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University Relations

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NON-MATRICULATING TRANSFER STUDENTS
ONLINE BULLETIN BOARD
OCTOBER 10, 2019
The Admissions department wanted to conduct market research to understand why transfer students admitted to WVU failed to matriculate. The findings will be used to inform decisions related to the transfer process itself, as well as future communications with prospective transfer students.

Specifically, the research objectives were:
- To determine how easy or difficult students perceive WVU’s transfer process is
- To identify pain points
- To understand if the University’s communications are effective and responsive
- To identify areas for improvement

METHODOLOGY
Since Admissions was interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of why students did not matriculate, students who did not matriculate were invited to participate in a one-day online bulletin board discussion. An online bulletin board is an asynchronous tool that allows targeted participants to respond at their leisure and offers flexibility and convenience for respondents to think a little more deeply on a topic. It’s also a good tool to use when participants are geographically dispersed, as was this case.

The list of possible research participants was sourced using Target X.

PARTICIPANTS
Students who participated in the discussion board were from 12 states. The majority of had attended a 2-year college and wanted to further their education by earning a bachelor’s degree.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The strategic initiative to recruit more transfer students must be more widely communicated. The transfer process at WVU is, in a word, inconsistent. About half of the students experienced a smooth process, recounting a positive experience: personal communication, follow-up and encouragement by staff, as well as a good understanding of the “next steps” throughout the process. However, the other half had a completely dissimilar, impersonal and surprisingly disappointing experience. As a result, they felt “like a number,” rather than someone who the University valued. These students claimed no one followed up with them, it was difficult to obtain timely answers to their questions and they felt lost in the process. Two students felt disdain from staff members during New Student Orientation.

It’s important that the cost of attending WVU is conveyed early in the process. WVU was among the schools these students considered transferring to for a variety of reasons – chief among them, affordability. Whether they would receive financial assistance and/or scholarships or not was a very important factor in their decision. Thus, notifying students about costs early in the process will lead to greater efficiencies. Once a student realizes that WVU is not an affordable option for them, there is likely no further need for communication.

There is an opportunity for WVU to differentiate itself in the way it treats transfer students. Overall satisfaction with WVU’s application process was indiscriminate as well. Again, students recounted polar opposite experiences. Even one student who gave it a positive rating acknowledged that “there wasn’t anything exceptional about it.” In fact, for some, just the fundamental step of transmitting their transcript was problematic and subjected them to unnecessary additional costs.
Attention to detail, as well as initial, consistent and follow-up communication are critical. In addition to some students having to spend the unnecessary time and expense of resubmitting their transcript, many wait weeks to speak with an advisor or are unaware that they have the option to use WVU’s online Transfer Equivalency Review Request system before deciding to apply.

The fact that many named acceptance at WVU as the best part of the transfer process reiterates that the process needs to be improved. Transfer students should receive a detailed timeline and have a good understanding of where they are in the process at all times. Additionally, be mindful that communication sent via their MIX account will likely not be read since most fail to set it that account. Those who do don’t typically access that account to read mail they may have received from the University.
The majority of students who participated in this online discussion had planned to transfer from a 2-year school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Transferring from</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>Not transferring directly from a school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>Youngstown, OH</td>
<td>Hocking College, 2-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Phillpsburg, NJ</td>
<td>University of Pittsburgh (freshman year) then transferred to Northampton College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2-year college) due to costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameryn</td>
<td>Allentown, PA</td>
<td>2-year community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>New Milford, CT</td>
<td>Coastal Carolina University, 4-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Clay County, WV</td>
<td>Bridgevalley Community and technical, 2-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher</td>
<td>Grand Blanc, MI</td>
<td>Mott Community College, 4-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Painsville, OH</td>
<td>Lakeland Community College, 2-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cam</td>
<td>Matthews, NC</td>
<td>CPCC, 2-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jolie</td>
<td>Buffalo, NY</td>
<td>Louisiana State University, 4-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Mountain Lakes, NJ</td>
<td>County College of Morris, 2-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abelardo</td>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
<td>Miami Dade College, 2-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maddie</td>
<td>Pepperell, MA</td>
<td>Middlesex Community College, 2-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Peoria, IL</td>
<td>Illinois Central College, 2-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trenton</td>
<td>Canonsburg, PA</td>
<td>CCAC, 2-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Virginia Beach, VA</td>
<td>2-year (unnamed) community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Cincinnati, OH</td>
<td>University of Cincinnati, 4-year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NON-MATRICULATING TRANSFER STUDENTS

Students provided a number of reasons they were interested in transferring schools, with most mentioning their intent to obtain a 4-year degree.

