2017 Parents Communication Survey FINAL.02.15.16

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PARENT COMMUNICATIONS STUDY
Research Objectives & Methodology

**Research Objectives**

To determine how well the University is communicating with parents of current undergraduate students and discern if the current communication vehicles are effective.

**Methodology**

A brief online survey was distributed late January to approximately 25,900 Mountaineer Parents Club members via their email address. 1,480 parents completed the survey.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Executive Summary

University Communications
Overall, the University does a good job providing parents with practical information at the desired frequency. All of the parents surveyed receive communications from the Mountaineer Parents Club. Some receive information from a variety of other sources as well – from Admissions to the Alumni Association.

The majority also learn things from GeeMail videos, and the videos are very well-received. However, a few parents acknowledged not being aware of the videos. In addition to seeing President Gee in videos, parents feel it’s important, to some extent, to be able to interact with him in person. More importantly than that, parents want the opportunity to be able to engage with other WVU administrators.

An overwhelming number of parents prefer email communication from the University, and about half are also open to receiving electronic newsletters or select texts (i.e. that provide essential information). Their use of social media is mainly limited to Facebook; significantly fewer use Pinterest, Twitter or Instagram on a regular basis.

Effectiveness of Communication
Parents were asked to rate the usefulness of seven information sources. Parent Electronic News fared best, but information from the school in which their student majors, the Mountaineer Parents Club website, Admissions and the Mountaineer Parents Club Facebook page are also considered valuable. While the latter makes parents feel more connected to WVU, half the parents never look at the site.
Executive Summary

Communications from Student Life
Parents believe Parent Electronic News is all-encompassing, so few are compelled to visit the Mountaineer Parents Club website on a regular basis, if at all. They would likely visit the website if the newsletter contained a link that prompted them to do so and the site provided updates or vital information. The fact that Parent Electronic News is distributed twice a month is appreciated, though some parents would prefer to receive it weekly.

Important dates/deadlines (housing deadlines, payment/billing dates, deadline for dropping a class, etc.) are the most valuable topics in Parent Electronic News. Information provided by the Mountaineer Parents Club (Fall Family Weekend details, holiday bus schedules, etc.) is nearly as valuable, followed by announcements regarding upcoming campus events (graduation details, housing, study abroad fairs, etc.). Additionally, the Mountaineer Parent Club’s annual newsletter does a very good job of helping parents learn more about the University.

Other Communication Vehicles
Parents are not particularly receptive to participating in WVU webinars. Most expressed some degree of interest, but that should not be misconstrued as an overly positive response; their participation cannot be counted on. With that in mind, those who are intrigued by the idea are most interested in learning about financial aid/scholarships and academic resources for their student.

If WVU were to hold a focus group that would address issues that are important to parents, a notable number expressed interest in being a focus group respondent.
Executive Summary

Parents were asked what advice they have regarding improving the University’s communication with parents. There is a strong consensus that parent communication is done well and needs few changes.

- **Parents Electronic Newsletter**
  - Provides parents with very useful information

- **Mountaineer Parent Club Annual Newsletter**
  - Helps parents learn more about the University

- **Mountaineer Parents Club Facebook Page**
  - Makes parents feel more connected to the University

Parents who advocate change suggest that emails be made more concise (summary, bullet points, links for additional information). Others believe the large amount of information necessitates more frequent emails so information is more digestible. Still others think it would be useful to segment information: freshmen vs. upper class students, etc.

It’s also important that parents be made more aware of deadlines and that they hear from the school in which their child majors. The lack of communication from the latter leaves some feeling detached from the University.

