WVU & THE ACCULTURIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
Research Objectives:
The overarching objective is to determine how good a job WVU does do in creating a culture of internationalization and embracing international students. Specifically:
• To understand the factors that led them to consider WVU and other schools
• To identify the most important drivers in their decision to attend WVU
• To identify the gaps between their expectations and current perceptions of WVU
• To explore the effectiveness of the onboarding process
• To determine messaging that will best resonate with prospective international students

Methodology:
Using convenience sampling, fifteen international students who did not use a recruiting agent were identified. In-depth interviews were conducted between November 28 – December 1 in order to obtain feedback from students before exams and their winter break.

Note: A recruiting email sent via the International Office’s listserv primarily elicited responses from graduate or PhD students. In explore problems that undergraduates are more likely to have and provide a broader perspective, we will try to recruit more international undergraduate students (excluding exchange students) early in the new year via the heads of international student organizations.
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Full-time students from the following countries were interviewed because they reflect the areas of the world WVU is targeting for international student recruitment*:

- Bangladesh
- Brazil
- China
- Columbia
- Hong Kong
- India
- Japan
- Kuwait
- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Nigeria
- Oman
- Philippines
- Russia

Efforts were focused on recruiting a mix of undergraduate class levels, but more graduate students and exchange students indicated interest in participating in the research. In the interest of completing interviews before the end of November, interviews represent the following classes:

(1) Freshman
(1) Sophomore
(2) Junior
(4) Graduate student
(4) PhD student
(4) Exchange student

*See page 47 for some highlights of the 2016 Open Doors Report
PARTICIPATING STUDENTS

- Bangladesh, PhD student: English Literature major. First time studying in the U.S.
- Hong Kong, Physical Education: Studied three years in Hong Kong; exchange student who has been at WVU one semester
- Nigeria, Electrical Engineering: First time studying in the U.S.
- Columbia, Masters in Foreign Language and Public Administration: Earned both Master’s degrees from WVU; recently graduated
- Mexico, Accounting: Exchange student for one year and at WVU since Spring semester
- India, PhD Electrical Engineering: Completed one year at WVU; earned undergraduate in India and Masters in Canada
- India, Computer Science: Soon to graduate with Master’s degree; completed undergraduate in India
- Japan, Liberal Arts: Exchange student for one year
- Oman, Mechanical Engineering: Currently a junior; government-sponsored
- China, Statistics: Second semester as a graduate student
- Malaysia, Aerospace & Mechanical Engineering: First time studying in U.S.
- Brazil, PhD student: Has been in the U.S. for six years. Was a high school exchange student for one year. Completed his undergraduate degree in South Carolina
- India, Engineering: Soon to graduate from graduate school
- Russia, Journalism: Exchange student for one year
- Kuwait, Political Science: First time studying in the U.S.; currently a sophomore
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
These international students cited the following influences in their decision to attend WVU:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors in Choosing WVU</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduates from WVU and had good things to say about it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word of Mouth Recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Brother who lives in Texas suggested that WVU is a good school for his major (computer science)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Students who went through a similar program spoke well of it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value for the money</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student received the most funding at WVU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendation from professors</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Professors recommended a graduate program at WVU</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Professor taught at WVU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reputation</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Student was aware of WVU’s NCAA Division 1 status</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Heard good things about WVU’s engineering department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power Globe - Online forum for EE</td>
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<tr>
<td>-WVU professor was seeking a PhD student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accomplished professors</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Grad students researched professors’ CVs along with what they published and where they were published</td>
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<tr>
<td>“John Denver City”</td>
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<td>Student developed positive images from the song “Take Me Home Country Roads”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late admission policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student had intended to go to a school in U.K. but his visa got delayed. Had to apply to those schools still accepting applications</td>
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In some cases, the reality of what they have experienced at WVU has surpassed expectations; in other instances they were disappointed with what they found.

<table>
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<th>Expectations vs. Reality</th>
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| “Party school” reputation implies it’s not a serious academic institution and could spell trouble | - The engineering program is a serious program  
- Going to parties with friends is safe |
| Can rely on the PRT to get around campus | - It’s unreliable because it breaks down a lot |
| Will be matched with a mentor who will help me | - Not everyone is assigned a mentor; there are a limited number |
| Students get the courses they want | - Many international students may not get the courses they want because they register later than students in the U.S. |
| The campus will be easy to navigate | - Students have to plan their classes accordingly because commuting can be difficult and time-consuming |
| The University is run similarly to the IEP | - It’s completely different and no one helps you through the transition |
| A high acceptance rate gives everyone a chance to go to WVU | - The rigorousness of the early/initial classes is disappointing |
| The sporting events will be fun | - Sports brings people together here and makes students proud to be here |
| Will never meet WVU’s president | - He’s accessible and welcomes the opportunity to engage with students |
| Morgantown will be like New York | - It’s a quiet place that is conducive for students to study and not be distracted |
Academics

a. Courses - International students’ major academic concern is related to course selection. International undergraduate students seem to be penalized, in terms of their ability to register for classes in a timely manner. They are dissatisfied because they were unable to get some of the classes they wanted. Their understanding is that U.S. students are on campus long before international students arrive, giving them the ability to register far in advance of international students.

b. Homework - Homework assignments can also be problematic. Some professors provide instructions for students should they encounter problems with homework assignments; some do not. International students can be reluctant to ask questions, inform faculty that they may be struggling, and have no support system to rely on when they have questions.

c. Language - Issues occur in class as well, but these are associated with a student’s English language proficiency. Students struggle with professors who speak too quickly or have dialects they have not encountered before.

d. Authority - Some international students come from a culture in which they are differential to those in authority. A student’s lack of participation in class may be negatively misconstrued by professors, and may well diminish the quality of their learning.