Reasons for transferring

- Wanted to earn bachelor’s, rather than just an associate degree (10)
- High out-of-state tuition costs/will take too long to complete degree
- Wanted to be closer to home/further from home
- Lack of medical resources (ability to shadow, research etc.)
- Too many general education requirements

“Once I earned my associate degree at community college, I knew I wanted to transfer somewhere to earn a bachelor’s degree. It was just a matter of the best fit for me for reasons like cost, location, major, etc. While I attended Lakeland I was able to live at home, which saved me a lot of money, and work to save up for my last two years of college.” – Painsville, OH

“Community college was a last resort for me after graduating high school. I had gotten a lot of scholarships and had plans to attend a school in Maine but some things came up and unfortunately, I was unable to do so. I went to community college under psychology, which has nothing to do with what I actually want to do in the future, so I was practically throwing money out the window because our GenEd’s weren’t the greatest either. I knew by the end of my first year I was ready to leave and move onto a new adventure in my life as well as begin the path to my future career.” – New Milford, CT
Students provided these reasons for considering transferring to WVU.

### Reasons for Considering WVU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Reason</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer their major</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access WVU had to employers in his field</td>
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<tr>
<td>A lot of students from Hocking College attended WVU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heard it was a very good university</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can pursue a dual degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lots of engineering opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offers ROTC scholarships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offers a variety of minors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Larger size</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closer to home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beautiful campus/setting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards of athletic training program</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The “heartbeat” of West Virginia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Friend was an alum</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A big school with big opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good ratio between students and faculty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>The whole college experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Far from home</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-site hospital and medical campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has club sports and Greek life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt like they belonged</td>
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</table>

“I took into consideration the in-state tuition offered to me as an Ohio resident. I took into consideration what kind of housing I would go into, which was a stressful thing as I’d be transferring and not knowing anyone, but I found through talking to my tour guides that most sophomores live off campus. I took into consideration how I would commute around campus. I took into consideration the FAFSA process. I took into consideration the kind of education I would be getting. I took into consideration the social aspect of WVU in terms of events going on and how social the college is as a whole.” – Cincinnati, OH
When asked if during the application process WVU made them feel valued as a student, opinions were split. Those who felt like they had a personal experience provided the following reasons:

- Admissions was quick to respond to questions
- The tour guides were kind, helpful
- Emails felt personalized
- Someone checked in with her every step of the way
- Constant follow-up
- Received encouraging support
- Personal contact

“Every step of the way I had someone checking in with me asking whether I had any questions or concerns. During my transfer application process no other college truly did that besides WVU. I got almost weekly flyers and postcards from the school, and when I got accepted every piece of mail or email was always very friendly and congratulated me for getting in. While talking to admissions councilors throughout the application process, I was told my achievements and academic goals and aspirations were very strong. The school told me that I could achieve what I wanted to here.” – New Milford, CT

“When I graduated high school I originally wanted to attend WVU as a first time freshman, but after I decided to stay home, I realized that I could just transfer to WVU. During the transfer process, I went on a campus visit and had a lot of contact with the staff member in charge of transfer students of nutrition major. She was awesome! We contacted each other a lot through email and talked on the phone a few times too. She was always so helpful and guiding to any questions I may have had. She really made me feel excited about attending WVU and helped me feel like I wasn’t just a number at a big school.” – Painsville, OH
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However, nearly as many students were displeased with the way they were treated and felt like a number rather than a valued student. It appears that no one followed up with them during the process. Another student noted that the staff at New Student Orientation looked askance at her.

