.

Academic Advising

Students end up in the wrong major. They change, then their graduation is delayed. Maybe they don't understand what they are getting into when they pick majors. It goes back to better advising.

I met with my formal advisor once during my freshman orientation session. After that, I turned to the teachers I knew, teachers who were friends, to advise me. But I could meet the faculty socially through my church and campus activities. NEIU students don't have the off-campus options.

In some small liberal arts schools, faculty has 12 hours and sometimes more office hours. This has to do with customer service. At NEIU, we need more formal and informal guidance. Adults throughout the university have to see themselves as advisors, guides.

Student Population

NEIU is obviously offering something people want because we have students, but we have an admittedly non-traditional population to whom we are offering a traditional education. This doesn't fit.

Tuition

I don't see a problem with raising tuition in order to deliver services, but we have to deliver to the students.

Chicago Teachers' Center's Engagement and Service

Right now, our students are entering high school. As they get older, we'll be focused more on them. In the past GEAR UP has done lots of college trips so parents can see their children as college students.

Parents are both ignorant and afraid of college. We try to make it less foreign.

Parents don't understand "I have to study," or that "reading" is work. What is the background and education of African-Americans and Latinos? What do we do for parents?

In addition to parent orientations and parent weekends, we should consider spouse and family orientations. Do we ask students what they need, e.g., what time is most convenient for classes? Do we ask students why they leave?

CTC wrote a FIPSY grant. It focused on how to work with families so they are better able to support students. Basically, it acknowledges that the family goes to college, not just the students. Ask Amy Hendricksen for a copy.