(See Appendix for additional comments)
In summary, the problems identified and proposed solutions are as follows:

**PROBLEM**

| a) Emails are very long       | a) Add an executive summary, highlight topic but add a link for the details. Send emails more frequently so the information is less overwhelming and more bite-sized |
| b) Not all information is relevant to all parents | b) Segment information by class or by importance |
| c) Some parents/students miss deadlines and are unaware of some events | c) Provide dates in advance of major dates/events (drop dates, midterms, football games, etc.) |
| d) Not enough/any information from the schools; parents who do not received school-specific information feel disconnected from the university | d) Ensure that schools communicate with parents on a regular basis |
| e) Limited internet access | e) Be mindful of those parents who have slow or no internet access; consider snail mail |
| f) Information is not available on all devices | f) Consider making all communications accessible on various media channels |
| g) Texting not utilized | g) Establish automatic texts for important matters (emergencies, dates, school closings, health crises, etc.) |
| h) Not everyone is aware of all the communication resources | h) Ensure that parents of incoming freshmen/transfer students are aware of the available communication resources |
| i) No communication between the billing office and parents | i) Ensure parents receive timely information on scholarships, financial aid, etc. and get answers to their questions |
| j) Navigational instruction is not provided | j) Offer simple, specific instructions to parents on how to navigate through the systems at WVU (financial aid, housing, etc.) |
| k) There is no opportunity for parent-to-parent interaction | k) Consider offering in-person/online Q&A sessions |
All but 2% of parents say they receive communications from the Mountaineer Parents Club. This indicates some parents are confused by the source. Nearly two in ten (18%) receive information from Admissions, and nearly as many (16%) get information from the school in which their child majors and/or Admissions (11%).
Parents overwhelmingly prefer to receive email communications (92%) from WVU. More than half of parents would appreciate getting electronic newsletters (58%) and/or texts that only relay important information (53%).

How would you prefer to hear from WVU? (check all that apply)
Nearly nine in ten parents (88%) believe the frequency at which they receive communications from the University is “just right.” Just 11% would like to receive communication more often. Just 1% claim they hear from the University too often.
The information parents receive from Parent Electronic News is deemed most useful (90%). Information from specific schools (81%), the Mountaineer Parents Club website (78%) and the Parents Club Facebook page (76%) are thought to provide useful information as well. Information from Admissions is also valuable (72%). On the other hand, just over one-third (35%) acknowledge that the Alumni Association communications are useful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Source</th>
<th>Extremely Useful</th>
<th>Very Useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountaineer Parent Club website</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school in which your student majors</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Electronic News</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountaineer Parents Club Facebook page</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni Association</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Other” information sources include:
- Dr. Jack Byrd
- Parents Club email
- Athletics/sports
- Safety Alerts
- Financial aid/billing/scholarships

Other, but lesser mentioned sources include the marching band, housing, scheduling, Adventure WV, President Gee, Pathway, and Twitter.

“I find the Parent HelpLine a very useful tool. As a parent, we do not always know what is going on at the school and ANY information is a plus. I have taken advantage of the athletic tickets as well. This is our daughter’s first year at WVU, and she’s an out-of-state student. We have been VERY happy with the school resources and she is proud to be a MOUNTAINEER!!”
About one in ten parents (11%) visit the Mountaineer Parents Club website weekly, and four in ten (41%) visit the site 1-3 times in a typical month. One-fourth (25%) access it less often, and nearly as many (23%) acknowledge they never visit the site.

Those who do not frequent the website indicate the emails they receive are comprehensive; thus, they have no need to visit the site.

Many parents suggested they would be more likely to visit the website if the newsletter were to contain a short email reminder with a link to the site. Others suggested that if new/updated information or vital information were posted there, they’d be more likely to return to the website. A few suggested they would access the site if it provided information in a summarized/highlighted format.

Eight parents acknowledged they had no idea the website existed.
Things that would encourage parents to go to/return to the website….in their own words.

“There is much information on the site. I don't use it as much as I should since it has specific links that we need. I usually Google what I'm looking for. I need to use the site more. Maybe something in the Parents Club email that remind us to use the website.”

“Send me information on important things. I don't normally go fishing for websites. I don't have time to go there just because I'm curious.

“I would suggest} reminders that information is posted there or perhaps a link on the newsletter.”