With few exceptions, these students appear to have adapted well academically, socially and culturally to life at WVU. That said, they have identified some areas in which they’ve struggled or have seen younger students struggle.
Social Adjustments

a. Making friends - The issue of language also arises in terms of international students being able to develop friendships with American students or students from other countries. Most graduate students and gregarious undergraduate students are, by nature, more mature and feel more comfortable speaking English, even if they don’t speak the language perfectly. Also students who obtained their undergraduate degree in the U.S. have had more opportunities to speak English and they realize the importance of expanding their social circle beyond international students and learning about the culture in the U.S. However, younger international students are afraid they will misspeak and, thus, tend to socialize with other students who speak their language.

b. Personalities - Beyond the issue of language, some international students reportedly have trouble building relationships with American students. They tend to be more reserved than American students and often expect Americans to make the first move. When that doesn’t happen, international students tend to feel intimidated and overlooked.

c. Social activities - WVU hosts some events that appeal to international students, but these events are said to be ineffective in creating an environment where international and American students can “connect as people, rather than what they are interested in.” Also, few American students attend those kinds of international events.
Adaptation to Daily Life

a. Culture - For many international students, failing to receive basic knowledge about the people, the weather, etc. at WVU before they arrive at the University is unsettling. Also adding to their difficulties in adjusting to the culture here is the fact that they do not receive information regarding how some processes work once they get to campus (the need to make an appointment before showing up at certain offices, they must have their own car to take a driving test, etc.)

b. Transportation - These frustrations are multiplied when they have trouble navigating the layout of campus, arranging their classes so they don’t have to travel across campuses, or trying to take the PRT to class, only to find it that it breaks down more often that not.

c. Food preferences - Many vegetarian, health conscious students or those who follow religious dietary guidelines struggle with the proliferation of fast food on campus, the lack of local ethnic food stores and the inconvenient of public buses to those types of stores that to carry a greater variety of ethnic food and vegetarian staples (Walmart, etc.)
RECOMMENDATIONS

Partner with the international student clubs to promote their clubs. Many students are unaware that such clubs exist, yet they can make a significant difference to international student who are struggling to adapt to a new culture in the U.S.

“I was outside Hatfield’s and I heard someone talking Malaysian and that’s how I found out about the Malaysian club here.” Malaysian, sophomore

Offer seminars for international students who are concerned about being discriminated against. Teaching students ways in which to react and the options they have for coping with situations will help them feel more in control when they feel intimidated or at risk.

Hold events that will help international students better integrate with U.S. students. Activities/events where students must work together to achieve a common goal may encourage a spirit of openness and shared appreciation.

Establish a buddy system for international freshmen. Assigning students of similar age as “buddies” to international students will allow them to feel more comfortable when they are trying to figure things out when they first arrive.

Assign an advisor to work with students who graduate from the IEP Program. This direction would help students make a smoother transition into University life and classes.
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Consider using the Indian Student Organization as the standard for onboarding international students. This student organization takes control as soon as students exit the plane. They pick students up at the airport and help them ease into life in Morgantown, thus helping to lessen culture shock.

Make attendance at cultural events mandatory or offer a mandatory diversity course. Doing so would encourage students from difficult countries, including the U.S., to find commonalities.

“At my undergraduate school they had culture events and you had to attend a certain number to graduate. They would be a quick, 30-minute presentation but the last 30 minutes were discussion based. They would divide us into balanced groups of Americans and international students and while the discussions might get off topic, it didn’t matter. The idea was for students to stumble on similar interests and begin forming friendships. I made all my friends that way. The events should be based around hobbies and interests rather than what you are trying to do with your career.” – Brazil, PhD student

Create a reference booklet for international students. It would house essential information, as well as links to websites that provide fundamental information international students will likely need to help them integrate into campus life (e.g. information on the DMV…what they do, where it is, how it works, how leasing works, buying a second hand car, travel to Canada, the concept of tipping, etc.)

“I came here with the idea of New York in my mind so I had no idea how the lease system worked here. I heard that in New York that if there is a problem after a few months, there is some organization that will help you. I rented a house on the wrong side of the town…Sabraton…and I don’t have a vehicle. So I had to walk a lot and find someone to sublet my place so I worried a lot. I had no idea where to live and I didn’t understand the lease system. I also didn’t know if fixing a house would be safe or if I’m doing the right thing or not.” – Bangladesh, PhD student
THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS
Students applied to a variety of schools for graduate school:

- University of Nebraska
- UNC
- University of Texas
- Utah State University
- University of North Texas
- University of South Florida
- Ohio University
- Arizona University
- Purdue
- Oklahoma University
- Arizona
- Purdue
- Oklahoma University
- Arizona State
- Ohio State
- Penn State
Some students sought to experience a different culture/experience than their homeland; others found the idea of attending a large university very appealing.

“I wanted to live in a different environment from Tokyo. It’s a big city and lively so I wanted to go somewhere quiet. I had several choices but I spoke to another exchange student who went to WVU and they said it was great. They said there were events for international students and also a Japanese club which was very welcoming to Japanese people and events on the weekend so you can enjoy.” – Japan, sophomore

“My home university has an arrangement here. I had a choice of 5-6 universities but they said this is the biggest one. They said it has a football and baseball stadium and dorms and frats. The others were small colleges but I wanted to study at a university. Some friends had come here as well and they told me it’s nice, everything is good and they have everything there. I have also heard that Engineering is very good here.” – Mexico, senior

“It was apparent to me even though I didn’t know anyone who went here that there were a lot of events and sports here were big. Sports were appealing.” – Kuwait, junior

Personal recommendations were important to Indian students, but they were also attracted to WVU because of the variety of activities it offers. Also in India, state schools are considered better than private schools.