“Not at all. When I walked in to the orientation/transfer day whatever you want to call it, I was stared at, looked down upon on, and ignored. Staff was just standing around chatting instead of helping the students who needed to be signed in. I finally had to go up to someone and say what am I supposed to even be doing here? That’s finally when someone checked me in. Just felt really uncomfortable and fake.” – Allentown, PA

“Since Mountaineer blood runs through my veins, I expected to feel welcomed when I applied. I personally don’t think they cared about the transfer students as much. I constantly had to call and ask for updates on whether my credits were going to transfer or not and I could never get a straight answer. I was never informed on orientation dates or updates on my application.” – Virginia Beach, VA

“It didn't seem personal, however, I do think that could also be changed based on my participation. I didn't take a tour because I took one my sophomore year. I could have called to ask more questions about my application and eligibility for scholarships, but by that time I already had in my mind where I really wanted to go and my second option which was the best financially. Nonetheless, I do believe I would have enjoyed WVU because my cousin goes there, but I don’t believe it's my best option.” – Canonsburg, PA
Using a scale of 0-5, students rated their overall experience in applying to WVU as a transfer student. Ratings ranged from “0” to “5.” A few students who rated it highly did provide some suggestions for improving the experience and/or outcome.

**3.5**

“I would say my overall experience was a 3.5. I really loved my campus visit and all of the great things West Virginia had to offer but, when it came to the final decision and I was comparing prices, I felt that all of the hard work I have put in thus far in my academic career, was not recognized. Furthermore, I wish there was more scholarship or financial help opportunities available, especially for transfer students. I was very excited being an Ohio resident that my major was one of the “Ohio reciprocity” majors, but it couldn’t compete with the two prices I had from Cleveland State University and Bowling Green State University. I really do feel like WVU would’ve been a great fit for me, and truthfully I’ll always be a Mountaineer fan! I just wish there was more opportunities for scholarship money to help me as I finish my bachelor degree.” – Painsville, OH

**4.0**

4. I would say 4 because there wasn't anything exceptional about, and quite frankly I haven't experienced any schools that have been exceptional, except for maybe one school that was willing to meet with me the day after I contacted them, and give me a tour. But for the most part, all the schools I have applied to have given a similar experience, there was only one school, which was my community college, that everyone seemed like they hated their lives and where they worked, and they expressed it in the way they talked to you and did their jobs. – Canonsburg, PA

**5.0**

“I would definitely rate it as a 5. Jeremy Long, one of the transfer specialists was able to get back to me in a very timely fashion. It made me feel as though I was wanted at the school. The application process also didn't take long as well, so that also helped knowing what options I had especially so late in the summer, needing a new place to attend in less than 2 months.” – Buffalo, NY
Dissatisfaction was related to unclear communications about cost, difficulty during New Student Orientation and the perception of apathy and a party culture at WVU.

“0. It was very heavily implied and even outright stated at one point that I would be given a scholarship which when added to financial aid would cover tuition. Naturally, that was not the case.” – New York, NY

“0. I went down to check out the school and the help wasn’t very good. At orientation no one knew what was going on and how to help me and I bounced everywhere so I wasn’t anyone else’s problem. It took 4 hours to find an advisor as well.” – Pepperell, MA

“During the application process I went to visit the campus for orientation. It took me two hours just to drive through your campus because of the amount of students that didn’t even look before stepping onto the sidewalk. Transfer “advisors” were rude and judgemental for no reason. I also felt the overall atmosphere of the campus was just really not personable. The woman at the book store refused to speak to me and acted like her job was the hardest thing in the world. Staff didn’t hold doors or say thank you, which may not be a big thing but it really did change my mind about WVU. The students who were supposed to be guiding the transformation processes were snotty and all they talked about was the party scene and getting wasted. Not the best thing to discuss in front of parents at orientation/transfer day.” – Allentown, PA
NON-MATRICULATING TRANSFER STUDENTS

Students were asked what the best part of the transfer process was.