“I do read the weekly WVU Parent emails but somehow missed the information that there is a Parents Club website. It might be helpful if the link to the website is included in each of your emails.”

“I do not have children presently enrolled at WVU. I am a lifetime WVU Alumni Association member as well as President of the WVU Alumni Association Delaware Chapter. I would like to receive your information so I can relay it on our Facebook page Delaware Mountaineer.”

“{I’d visit the site if} emails indicated what to look at. I usually only look at it if it says something about it in the email. There is so much "social media" that you are “expected” to view, it is overwhelming, but mentioning something in the email lets me know if I want to look further.”
Nearly seven in ten (69%) feel it’s appropriate to receive Parent Electronic News twice a month. About one-fourth (26%) believe it should be distributed weekly. Just 5% would like to receive it more often.

All but 9% of parents believe the length of Parent Electronic News is “just right.” Just 9% and 1% feel it’s too long or too short, respectively.
Parents were asked to rank seven topics based on how helpful each is. Important dates, information from the Mountaineer Parents Club and event announcements are thought more important than resource reminders, feature stories, GeeMail videos or policy changes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helpfulness Ranking</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Important dates/deadline reminders (housing deadlines, payment/billing dates, last day to drop a class, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Mountaineer Parents Club information (Fall Family Weekend details, holiday bus information)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Announcements of upcoming campus events (graduation details, housing, study abroad fairs, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Timely resource reminders (midterms, Academic Resources Centers, tutoring, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Feature stories (campus highlights, students/faculty in the news, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>GeeMail Videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Notice of policy changes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Less than one-fourth of parents are extremely (9%) or very (18%) interested in participating in a webinar. Most (40%) indicated some degree of interest. One-third (33%) have no interest.

Of those parents who are at least somewhat interested in participating in a webinar, most (74%) would like to learn more about financial aid and scholarships. About two-thirds (68%) are interested in academic resources available to their child. Significantly fewer would find webinars on student life (35%) or study abroad (35%) of interest.

Additional topics of interest include career-related/internship information (#1) specific school/graduate program information (#2), healthcare/mental health (#3) and student self-help resources/tips (#4).

80% of those interested in webinars would prefer that they take place in the evening (6-8 p.m. EST).
About three-fourths (74%) actively use Facebook. Far fewer use Pinterest (28%) and even fewer are active on Twitter (22%) or Instagram (22%). Nearly two in ten (18%) are not engaged with any social media.
Half of the parents (50%) never look at the Mountaineer Parents Club Facebook page. However, 93% of those who view it feel more connected to WVU; 7% do not. All but 7% feel the Mountaineer Parent Club annual newsletter enables them learn more about the University.
About six in ten (63%) watch GeeMail videos. Of those more than one-third (37%) love them; another 47% very much like them. Another 18% like them to some extent. Just one person dislikes them to some extent. One parent, who is likely representative of many more, was unaware that GeeMail videos exist.
Parents believe it’s extremely (19%) or very important (23%) to have opportunities to interact with President Gee. More believe it’s extremely important (23%) or very important (32%) to be able to interact with other WVU administrators.
Less than three in ten (28%) believe that receiving information on additional topics would be helpful to them. Most are interested in learning about academics (62%), student life (55%) and/or financials (51%). Slightly less than half (47%) want to learn about safety on campus.

Other topics with 5+ mentions include careers/career services (15 mentions), internships/study abroad (15 mentions), transportation/parking/PRT (9 mentions), on and off-campus housing (8 mentions), school-specific information (5 mentions), scholarships (5 mentions).
Q. In addition to the information you already receive, are there other topics that would be helpful to learn about? Q. What other topics would you be interested in learning about? (check all that apply)

Verbatims

Other topics parents are interested in hearing about….in their own words.

“Opportunities for internships and travel abroad experiences within specific schools.”

“We are visiting this weekend and the PRT is not running. This seems to be an ongoing issue. We are not happy.”