“I found out about WVU through the website and friends who went here. Having those activities are what we are used to so we wanted to find something similar.” – India, graduate student

“Back in India if you have a university of a state, we consider it a higher priority” – India, graduate student
DRIVERS

Personal recommendations trump other factors for those enrolled in a graduate or PhD program.

“I met a research professor from WVU in the Philippines, and he was my selling point to WVU. I got my undergraduate degree in the Philippines and my Master’s degree in Europe so I have ideas of international schools. WVU didn’t really fit into the mold of what I was used to in Europe. But this professor told me the graduate program at Davis College was really good and he introduced me to faculty and told me what I can learn from them. So it was the people who sold me.” – Philippines, PhD student

“There was an announcement that an alumnus from the university who was working at WVU had reached an agreement to open some spots for people to do a Masters in foreign language teaching and linguistics. The professor said he went to WVU in the 60’s to do a Master’s degree and he loved it so he stayed. He said it was such a wonderful place to be. I found that enticing.” – Columbia, former graduate student

“I talked to some professors at Winthrop University and they mentioned WVU. I looked into the program and liked the opportunities I would have for research and funding as well. I also applied Tennessee, Oklahoma, LSU and Houston. During my visit I met the students who were very nice and honest about the program. The PhD program is a little bit smaller which helps with the interactions with the professors. I like the opportunity to do research with professors who are not your advisor because they look forward to working with more people than just who they are assigned to. That’s a big thing for me so it was a big weight off my shoulders.” – Brazil, PhD student
A few cited affordability as the most important factor in their choosing to attend WVU.

“I applied to like six schools and each of them accepted me. WVU gave me the most so I don’t pay as much. After I choose it, I got the number of two students who went to WVU from a woman I worked with in Nigeria. They said the school was good.” – Nigeria, freshman

“My dad graduated from WVU in 1985 and he is paying for my education. I applied to other schools but none gave the scholarships. That also was a huge factor in my coming here. My dad said the university is good and it is a good experience for your overall well-being. It’s also a lot cheaper.” – Malaysia, sophomore

Some wanted to experience a different climate, and still others were attracted by the sports culture.

“When I applied to the University of North Texas, I came to know that the climate is similar to that of India. I knew it was different here so that is one of the reasons I decided to come here.” – India, graduate student

“My university has a connection here but I had a few choices I am studying physical education and my first choice was America. I know WVU is Division I. I know that program here is pretty good and has some subjects for me to study. I found that out by going on the website. I didn’t Google West Virginia because I knew it wasn’t a very popular destination for tourists.” – Hong Kong, senior

“It was apparent to me even though I didn’t know anyone who went here that there were a lot of events and sports here were big. Sports were appealing.” – Kuwait, junior
I researched quite a few universities to apply to but I kind of came here by accident. I had planned to attend university in the U.K. but my British visa did not finish in time so I had to scramble and apply late to schools that were still accepting applications. I got accepted at Penn State and WVU. It was apparent to me just by looking at events and the university's appeal that sports here were big. Sports were appealing to me and I heard good things about the engineering department. It was ranked higher than Penn State nationally.” – Kuwait, junior

DRIVERS

One student acknowledged that because of a glitch with his visa, he was forced to apply to only those schools that were still accepting applications.
THE CULTURE
NARRATIVES

One graduate student explained that in Bangladesh there are misperceptions about the association between where U.S. colleges/universities are located and how well-suited those colleges are for international students.

“One challenge is that international students are more likely to come across schools in more well-known states. How can WV reposition itself from being in a small state. Maybe say that the university is bigger than the state itself! Many people don’t even know West Virginia is a state. My friends keep asking me how is Virginia? How can this university define the state? WVU and SUNY NY rank the same but my friend said why didn’t you choose SUNY? So sometimes the state gives it a better brand name. Some friends asked me why I’m not studying in the north where they are more welcoming, understanding and having more of a history with international students.” – Bangladesh, PhD student

Some friends/family of students outside the U.S. recounted less than favorable narratives about the U.S.

“I heard a lot before I came here from my family and the news. They always say that in America you have to be careful. You have to know where you are going. When I came here, I didn’t feel that. – Oman, junior

“Before I came here to study my parents and friends told me to be careful here. They said Americans carry guns; in China we cannot have guns. I guess I did worry about that at first but now I don’t think this is an issue.” – China, graduate student
NARRATIVES

The party school image still looms large on the Internet, and some within WVU continue to perpetuate that image. Some international students embraced the idea of a party school, albeit cautiously.

“I read that WVU is a party school. The first things the grad students in the PhD committee (mostly local students) joking said is that I want to stay away from campus because it is one of the most notorious party places in all America. They told me that so I knew not to live there.” – Bangladesh, PhD student

“I tried to find out about the city...is it big or small. I read that it was a party school and was definitely happy. I had a lot of friends who did a PhD so I know how the life is for them...Very serious. Of course I have to do my work but I’ll have a lot of opportunities.” – Indian, PhD student

“I read that it’s a party school but I think that’s great because I can experience a culture that is totally different from Japan. But I saw a video that made me think it could be dangerous because some people died of alcohol. But I think it depends on the party and if I go with my friends it will be safe.” – Japan, sophomore
NARRATIVES

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Those who Googled WVU or West Virginia before coming here were concerned by what they read. One student noted that West Virginia does not rank among the top cities that embrace students who hail from another country.