- Getting accepted (9)
- Finding two roommates off campus
- The campus tour
- Meeting with Admissions
- Personal conversations with staff

“Getting my cute pop up box that said I was accepted. It was definitely different then just getting a letter.” – Virginia Beach, VA

“The best part was connecting with the staff member that would advise me with my classes and scheduling. We talked a lot over email but she was always so helpful and guiding.” – Painsville, OH

“Mentally going through the process of deciding what draws me to towards certain schools and seeing the benefits from each school, WVU showed me things I want in my ‘future university’ and some things I don't want.” – Canonsburg, PA
They were also asked about the worst part of the process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worst Part of Process</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• High costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Late schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No further contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Not being able to afford the tuition costs. In-state tuition and fees is about $8,976/year while out-of-state tuition and fees is about $25,320/year. I’m trying to earn outside scholarships in order to attend so my parents don’t have to take out loans for me but it’s a process. It sucks when you find your dream school but can’t attend it just because of financial reasons. But that’s what life is. Also a financial aid rep that I spoke to mentioned that WV doesn’t provide too much need-based aid to students so it’s relatively hard to get in that state.” – Phillipsburg, NJ

“Not getting a schedule until the night before and it was so bad I never attended a class and left a week later.” – Pepperell, MA

“After I received my financial package, I would say I was almost ‘ghosted.’ I really didn’t have any contact with staff members and felt like I was just left hanging in the group of ‘new students on campus’.” – Painsville, OH

“Not knowing if I received a scholarship but by not receiving a letter saying I received one could be saying that I didn’t get one. In some ways I wouldn’t have minded receiving a letter clarifying that I was not eligible or didn’t get accepted for any scholarships.” – Canonsburg, PA

“Not having knowledge about where I was at in the process. I felt like an email would of been more effective then calling me at random times during the day.” – Virginia Beach, VA
The information regarding the transfer process that WVU has on its website was deemed relatively accurate and transparent. However, one student noted that there is a lack of detailed timeline regarding what to do and how to do it.

Other issues they experienced during the overall application process include:

- Communication difficulties
- Trouble meeting with an adviser in her major
- Getting transcripts and SAT scores delivered

“I think that the academic adviser only contacting me through email was a bit troubling. I found out everything I needed though and I was able to get all of the documentation that was required or wanted there in a timely manner and the staff members were able to look at it and get back to me, so I think it was very efficient.” – Buffalo, NY

“Couldn’t get in touch with anyone and only when I did I was told I don’t get an advisor until 3 weeks after school starts for the better convenience of staff and they couldn’t help me make a schedule or anything. Considering my last school walked me through it and they had very different processes.” – Pepperell, MA

“The only issue I had is resubmitting my transcripts back to WVU. I had copies made & saved to my computer but they wanted me to resend official sealed copies from Pitt & Northampton back to them after I had already done that before reapplying this semester.” – Phillipsburg, NJ

“Having to resubmit my transcripts TWICE paying $40+ dollars after having to pay a ton for the application fee. They claimed they did not receive them when I sent them to the exact address, and they then refused to accept a scanned copy therefore I had to send them and pay twice.” – Allentown, PA
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About as many students were aware as unaware that they could have used WVU’s online Transfer Equivalency Review Request system and immediately determine which of their courses were transferrable to the University, before deciding whether to complete an application.

A few students mentioned they didn’t receive any communication subsequent to being accepted to WVU.

“No (I was not aware). Only after the day before classes started did you get credits evaluated and they did not take many of my general courses. I wasn’t paying 26,000 dollars to retake almost my freshman year just wasn’t worth it.” – Pepperell, MA

“I did not know you could find out what transferred and what didn’t before completing the application. That would’ve helped a bit because I was in a time jiffy this summer needing a new institution so knowing that they had that and not having to wait would’ve been really nice. I also don't think that any advisers or any information was sent to me after I got accepted. I had to reach out and find out myself, which I did not like.” – Buffalo, NY

“No, I was not aware. This was not listed anywhere on the application or website when applying, so how would I have been made aware?” – Allentown, PA

When asked how much time it took for them to receive notification of their transfer credit evaluation, all but a couple reported not having received any notice.

“Once I contacted someone and had the athletic coach help me through the process, (I think being a recruit to WVU helped expedite my process) I received the information I needed. I think it took about 2-3 weeks after applying, which wasn't bad, but would've helped if I knew before.” – Buffalo, NY

“I didn’t know I had to do a transfer equivalency form or even look at them until day before. It was a nightmare and headache to do so. I was never told that if it didn’t match and then if it didn’t match the first time, it can be sent to a higher board to be reevaluated and I was never told.” – Pepperell, MA
Students’ satisfaction with the communications they received from WVU throughout the process, as well as their ability to get their questions answered, varied.

