FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

The focus group, held October 6, consisted of six students from Texas, two of whom are first-generation college students. One student who could not attend the focus group was provided with an abbreviated version of the questionnaire and submitted her responses separately. She is also a first-generation student.

Their majors are as follows:
• Theatre
• Engineering
• Forensics
• Computer science
• Petroleum engineering
• Music
• Animal science

Three respondents are female; four are male.
WVU’S UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

WVU’s combination of unique programs, climate, beauty, friendliness and pride are said to differentiate it from other schools. It’s also said to offer a challenging, yet diverse environment.

The Programs
• Forensic School (the only school that offers a Ph.D. in forensics)
• Dual degree in Petroleum and Natural Gas Engineering
• Theatre program

“The FEEPAC accreditation is pretty much based on WVU because WVU was the first to get that accreditation.” – Freshman, forensics

The Environment
While the videos and picture of campus are said to be good, they fail to capture the vibe students feel when they get here.

“The beauty: “I’m pleasantly surprised. West Virginia is so beautiful. It’s hilly and so pretty.”” – Freshman, theater major

“It’s not 108 degrees.” – Freshman, engineering

The Culture
Students are pleasantly surprised with the “southern” warmth and feel of WVU.

“It’s a friendly vibe, but it’s so far north. Honestly, I wasn’t expecting it.” - Freshman, music

“I went to the Brad Paisley concert and I was surprised at how many people mimicked the cowboy look or were actually wearing those kinds of clothes.” – Freshman, computer science

The Pride
Being part of the Big 12 has increased our favorability factor. WVU’s spirit and pride impressed these Texas students and are said to be nearly unrivaled.

“It’s almost like how much spirit they have in Texas. When you go out of state, you don’t see that much spirit. Here it’s almost like they shove it in your face (a good thing).”” – Freshman, computer science
RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a tremendous opportunity for WVU to promote its academic programs/life. Texas students’ knowledge of WVU is limited to football, and the party school image still looms large. However, the students in this focus group were not deterred by their friends’ negative talk since the majority became seriously interested in WVU once they learned about its academic programs.

WVU must promote West Virginia’s beauty, as well as the sense of pride and spirit instilled in the people of West Virginia regarding WVU and the state. Texans are very proud of their state and their knowledge of the state of West Virginia is vacuous. Their lack of awareness about the beauty of the state and WVU must be overcome.

“I like the amount of pride everyone has here. I knew that everyone at Texas schools would have that because it’s like ‘We’re Texas,’ but I feel like I didn’t lose any pride coming here.”
– Freshman, music

The fact that WVU is challenging, as well as offers diversity in terms of what students can do outside the classroom, is important to promote. To reiterate, Texas students have a narrow view of the school that precludes them from including WVU on their consideration list.

The promotion of WVU’s student clubs and organizations is arguably as important, and this should be done in conjunction with advertising its majors. Texas students are far from home. In light of that, it’s crucial that they know they will have the opportunity to immediately meet people who share the same interests and, thus, begin to form friendships.
RECOMMENDATIONS

WVU must have a strong in-person presence (including compelling visuals) at college fairs. The lack of WVU’s participation at formal or informal college fairs in Texas has been detrimental to its ability to recruit prospective students. There is a fundamental issue of “out of sight, out of mind,” in addition to students being ill-informed or uninformed about the school. Introducing WVU at colleges fairs presents a key opportunity to promote student clubs, in combination with majors, as addressed previously.

WVU’s communications with prospective students in Texas should be personalized. With increased competition from other schools recruiting Texas students, WVU must present itself as authentic and sincere and deliver a different personalized experience at every touch point. Most of these students recounted receiving “red carpet” treatment from WVU that clearly made it stand out from other schools. Establishing one-on-one communication between current and prospective students has proven particularly effective and should be continued as well.

It’s also important to stress that WVU offers a well-balanced environment – where students have the ability to be both challenged and entertained.