“My government said I got a scholarship and I let them choose the university for me. I googled it and party school came up. I know for sure that it’s not going to be crazy though because the government would not send me here. I read that West Virginia is a very poor state and I didn’t want to go. But when I came here I liked it here.” – Oman, junior

“I searched for cities that are most welcoming to international students and West Virginia was not at the top of the list. It’s slightly down there or maybe in the middle. International students search for that a lot. But I knew from my earlier experience traveling that what you read and what you see are very different.” – Bangladesh, PhD student
Aside from the campus layout, students were, in many respects, pleasantly surprised with what they have found when they got to WVU.

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

“Before I came here I had expected very fancy stuff because that’s what the U.S. is known for, in general. Now I know that it’s good for students and you don’t get distracted from studies. It’s not crazy like New York.” – Oman, junior

**ACCESSIBILITY**

“Your culture is very different than Mexico. Some of them I expected and some of them I did. Once a professor was trying to open something and ask if anyone had a little knife. Two or three guys pulled out big knives with handles! I've since heard that is not a weird thing. – Mexico, senior

**ACADEMICS**

“I had never even heard of West Virginia before. A lot of my friends went to Penn State and I think I would not have had the same academic experience there.” – Kuwait, junior

**THE CULTURE**

“Before I came to the U.S., I could never image that I could talk with the president of a university...like at Up all Night or on the street. In my four years in undergrad, I never met the president of my university. President Gee is humorous and seems like my grandpa or uncle – very close.” – China, graduate student

**THE PARTY IMAGE**

“All the students were talking before the SATs and when I mentioned WVU, they all said you’re going there for the parties. Then I Googled it and found out – wow – it’s like in the top 10. I then wondered if the education was going to be poor because of this so I asked my dad. He said it’s normal for every college campus in America. People were saying that couches were being burned! A lot of relatives agreed with my dad and said it all depends on how you manage yourself. When I got here I found that it was a party school but then I got to the engineering school and saw that the professors were good and the TAs are good and the program is quite serious.” – Malaysian, sophomore

**TEACHING PHILOSOPHY**

“I found that WVU is also a very liberal school so it should also highlight that. By that, I mean its diversity, inclusiveness and liberal attitude toward learning. It is not your conservative, classical methods of education. It has a more modern, cutting-edge syllabus.” – Bangladesh, PhD student

**THE CAMPUS**

“It’s been good and bad. The environment is awesome. I love how sports bring the people together here and you feel proud to be a WVU member. The bad part is the way the city is laid out.” – Brazil, PhD student
EXPECTED VS. REALITY

Despite many students having little to no knowledge of WVU or the state before coming here, they were pleasantly surprised by what they found. Several students were also asked to rate their overall experience at WVU using a 1-10 scale; the University garnered high scores.

“I love the hills and the mountains. We don’t have many hills or mountains in Russia. Russia is pretty plain. I love the scenery here. We traveled a lot here and we saw the fall colors.” – Russia, sophomore

“I would rate it a 10. When I go back to my own country, I miss it here. I have my own apartment here and all of friends back there are gone. It’s nice. I love it here.” – Oman, junior

“A 7. It was a culture shock but in general, there are no impenetrable barriers here.” – Kuwait, junior

“I read that it’s a party school. Now that I’m here, I realize that it depends on the party. If I go to parties with my friends, it will be okay.” – Japan, sophomore

“It’s a 10. It’s a new experience for me and I enjoy it very much.” – Hong Kong, senior

“I would rate my experience an 8 because we can’t take the courses we want to take since we registered late. Sometimes we’ll meet very drunk people downtown. They scare me when they scream but if I go out with other people, it’s fine to go there.” – Japan, sophomore
Many struggled when they first arrived. They received a plethora of forms, etc. from OISS but fundamental information - so important to those adapting to a new culture - was conspicuously absent.

“I sat there waiting for the bus from Pittsburgh to Morgantown and I watched it pass me by. I didn’t know that I had to have a reservation. I got information from OISS that said there’s this bus and you need to get on it, but they didn’t tell me anything else. My advisor and his wife picked me up.” – Philippines, PhD student

“I had no idea where anything was when I got here. I would have preferred to do the undergraduate tour. Just show me where things are, the gym, etc. I love working out to relieve stress and not having the gym close to me was a huge negative, so I even have another gym membership. I would rather pay a monthly fee than spend an hour of my time commuting to the gym everyday. “In my view once you go to the graduate level you care a lot about the funding. The funding is nice and you might think I’ll deal with whatever comes with it. But in my view, more funding but having a harder time in the city might be something you have to consider before you go somewhere.” – Brazil, PhD student

“Tax Services told me to bring some kind of paperwork but I didn’t know that I had to make an appointment first.” - Brazil, PhD student

“I would have loved more information. For example, I went to the DMV four times and they told me I couldn’t get a driver’s license until… I was running after things that couldn’t be done anyway but I didn’t know that and I lost a lot of my summer trying to get things done. – Brazil, PhD student

“WVU should work with the assumption that international students are not like American students who know how everything works here. When we come we have worries, questions...” – Bangladesh, PhD student
ACCULTURATION

Students who attended the 14-month International English program at WVU struggled when making the transition from IEP to undergraduate studies because they didn’t receive any direction.

“As an IEP student, we got used to doing things as IEP students and when we got to the University, it was a hard adjustment. Once we graduated, we didn’t know what to do. We heard a lot of students take this or that class. And it was a hard adjustment. I don’t remember talking to an advisor so I signed up for any class but later I had a general education advisor. Engineering students should have their own advisor. That’s what put me behind in my studies for the first semester.” – Oman, junior

One graduate student (not enrolled in IEP) also reported that she wasn’t given any guidance and had to figure out everything for herself.