“Communication was spot on. If I didn't get an email, I got a call/voicemail. If I didn't get a call/voicemail, I got an email. It made life very easy.” – Phillipsburg, NJ

“I felt like I was being spammed called every day to come spend my money there. Too much communication at some points. Maybe not a call every single day or sometimes twice a day when I had already answered their calls numerous times.” – Allentown, PA

“Most of the questions I asked, I would say it was very easy to get answers. Almost all of my emails were answered in a very timely manner. It was disappointing toward the end when I narrowed my Choices to three school and 1) I didn’t get enough money from WVU and 2) I didn’t have much contact with WVU’s staff.” – Painsville, OH
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In terms of timing, many decided not to attend WVU as soon as they found out they would not get the financial aid they anticipated. In fact, some were devastated by that news. A couple of students made their decision during or after New Student Orientation and others specifically acknowledged making their decision in August.

“I was between the University of Houston and WVU and it honestly came down to money and the credits. I was sad I couldn't go to WVU and participate academically and athletically, but I think it was the best decision for me in the moment and to prepare me for my future better. I decided around the beginning of August probably a month after I had applied and got accepted.” – Buffalo, NY

“I also really felt as though the whole “transfer process” was geared towards 18 year-olds and not actual transfer students who are ALL ages, most coming from a two year college and are at least 20+. I felt like a child and received absolutely no information on finances, academics, or housing. It was ‘take 100 minors.’ ‘get drunk,’ and ‘try to pass.’ This 110% confirmed my choice to not attend WVU as it was CLEAR it was not going to be beneficial to me, they obviously do not care about their transfer students needs. Someone in the staff needs to be more educated on the fact that transfer students come from all walks of life and are not just 18 year-olds looking for somewhere to party, but clearly WVU does not care about this and are just trying to suck students in with their easy academics and sloppy scene.” – Allentown, PA

“I decided one-two months after my tour. For a few reasons: a) financial; b) unsure of what FAFSA or scholarships I would be receiving; c) unsure of what my housing situation would look like as a transfer sophomore; d) a lot going on in my personal life. I am confident in my decision, though I am very interested in returning to WVU and reapplying to the Medical School when the time comes.” – Cincinnati, OH

“At the end of orientation, when I found out a full year needed to go by before qualifying for in-state tuition, and although I put off a lot of time to complete my degree, I did not want to waste more time.” – Miami, FL
Just one student was aware that WVU communicated with them via their MIX account. Having such an account was news to the vast majority.

Over half the students ended up transferring to another school; 31% stayed at their current school, and 13% took a break from school for personal reasons.

“Just took the semester off to fill out scholarships, decide my next steps, etc. I really would love to earn a full ride to WVU. That way I can just focus on my education, goals, and innovative developments without the extra stress of how will I pay for it. I don't want to attend another school where I don't love it. It just comes back around to cause mental health issues because you don't feel as comfortable there as you should be. It will affect your academic performance too. I'm also waiting on a few scholarships that could be game changing If I get awarded them. However I'm looking into transferring to WVU for the spring semester.” - Phillipsburg, NJ
The factors that ultimately led students to choose another school or stay at their current school were:

- Financial (6)
- Major/curriculum (4)
- Personal life (2)
- Location/distance (2)

“I think the Texas Medical Campus with over 15 hospitals, 5 miles away from campus was huge. The money part, I got a lot of academic and athletic money. Also, all of my credits transferred and I can do nursing school for one year after my 4-year bachelor degree. So all around it was a better, more affordable option.” – Buffalo, NY

Suggestions for making the transfer process smoother include:

- Continuing the use of transfer students assisting other transfer students
- Demonstrating more consideration
- Being more responsive
- Creating a separate address for receipt of transcripts

“Readjust the way WVU provides aid in certain situations. It's hard transferring to WVU and receiving 0 financial aid. If I could just transfer there and earn a 4.0 GPA for the year to prove I can excel, being able to earn aid/scholarships for that would be amazing.” – Cincinnati, OH