“I get very little information from the School of Medicine.”

“Career opportunities for graduating seniors.”

“Job openings/internship openings.”

“Updates from the college the student is associated with (e.g. Health, Engineering, etc.) regarding how they are improving things and opportunities for upcoming graduates or students looking for other ideas/avenues.”

“Helping kids regarding changing majors, career services, resources.”
Parents identified four major areas when asked how they would improve communication with parents:

a) Email communication should be KISS (“keep it simple, stupid”). They should be concise, relevant, short and sweet.
b) Provide relevant dates in a timely manner
c) Ensure parents receive communications from the schools
d) Provide multiple ways to communicate in a timely and efficient matter. Consider texting important information and providing
If you were in charge of Parent Communications at the University for a day, what advice would you give regarding how to improve communication with parents?

Verbatims

#1 NO CHANGES NEEDED (157 mentions)

“The level of communication at WVU is incredible. I have a student at another college and we hear NOTHING from them. I feel connected to the school and what is happening there.”

“Honestly, I really feel as though WVU does a wonderful job communicating with parents via email, social media and ground mail. All communications are relevant, very informative, and delivered in a timely manner.”

“Keep doing what you’re doing. I have been so very impressed with how WVU keeps parents connected to the University. I feel as if WVU really cares about its students and their families. Our daughter is consideration WVU as her second home for four years. She sees her brother’s freshman experience as a very positive one.”

“The Parents Club is doing an extremely good job. The Parents Club is one of the reasons we choose WVU.”

“Change nothing.”

#2 SIMPLIFY EMAILS (61 mentions)

“Keep it (the newsletter) brief, to the point, well-organized, bulleted points, but with personality…”

“Don’t over embellish. Don’t be wordy. Get to the point quickly and concisely.”

“Shorten the emails. Combine the content so you get all the information up front…instead of the beginning being an intro and scrolling down to actually get the information.”

“I would not send such long emails. I rarely read them because they are so long that I don’t have time. I intend to get back to them when I have time, but I never do.”

“Keep the emails simple. Some of us live in rural areas where there is no high speed Internet so we do not have the speeds to see long emails or videos.”

“Perhaps break up the emails by grade of the student. What freshmen need to know is very different than what upper classmen need to know.”
Verbatims

#3 PROVIDE DATES (22 mentions)

“Provide information for academics such as drop dates, midterms, tutor information and dates for registration and payments.”

“Make sure parents know dates of upcoming events (graduate, weekends). Also informing parents (way in advance…along with reminders) to make hotel reservations in Morgantown for upcoming football games, etc.”

“I believe more information should be provided on deadlines for housing, choosing classes, etc. They should be provided with plenty of advance notice.”

“Make sure parents are aware of deadlines and changes in university procedures.”

“I’d tell a small groups of techies that they can’t go home until they figure out how to have reminder dates that we can download directly to Outlook (or other formats).”

“I very much enjoy and appreciate the manner in which I receive Parents emails and the effort expended to keep me information a s a WVU parent. I would appreciate more information and guidance regarding financial aid information, deadlines, etc.”

#4 SCHOOL DEPARTMENTS (14 mentions)

“I would like more communication from within m child’s major department. If it wasn’t for Jack Byrd (he is awesome) I would feel very much out of touch with what is going on and what is next.”

“More communication from the majors or schools. I get no information from the School of Nursing.”

“I’d like to hear a little bit about what’s happening in the various schools. Possibly a short story featuring a professor, something that students are working on in a lab, a student and their internship experience, etc.”