“Graduate students who come here have to figure out everything on their own. When I was in the U.K., for example, they have an orientation for all international students. It doesn’t matter what you’re taking. Everyone learns these are the rules, these are the services, these are the people you talk to. As a grad student here, I just had to ask my classmates and figure things out for myself.” – Philippines, PhD student
SOCIAL BARRIERS

While WVU has some social events that are more enjoyable for international students to attend, these events are not necessarily conducive to meaningful interactions with American students. Many advocate that the University introduce a different type of event, one in which international and U.S. students can comfortably mingle.

“If you’re an outgoing person, you shouldn’t have any problems meeting people. You can meet people through students organizations or just playing sports at the Rec Center. - Kuwait, Junior

“International students go to Up All Night but I’m not sure if there are enough interactions there. They seem to keep to their own groups. Only American students can make us feel comfortable. I read something in the Eberly Magazine where a doctor wrote that working in the writing department with international students helped him understand how some international students like to hear more from doctors than American students.” These interactions are very precious.” Bangladesh, PhD

“Basic rules are hard for new students from Brazil at first, especially socialization skills like how to greet people. It’s good to have activities in which they can interact with American students and not just trust them to go on their own. The problem is that if international students see an event they say they don’t know anybody so they won’t go. But when you give them a chance to work together they will begin to recognize more students on campus and then consider attending future events.” – Brazil, PhD student

“If we do not join a club, we cannot make American friends. Up All Night is good but we don’t have opportunities to make friends there. I’d like to see dinners, sporting events or other types of events where we could sit with American students – Japan, sophomore

“...
SOCIAL BARRIERS

It’s evident that those students are naturally more outgoing and mature have an easier time making friends with American students and/or students from other countries.

“If you’re an outgoing person, you shouldn’t have any problems meeting people. You can meet people through students organizations or just playing sports at the Rec Center.” – Kuwait, Junior

“In my program, I am the only international program so I made four friends from the U.S. The grad school committee has some international students and where I live, they’re most from South Asia like me. I’m kind of an outgoing person so I don’t have reservations.” – Bangladesh, PhD student

“When you are in IEP, they find you a match. It was with an American student and that was really helpful. I signed up three times. I also meet people in my engineering classes and playing soccer. For anyone who wants to be social, it’s easy.” – Oman, junior

“The Malaysian college education system is different. We are given a set class and the teachers would come to your classroom. I was surprised when I got here. So you get close to those students because you’re with them for the whole year but here you get to meet friends for every different class session that you have.” – Malaysian, sophomore
LANGUAGE BARRIERS

A lack of English proficiency was identified as the major barrier for younger international students to feel comfortable participating in social events. One student put the onus on American students to make international students feel more comfortable.

“A Chinese friend of mine got a text message from the school but I had to translate it for her.” – Chinese, graduate student

“Of course they want to interact. Undergraduate students have a harder time, especially when they come with poor English. That is their main worry and they speak less in class. They also are homesick. Grad students are more mature. I don’t know that local American students have the same maturity as graduate students. They don’t want to shock people culturally. I might also shock some students but graduate students are more understanding of my differences.” – Bangladesh, PhD student
ONE STUDENT’S STORY

This freshman, a late arrival because his flight was delayed, feels lonely and out of place. The Nigerian student’s flight was delayed so he was only able to attend one session of orientation which caused him a lot of anxiety.

“I was so confused. I went to my advisor so the only thing I knew was the classes I was going to take. I’m struggling but I’m okay. I just go to class and get food downstairs. I’m not really happy with that.”

He acknowledged that he figures things out by asking people.

“My roommates and I don’t really speak but sometimes I’ll ask them questions. I found out where the PRT was because I was outside and heard someone yell ‘PRT,’ so I said oh, there’s the PRT. The day that I came we went to the buildings around here. The tour guide just pointed and said the PRT is over there.”

He didn’t know there was a rec center and hadn’t heard anything about student organizations. Without his involvement in such things, he will remain isolated.

“School is okay; I think it’s just me. Some get help with homework but for me, it’s just me trying to figure it out. I want to make friends and have tried to talk to people but we didn’t fit. If there were more Nigerians I’d feel more comfortable.

If there are five people in a room and if they’re all confused, you kind of come together. Everyone else is comfortable because this is Morgantown. Almost everyone I meet knows everything about this place, and they already have friends from here.”
INITIAL EXPOSURE TO THE U.S.

For some students, coming to the U.S./Morgantown for the first time was an eye opener. Some experiences were good; others gave them pause.

“I expected it to be much bigger. It’s not a small town but it’s not that huge and crazy like a very large city I’m very observant so I watch what other people do and do the same.” – Mexico, senior

Your culture is very different than Mexico. Some of them I expected and some of them I did. Once a professor was trying to open something and ask if anyone had a little knife. Two or three guys pulled out big knives with handles! I’ve since heard that is not a weird thing. – Mexico, senior

“One major difference between my country and here is that it’s a small-like and individualistic society. In my country, we interact a lot more in my country. We spend long hours sitting together and talking. It’s a lot busier here. Politics is not much talked about here, other than the elections but in Bangladesh, we talk a lot about them.” - Bangladesh, PhD student

“I had never been on a plane before and I remember my first days here. My friends who done the program previously told me to look in South Park. I can clearly remember walking around, and I thought this really looks like what you see in the Hollywood movies. I thought movies are movies so I didn’t expect it to be like that. The other thing that surprised me about West Virginia and Morgantown was how beautiful and green it way. In Hollywood movies, you never see so much greenery and mountains and trees. – Columbia, former graduate student

“All people from my country are thought to be Muslims. I was looking for places that were more sensitive to diversity. West Virginia is not very famous for that; I read about it. My opinion has totally changed. I’ve found people to be cooperative, helpful, and I haven’t encountered any problems. It is totally different.” – Bangladesh, PhD student
CULTURAL NETWORKS

The Indian community embraces Indian students and could be used as a model for “best practices” on onboarding foreign students. Indian students have established a strong network at WVU, with 400 students strong. The Indian Student Association is responsible for helping in the initial arrangements for new students coming from India, including picking them up at the airport, opening their home and acting as a personal orientation guide.