“The blend between social life, sports and academics is perfect. Monday through Thursday you focus on academics, Friday you can go to clubs or house parties, Saturday is football, and the next week you do it all over again.” – Sophomore, petroleum engineering
DETAILED FINDINGS
PERCEPTION OF WEST VIRGINIA AND WVU

Few of these students were knowledgeable about West Virginia or WVU before visiting campus. In fact, most were pleasantly surprised to find that a state that they considered to be “north,” actually feels very southern to them. That implies a sort of down-south friendliness.

“The only association I had about West Virginia was that show a couple years back about the moonshine makers. That didn’t influence my choice to come here though. I was surprised how north it is but how southern the people are!” – Freshman, theatre

“The only thing I knew about West Virginia was the John Denver song. You barely even knew it’s a state, right.” – Freshman, forensics

“I didn’t even know where West Virginia was. The only people I knew that knew about West Virginia lives in Virginia and told me things about it being ‘not Virginia.’” – Freshman, music

“When I girl in my class learned I was going here, she said ‘West Virginia sucks because ‘it’s not Virginia.’”’ – Freshman, computer science

A few became familiar with WVU because their fathers were lifelong Mountaineer fans. However, even those students’ knowledge of WVU was limited to sports.

“In my first picture as a baby, I’m in West Virginia clothes. My dad is a huge Mountaineer fan, but he didn’t go here; he went to an engineering school in New York. My grandfather ran track here and my grandmother went to school here. So I grew up as a Mountaineer fan.” – Sophomore, petroleum engineering
**ON THE RADAR**

Family, alumni and reputation are some of the ways students initially learned about WVU.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Details</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music teacher</td>
<td>Her teacher earned her Master’s at WVU and recommended it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Father(s)</td>
<td>- His father knew WVU has an NCAA Rifle program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- His father was born in W.V. and always talked about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>He has extended family throughout the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Her brother attended WVU and enjoyed it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Lee</td>
<td>He sold a prospective theatre major on WVU at a “cattle call”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of the program</td>
<td>Student researched forensics programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I really wanted to branch out in the U.S. for school because I didn’t want to be in Texas my whole life. I wanted to experience a state with seasons! I chose WVU because my brother attended the school, and he loved it!” – Freshman, animal science

“I learned that WVU is one of only 19 accredited forensic programs. If you want to major in Forensic, WVU is where you want to go.” – Freshman, forensics

“My dad filled my head with stories of West Virginia growing up.” – Freshman, engineering

“I was on my high school rifle team and I ended up getting first in the army. They encouraged me to continue it in college, so I asked what schools have an NCAA rifle team. My dad said there was this really good school in West Virginia.” – Freshman, computer science

“My horn teacher did her master’s program here and all throughout the application process, she kept telling me that I should look at WVU. I never even knew where West Virginia was.” – Freshman, music
HIGH SCHOOL RECRUITMENT

WVU has been conspicuously absent from college recruitment fairs in Texas high schools. Unsurprisingly, guidance counselors only speak with high school students about the plethora of colleges/universities in Texas so students will not leave the state.

“My district does a district-wide event (CCISD District College Fair) where they feature a lot of schools. The WV representative stayed for about 30 minutes and left. WVU had already been on my radar.” – Freshman, computer science

“My school had over 200 schools during the whole application season but I don’t think West Virginia was one of them.” – Freshman, forensics

“Texas has so many colleges to choose from that it’s not necessary to go far for school. The high school I attended was extremely competitive with grads and almost every student was in AP classes.” – Freshman, animal science

With no presence to dispel the idea that WVU is the number-one party school, this myth is still alive and well in the mind of most high school students in Texas.

“A lot of people thought I wasn’t going to get a good education here but I’ve been able to tell them about how great the academic program is and that it’s not all sports here.” – Freshman, forensics

“Some of my friends who were going to a Texas school didn’t respect that I was going to go to school here. They said isn’t that just a party school? So I tell my mom to tell my friends that I’m doing really great and having the best time.” – Freshman, music
THE COMPETITION

All the students had applied to a number of colleges. They chose WVU because it seemed the best fit for them and/or it offered the best financial incentive.