“Currently we parents receive no communication at all from the Eberly College, where our daughter will graduate from. This is a shame. We don’t know about faculty, program changes, new programs or strategic directions of this college. I think we would feel more a part of our daughter’s education if we better connected to the college where her degree will be achieved from…”
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Verbatims</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>#5 TEXT INFORMATION (14 mentions)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I would like to get important texts for emergencies and cancellations.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The emergency text system needs streamlined and parents AUTOMATICALLY entered. We still haven’t figured it out and I would like to know.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Text important dates, deadlines.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Text brief highlights. You may use texts to alert for newsletters and emails that are on the way.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Text for an important or last minute issues, problems or things going on at the University. I left a message for transportation regarding some concerns and issues and was very discouraged and disappointed that I never received a return call or heard back from them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Send a text a day or a text a week. Out of sight, out of mind is a real thing so I think quick weekly updates would help parents feel more connected.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Also communicate through texts.”</td>
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</table>
About one-quarter (23%) expressed interest in participating in a focus group in which issues that are important to parents would be discussed.

If we held a focus group to discuss issues that are important to parents, would you be interested in participating? (A focus group is a moderator-led, face-to-face discussion with a small number of people) If so, please provide your name and email address.
“Eliminate the letters from housing pleading with parents to sign up for gifts to be sent at mid terms, finals, etc. college is wildly expensive without pressure to send gifts. Please pass this along. It is quite annoying.”

“I think that navigating grades for new students is a huge learning curve. As a parent I felt I couldn’t offer any help to my child when it came to surfing through this. Some professors use eCampus, some don’t. Then when grades post on degree works it is often different than eCampus. How do you suggest parents encourage their student to closely follow grades & keep them at a certain standard when they often aren’t available (b/c of the professor)?”

“I don’t know a lot of parents of students at the school. It would be good to meet parents to go to football or basketball games with. Perhaps do a parent mixer.”

“I would create a way for them to be responded to. I have sent emails that haven’t been answered.”

“Send a link that allows parents to sign up for safety alerts. I changed phone carriers and haven’t been able to find out how to get the texts again. Don’t lie to parents & tell us that parents requested the earlier date for tuition to be due. It’s an insult. No parent ways to pay tuition, much less pay it the week before Christmas!”

“It would be helpful to be able to have interaction or communication with our student’s advisor. My freshman had difficulty the first week of school and no luck getting his advisor to return emails. He finally found another professor to be his advisor. I just think many freshman and their parents who are paying tuition need more confirmation and or questions about courses, scheduling, etc. It may help to provide more access to advisors even if parents have questions. Not sure if Parents Club would be able to facilitate such access for parents.”

“Important phone numbers are on the Parent Club site but I’m not sure most parents -- those who belong as well as those who don’t -- know where to find them. The Parent Club e-mails are extremely helpful, particularly to first-time college parents and those who are 3+ hours away from the University.”
“Perhaps communicate with parents about all of the opportunities for communication that there are. I learned in this survey that I should be getting info from Admissions and that there are these things called GeeMail videos. For whatever reason, I've missed that I should be accessing these things somehow. It could be that I am overwhelmed with information coming at me from all types of places, so I skim the communications coming from WVU (as I skim everything else). So, I probably missed communication about these resources. And maybe that's my word of advice: remember that people in general are bombarded with information from all directions, so somehow WVU communications need to rise to the top of that mountain! :-)”

“I had a problem with Spring 2016 tuition because the website said I couldn't select a meal plan until 12/21/15. In the meantime, the tuition bill was due. Since I have a 529 account, this meant I had to access it twice and because it takes at least a week for the mail and processing, I was going to be late paying the bill. So I paid it out of my checking account and am now waiting for the university to reimburse me.”

“I would like to be involved with a local WVU Parent Club, but I don't think there is one in my area. It would be nice to have this resource locally. (Cleveland area/east side)”

“I believe it's important to have open forums for parents to ask questions or make comments about experiences that would help new parents feel more involved and more relaxed on the experience their child is going through…”

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“Providing information on how and who to contact. For example - health science financial aid is not the same as ref financial aid - I found this out after a day spent holding, being transferred, leaving messages, etc.”

“I would advise being very honest with the issues that students are encountering at school. Sometimes it would be nice to hear from admin about how they are handling the negative situations.”