After I came here I found some Indian communities and they were really helpful to show what needs to be done. I found them on Facebook. I googled every university with an Indian association and it showed up - WVU ISA. That helps with finding housing. Then someone from the Indian community I was staying with took me to the bank, etc. I consider them my orientation guide.” – India, PhD student

“I learned that I had to go to Tax Services for my assistantship. The person I stayed with told me to go there, so it was like a one-stop shop to any of my questions. That’s how it happens in the Indian community. Whoever comes will stay with someone who is Indian, for at least a few days and we tell them whatever we know, whatever has to be done. It is not hard, but for someone who is new, it can be confusing.” – India, PhD student

“WVU is not only good at academics but it is good at connectivity. I always feel there is a lot to take in here and I like that. I found out about WVU through the website and friends who went here. Having those activities are what we are used to so we wanted to find something similar.” – India, graduate student

A Chinese student reported that Chinese students also have a strong network.

“For Chinese students, it’s easy. We have social media groups...at the university, Morgantown, and West Virginia and we can make friends that way.” – Chinese, graduate student
SAFETY PERCEPTIONS

Generally speaking, the vast majority of these international students have not felt intimidated or threatened at WVU or the surrounding area. That said, the election did cause some uneasiness and some have lingering concerns.

“I feel safe here but there is one thing I noticed here that I haven’t noticed in other parts of America. I do feel like there is almost a culture of anxiety here about security even though it’s a relatively secure place.” - Kuwait, Junior

“I’m not worried about that. In Nigeria we have five fences this high around everything. I feel safe here and I never lock my room.” – Nigeria, freshman

“After Trump got elected, I was afraid to go outside and so was my husband. We got a lot of letters and emails from the university so you feel like it’s going to be okay. But then I know that this is a red state and a lot of people probably voted for Trump…I fear random acts of racism from people. I think the emails were very helpful. They also said we’re going to have a dinner and talk about it, and anytime you feel afraid, just come over and we’ll talk about it.” - Philippines, PhD student

One student feels it’s prudent to keep his Muslim faith concealed.

“Most people don’t know that I am Muslim because they think I’m Asian. I only tell my close friends that I am Muslim because I don’t want others to feel uncomfortable. Even some of my close friends say, ‘You seem normal.’ I don’t pray 5 times a day or eat Hillel meat. It was a bit troubling with the elections this year and all the nasty stuff that happened after that. I just try to keep a low profile.” – Malaysia, sophomore
SAFETY PERCEPTIONS

Students appreciated that the University tried to address students’ concerns during these election and post-election times and was successful alleviating some students’ fears, others realize that the University cannot dictate the behaviors exhibited by those outside the University.

“The emails from the University made me feel comfortable that they were trying to reach out of minorities and Muslims. I remember when they had the session for the Orlando shooting victims so every time there's something that concerns people, they try to engage and comfort them.” – Malaysia, sophomore

“With the result of this election, I feel it could get scary again. I appreciate the efforts of the University that doesn’t change what’s happening out there.” – Columbia, former graduate student
SAFETY PERCEPTIONS

Two students acknowledged feeling unwelcome because of their ethnicity. One took some steps that he feels may Americanize him; the other has not found a solution.

“It depends on the crowds around. Some students are really open and some are not keen on making friends with international students. I remember the first or second week of classes, I made a friend who was with this who was from a very rural, very conservative, Christian town in West Virginia and she didn’t even look at me when she talked to me. I was wondering if she was the first Asian person she’d ever seen. So then I thought that maybe some people are not used to people like me. Sometimes that makes me a bit uncomfortable, but I tend to keep an open mind. I was the only international student on my floor. Most people on my dorm floor were nice but there were some students who, when you say hi, they just ignore you. So sometimes I face that. In the spring, I found that faking an American accent helped. Malaysians speak something that sounds like British English, but began pronouncing words differently.” – Malaysia, sophomore

“There have been a couple of times in grocery stores where I have felt hostility from other people. A man was waiting for them to bring out his groceries and he started starring at me. I could feel a guy starring at me with hate so I said hello and asked him if I could help him. He said, ‘I don’t know what your kind is doing here.’ I understood what he was saying but I didn’t know what to do. That happened when I was here six months. They think South Park is a very progressive neighborhood. There are times when I’ve noticed people cross and go to the other side of the street. but I have watched a woman cross the street while walking her child when she saw me. She then crossed back over after she passed me.” – Columbia, former graduate student
PERCEPTIONS OF FOOD

Unsurprisingly, an international student’s eating habits prior to coming to WVU contributes to the level of satisfaction they have regarding the food available at the University or local restaurants. Many believe there’s a lack of healthy food options at WVU which has caused them to gain weight.