“When it came to apply to schools, I applied to Texas Tech, Texas A&M and WVU. I got into Texas Tech in my major but I hate Texas A&M. I got into UT but not into the petroleum engineering program. I love Houston and the state of Texas, and I hope to go back there to work. I wasn’t trying to get away but West Virginia was where my heart was. I thought if I don’t like it, I’ll transfer home but I came here and fell in love with it.” – Freshman, petroleum engineering

“Nothing makes you hate a school more than growing up five minutes down the street from it, so I hated UT. My dad filled my head with stories about West Virginia growing up and I watched the sports. The only other school I knew about in West Virginia was Marshall, but I knew I was going to WVU.” – Freshman, engineering

“I had my mind set on going to A&M since I was little. Half my cousins went there and I grew up looking at the Cadets and wanting to have my ‘boots.’ I applied for an Army ROTC scholarship and put WVU down as an alternate school.” – Freshman, computer science

- Cultish
- Military
- Very conservative
- One of the best Animal Science programs in the country
- Very small school
- A very good school
- Has one of the best petroleum engineering programs in the country
- Has a lot of homeless people
- Has a sort of liberal culture
RECRUITING PROSPECTS
When recruiting these prospective students, WVU (and/or the colleges) offered most a more personalized experience. The “personalization” included students receiving a special tour, being introduced to students in their intended college via email, and receiving personal phone calls.

“Before I decided, Jim Trivalgo, the recruiter at the CCA made me feel I was really valuable in the program. Every other school would send me generic things. But I felt like I got really special attention here which was really nice. Being from out of state, I did need a piece of the puzzle.” – Freshman, music

“Statler College sent me a handwritten letter from a student and I became pen pals with that student. I thought that was the coolest thing ever.” - Freshman, computer science

“They rolled out the red carpet for me. One of the guys pulled me aside who said he had a buddy in the basketball department, so he gave me a special tour of the basketball facility, which was awesome. Then that same guy called me once a month just to see how things were going.” – Freshman, petroleum engineering

One student, when still a prospect, pointed out that she welcomed the plethora of print collateral she received from WVU because it made her really feel wanted. Another student seemed perplexed and troubled because he hadn’t begun receiving anything from WVU until after he had applied. He is a first-generation student.

“I got one or two pieces of mail a week from WVU but only one piece of mail from other schools. That made me feel like they wanted me here. I got a little notebook from the theatre program, which was really cool. I got the Let’s Go sign, and I got reminders of things coming up.” – Freshman, theatre
**Students were asked to reference the thirteen items below and rank them in order of the importance they played in their decision to attend WVU.**

- A parent/relative who attended WVU
- Easy admission
- Degree in chosen field
- Athletic programs/sport teams
- Low crime rate
- School’s active social life
- Job placement record
- Affordability
- WVU’s size
- Overall reputation
- Academic reputation
- Racial/ethnic makeup
- Availability of financial aid

Their top two reasons and rationale for their choices are below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Reason 1</th>
<th>Reason 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman, theatre</td>
<td>1) Degree in chosen field</td>
<td>2) Size (“wanted a big school”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m a city person. Morgantown isn’t a city but it’s big, and I like the flavor of a lot of people.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman, engineering</td>
<td>1) Overall reputation</td>
<td>2) Athletic programs/sports team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“As I said I grew up hearing all about West Virginia and I LOVE WVU football.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman, forensics</td>
<td>1) Degree in chosen field</td>
<td>2) Academic reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It was important that WVU was a highly accredited program.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman, computer science</td>
<td>1) Degree in chosen field</td>
<td>2) Academic reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I find it interesting that computer science is in the engineering program here because a lot of other schools consider it a part of Arts &amp; Sciences. It’s more work but I get to brag that I’m an engineer.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore, petroleum engineering</td>
<td>1) Affordability</td>
<td>2) Availability of financial aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“With the scholarships, hardly any money had to come from out of my pocket, so that was a huge thing. Unlike other schools, petroleum engineering and natural gas is a joint program, so it gives you flexibility.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman, music</td>
<td>1) Degree in chosen field</td>
<td>2) Affordability, financial aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My sister goes to Texas A&amp;M, and my parents were on the fence about me going to school so far away. But once they found out they didn’t have to pay, they were on board!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The students were asked to choose the one person, place or thing that best reflects their experience at WVU. Their responses* are below:

**Mountaineer**
“When I first got here, I was thinking Mountaineers…you know guys living in the hills. It’s the vibe I got when I first came here. I didn’t even know a Mountaineer was the mascot here.” – Freshman, computer science

**President Gee**
“I heard him at orientation and he was joking around. I got the message that yeah, it’s a party school – you can have fun. But at the same time, it’s serious. It’s school and you’re here to get an education, to work hard and get done what you need to get done.” – Freshman, engineering

**Mountainlair**
“I think it encapsulates the campus as a whole. It’s visually cool from the top…the terrace. Then when you go inside, you’ve got people hanging out and an equal number of people there to study. Then you’ve got the games area – very cool – and the food court in the middle. The top is business. So you’ve got a lot of diversity in terms of what you can do there.” – Freshman, forensics

**Adventure West Virginia**
“I did the Wilderness one with a small group of people. The group was diverse and had a good representation of all types of people I meet here and I liked all of them. And my leaders were really cool and had good advice about living here. That combined with being in the wilderness with all of these people.” – Freshman, music

**The Woodburn Clock Tower**
“You’ve got to be good at time management. You know…being in engineering, a fraternity, going to the gym and finding time to eat and study. There is a lot…so many things….to do here.” – Sophomore, petroleum engineering

*One student had to leave the discussion early because of work so she could not respond.
CONCERNS/FRUSTRATIONS
Texas students’ concerns are not atypical of the average WVU student’s concerns. Their top of mind complaints are:

- The cold winter
- The unreliable PRT
- The terrible roads
- The lack of knowledge about student organizations
- The distance from home

“I asked my mom what clothes I needed to buy for the winter. She had no idea.” – Freshman, computer science

“I’d never seen an ice scraper before. I didn’t even know what it was!” – Sophomore, petroleum engineering

“The PRT breaks down 50% of the time. I’ve been late to exams and had to reschedule them.” – Sophomore, petroleum engineering

These Texans also echo what other WVU students say about student orgs. They want to learn about organizations prior to or on the day they arrive on campus. They also believe it would be helpful for WVU to promote clubs while showcasing its majors.

“I’ve been into robotics since I was a freshman in high school. I really wish I knew that you had a robotics club before I got up here because I would have been in those clubs right away.” – Freshman, engineering

“I know that the website has a list of majors but nothing beyond that.” – Freshman, forensics

“Even now I don’t see information on clubs on campus. It’s such a great opportunity for kids to meet other kids that they share interests with.” – Freshman, music
CONCERNS/FRUSTRATIONS
Two students acknowledged that attending school so far away from home is disconcerting. For some, the lack of discretionary income forces them to stay in Morgantown over breaks. Others are making the best of it, acknowledging that not being able to go home at any time gives them the opportunity to become independent.

“I’ve got my tickets for Thanksgiving, Christmas and Spring break. I love Houston, so I go home every chance I get. My parents come up once a semester, and I facetime them every weekend because you miss them, you know. A lot of students in Texas go home every weekend, but you have got to learn to be on your own for a while. You’re really not gone for that long…two months at the most.” – Sophomore, petroleum engineering

“I’m the oldest of nine kids so I don’t get to see my siblings or mother. I guess it does kind of get to you at times.” – Freshman, engineering

“I hear about friends partying back home and I can’t be there. It kind of wears you down.” – Freshman, computer science