“There is diversity in coffee shops and restaurants, both in terms of the food and the prices. I do think they should have healthier options in the Mountainlair...not fast food, offer vegetarian options, etc.)” – Kuwait, junior

“Access to unhealthy food was less probable in Brazil than here so I’ve had to be more cautious about what I am eating.” – Brazil, PhD student

“Definitely there isn’t a lot of variety here. That’s definitely a disadvantage in Morgantown. Accessibility is difficult so opportunities are less. I am a vegetarian so I definitely have to cook. I don’t have plenty of options eating out. I mainly go to Kroger’s. Going to Walmart is not easy because I don’t have a car. I wish there were something else because I need to eat the same things all the time.” – India, PhD student

“Some of my friends who are observant Muslims from Malaysia cannot find Hillel meat (a kosher meat certified by clergy).” – Malaysia, sophomore

“This is a constant problem among us Russians. The food here makes us fatter. Even though the meal plan is convenient, it makes us a bit fatter. Even though the products are basically the same as we have in Russia, we don’t cook them in such ways that they have so many more calories.” – Russia, sophomore

The lack of healthy food, in combination with the lack of convenient transportation options to purchase healthier foods, is problematic.
HEALTH INSURANCE

While international students recall being told about health insurance, they need a more in-depth explanation of when and how it works in order to prevent surprises. Several received bills they did not anticipate.

“My fall happened in January and then found the fracture in April and in June I started getting bills. I had been under the impression that everything was covered. I kept asking them if I owed anything because I hadn’t gotten a bill. They said if you have insurance, it was probably all covered.” – Columbia, former graduate student

“I did not know that deductibles were $400. I thought that the medical insurance provided by the university would be free.” – Russia, sophomore

“I remember hearing about it but they didn’t mention how to use it if anything goes wrong (copays, etc.). I went to Aetna’s site and they have a really nice table there that helped me understand. Maybe you can provide that to students.” – Malaysia, sophomore

“The insurance was presented to me but it was not presented clearly because I missed the waiver application. I definitely didn’t receive enough information about the student insurance process and how if you don’t do the waiver application, it’s on your bill.” – Kuwait, Junior
UNIVERSITY SUPPORT SYSTEMS

None of these students acknowledged facing difficulties that dictated they seek assistance from an office in the University.

“I’ve relied on friends and family for support. I did have a friend last year who used the counseling services and she said they had a therapy dog there. I thought that was funny.”
- Kuwait, Junior

“I’m struggling [but using a 1-10 scale], I would rate my experience as at a “9” because I’m optimistic.”
- Nigeria, freshman
LOGISTICS

Some international students find the layout of campus challenging, particularly because they cannot rely on the PRT to get to class. One student noted that while he was told the PRT is not particularly safe to ride at night, he has not encountered any problems.

“Everything is good so except for transportation, where I always have difficulties. I’m new so I don’t have a car. I had to walk and it wasn’t a pleasant experience. There is a slope and no proper parkway and I had to cross a highway. Except for Tax Services, everything has come to Evansdale which helps a lot. The PRT is good but sometimes it breaks down. Today we had to wait about 20 minutes and other times I’ve waited for an hour. I looked at the website, Busride.org to find out about the buses. Every place is accessible but timing is difficult. So maybe you can increase the frequency.” – India, PhD

“I’ve had people mention that late PRT rides are not safe, but I have not experienced anything bad. I don’t know if they were joking or not but they told me to be careful after 7:30 on the PRT.” – Brazil, PhD student

“It’s tricky at first. I didn’t like how not accessible different campuses are. I have to drive to the Evansdale campus and take the PRT every day, which breaks down. At my other school I had accessibility to walk everywhere or ride my bike. If I forgot something, it was a five minute walk back. Here, it’s a 40-minute drive if that happens. So you’ve got to plan a lot better. That is the really negative part of the university. Also, being a bigger school offices are in different parts of the city so I have to travel a lot to get some things done.” – Brazil, PhD student

“In fact, solely relying on the PRT can be detrimental to a student’s academic success.

“My TA in lab is pretty nice so if you’re ten minutes late, it’s okay but if you’re 30 minutes late, she won’t let you in. The law is that if you’re 5 minutes late, that’s 5 points off your lab quiz.” – Malaysia, sophomore
LEGAL ISSUES

Another struggle international students face relates to laws regarding things like housing, driving, travel, etc.

“I came here with the idea of New York in my mind so I had no idea how the lease system worked here. I heard that in New York that if there is a problem after a few months, there is some organization that will help you. I rented a house on the wrong side of the town...Sabraton...and I don’t have a vehicle. So I had to walk a lot and find someone to sublet my place so I worried a lot. I had no idea where to live and I didn’t understand the lease system. I also didn’t know if fixing a house would be safe or if I’m doing the right thing or not.” – India, PhD student

“We had a lot of issues renting an apartment or a house, buying a second hand car, or if I want to visit Canada. Some students just went to Mexico and they had a problem. They cannot get back in the U.S. any more.”
- Chinese, graduate student

“I heard that the OISS has a legal department but they didn’t tell us exactly what they do.” – India, graduate student
OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

Overall, students described the department as helpful in answering their questions. However, the office’s response time and limited distribution of information was called into question. To reiterate, students acknowledged that OISS sent a significant amount of documents but would have appreciated receiving more intimate information about WVU - the culture, the weather, etc.

“I knew I was accepted here in March but I didn't hear anything from OISS until June so it was time to panic. I even initiated the conversation with them. I had to call him. He told me I didn't have enough money. So I told him all I would get and he didn't reply to me. If he had just told her that, she could have cleared it up. This is so different that what I experienced in Europe. they have everything ready for you. I had to transfer between three different schools when I was in Europe and the school was always responding. The experience I had at WVU really turned me off. I thought, ‘What am I doing?’ They (OISS) tells me to give them a letter, and I do that, and they didn't respond.” - Philippines, PhD student

“OISS let me know a lot of things that I had to fill out, etc. but they could have told me about the place or the people. For example, knowing about the weather would be helpful.” – Mexico, senior

“OISS has a lot to improve. Only the director knows everything so the employees have to learn more. Every time I have a problem, I have to meet with the supervisor or director but there is only one there.” – China, graduate student

“I was told there are lawyers who work for OISS but we were never told in depth about what they do. My Malaysian friends had a problem with the apartment they were renting...” - Malaysia, sophomore
COURSE REGISTRATION/ADVISORS

Course registration has caused the greatest consternation for undergraduate students. An engineering major noted the process was rushed, leaving him feel very disappointed. Others were angry because international students were the last to register, leaving them very frustrated.

“I feel like it was done hastily. I feel like the advisor was trying to sign up as many people as possible in as little time as possible.” - Kuwait, freshman

“International students get whatever is left because everyone else has the whole summer to register for classes. We only come the week before classes. It was really difficult to get the classes I wanted because a lot of classes were full.” - Malaysia, sophomore

“Some courses have prerequisites but it was not clear online. For example, I knew I had to take the prerequisite B course to take A, but when I went to class, the professor told me that I needed to have a prerequisite of C. The departments need to display all prerequisites on the website.” - China, graduate student

“We were late to gain access to the spring schedule, so a lot of classes were already full.” - Russia, sophomore

“I was frustrated because the courses I wanted were full. Why would I come here if I can’t take the classes I need? You need lots of approval through the departments (head of CPAAS and the professor). Overall, they did a good job, though.” - Hong Kong, senior

Most appreciated their advisor’s assistance. However, this graduate student would like to see advisors take a more proactive approach in helping students.

“My advisor has been good but I would appreciate it if he tried to reach me rather then me always having to reach out to him. What I want had been done at my previous school. If he could send me an email every two weeks or so to asked me how my classes are going, etc. I would prefer that he care about my progress as I go rather than only when we see each other. I’m his TA as well.” - Brazil, graduate student
INTERACTIONS WITH PROFESSORS

Although students had to demonstrate a certain level of proficiency with the English language to be admitted to WVU, some still face challenges in class. Generally speaking, international undergraduate students are more reluctant to participate in class because they have concerns about their ability to speak English.

“We struggled with the language in the beginning...with the accents...but we slowly adapted to that. It was so difficult to understand the lectures.” – Indian, graduate student

“When professors speak too fast and I don’t understand them, I ask students to take a copy of their notes for me.” – Japan, sophomore

Others have come from a culture in which it is not acceptable to question those in higher positions.

“I can tell you that here in the U.S. you give a lot of importance to student here. They are treated like equals. But in my country, the professor’s words would be the last word. Without the professors creating an environment, they wouldn’t even dare ask a question but it has changed. When I attended the government university we hardly asked questions. So I found out through teaching later on and that was a transformation for me. They usually participate less than the local students, and I guess they are worried about their English mainly.” – Bangladesh, PhD student

“I’ve seen students who are not at all comfortable asking professors questions. Just having someone their age that they can ask questions of regarding any kind of small transitions can make a big difference.” – Brazil, PhD student
OVERALL EXPERIENCE

When asked to evaluate their overall experience at WVU, most gave positive testimonies.

“I’m more than happy here. I like the people most of all. Everyone is very cooperative, the professors are super nice, the libraries are wonderful here, the clubs and the way things operate. And I love the PRT, even when it doesn’t work because I read about its history. It’s like the old grandparents who have served a lot. It’s been here for more than 40 years so how can they expect it to function like young people all the time.” – Bangladesh, PhD

“People from Bangladesh would like the mountains, lakes, and trees…this is what we also have. An also the university has a very liberal outlook, a very inclusive statement. And they mean it. I read it and I felt it.” – Bangladesh, PhD student

“I never had even a culture shock here but I probably will have a culture shock when I go back... Here I can have a discussion with professors and not agree with them or if I feel I know something extra I can share it with the class. All those beautiful American things in the American education system, we don’t have them back there.” – Russia, sophomore

“I’m trying to travel a lot to other states. But when I’m returning to WV, I always feel like I’m returning home. I imagine the wonderful Woodburn Hall and I’m thinking of, I’m going to be home! Everyone here is extra friendly. At my university in Moscow never cares about adopting or making you feel like a part of a family. The professors there are boring, formal, respectful and will never become your friend. I could listen to the professors here for hours and hours.” I would say it’s definitely an experience that changed my life. I would not have anticipated it happening that fast and being so profound.” – Russia, sophomore

“It was really good. You can enjoy university life and activities on the weekend, too.” – Japan, sophomore

“It’s nice, I love it here.” – Oman, junior
### TOP U.S. INSTITUTIONS HOSTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, 2015/16

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### TOP PLACES OF ORIGIN OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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### ACADEMIC LEVEL TRENDS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Non-Degree</th>
<th>OPT</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergrad</td>
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<td>1,120,430</td>
<td>89,566</td>
<td>85,157</td>
<td>1,534,695</td>
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<td>6.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
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<td>1,121,204</td>
<td>73,528</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>370,724</td>
<td>1,209,854</td>
<td>79,477</td>
<td>105,997</td>
<td>1,847,666</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
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<td>1,262,228</td>
<td>93,587</td>
<td>120,287</td>
<td>2,077,846</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>427,313</td>
<td>1,383,935</td>
<td>85,093</td>
<td>147,498</td>
<td>2,203,839</td>
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### SELECTED FIELDS OF STUDY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of Study</th>
<th>Undergrad</th>
<th>Grad</th>
<th>Non-Degree</th>
<th>OPT</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>10.3</td>
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<td>141,651</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Intensive English</td>
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Source: Institute of International Education 2016 Open Doors Report