

Focus Group Findings**Objective**

The purpose of the focus group interviews is to engage a variety of individuals in dynamic conversation about a variety of student life, student services, entertainment, and food service needs and preferences to determine their selection criteria regarding the use of the student union. Additional focus groups were held to understand student housing needs and preferences in order to conceptually shape facilities that would appeal to them. The focus group meetings also allow Brailsford & Dunlavey to gain an initial understanding of the issues particular to the Ohio State University (OSU), from a user's perspective. The information is used to set the direction for further market analysis through the Internet surveys. Focus groups are intended to yield qualitative data, reveal hidden sensitivities and raise issues previously not considered, rather than providing rigid, statistically reliable responses from a strictly demographically representative sample of the population.

Methodology

A moderator from Brailsford & Dunlavey led each of the focus groups. The purpose of the moderator was to gently guide the conversation to address concerns pertaining to the student union and on-campus housing. The moderator generally presented a series of questions, intentionally open-ended in nature, and permitted individuals to discuss tangential issues and engage in dynamic conversation. While the moderator was predisposed to obtaining answers to the questions asked, the moderator also paid close attention to participant generated issues raised during the interviews. Brailsford & Dunlavey staff subsequently transcribed the audiotapes and notes of the recorded focus groups.

The following is an outline of the groups interviewed:

Ohio Union

Group 1: University faculty and staff

Group 2: University faculty and staff

Group 3: Student Affairs staff

Group 4: Commuter Students

Group 5: SPA's

Group 6: Greek Students

Group 7: Student Leaders

Group 8: Residential Students

Group 9: Council on Student Affairs

Group 10: Ohio Union Council

Group 11: Campus Activities & Events

Group 12: Commuter Students

Group 13: Multicultural Center

Group 14: Ohio Union Student Staff

Group 15: Ohio Union Activities Board

Group 16: Student Leaders

Group 17: Undergraduate Student Government

Group 18: Residential Students

Group 19: Graduate & Professional Students

Group 20: Ohio Union Student Staff

Group 21: Non-Traditional Students

Group 22: Office of Admissions

Housing

Group 1: Graduate and non-traditional students

Group 2: Resident Advisors

Group 3: Living Learning Programs

Group 4: Mount Scholars Program

*Summary of Findings***1. Why did you come to OSU?***Size & Location*

- The majority of students chose OSU because of the size of the school. Many felt that the campus offers a myriad of opportunities for students, faculty and staff and agreed that there is something for everyone at Ohio State.

- Faculty and staff also commented on the vast resources and opportunities abound within their respective fields.

- Many participants in particular liked OSU's urban location and felt that the city of Columbus provided students with alternative social and cultural options off campus.

Tradition

- Most students concurred that they were attracted to OSU because of its athletic reputation. Many expressed that they had followed OSU football since they were young and were proud to be a part of the campus community.

- Students also agreed that family members who were alumni always shared great stories about Ohio State. The strong sense of pride exhibited by past and current OSU students made it an enticing place to want to be a part of.

Programs

- Focus groups participants said that they were impressed by the strength of the various programs at the University.

- Graduate students relayed that programs such as Law, Medicine and Engineering to name a few, are highly regarded across the country.

Value

- Many of the in-state students agree that OSU provides a good value, considering the quality of education offered for the current price.

2. Has OSU met your expectations? What would you like to change?

Academics

- Most students commented positively about their academic experiences at OSU. Many felt that the University provides a good balance academically and socially.
- Several students felt that they had a lot of graduate assistants teaching their courses and wanted more face time and contact with their professors.

Social Life

- Students commented that although OSU is very large, it is easy to find a niche of students with similar interests which helps to make the school feel smaller.
- Many felt that there are many social and cultural opportunities for students on and off campus and that these experiences help to accentuate their overall college experience.
- Overall students agreed that there is always something to do and that the diversity at OSU is very refreshing.

Administration

- Students commonly expressed that because of the size of the campus, there is a lot of red tape involved in getting things done.
- Many said that they felt disconnected with the administration and rarely saw them interacting with students, and equated this to the administration not putting students first.
- Some students also felt that the registration process for classes is very difficult and wanted it to be less tasking for students.

3. Are there any current physical characteristics about the OSU campus (i.e. green spaces, court yards, other) that you feel currently foster a sense of community?

- In every focus group session, students named Mirror Lake, the Oval and the Stadium as places that fostered the sense of tradition and community that makes OSU unique. Although Mirror Lake, the

Oval and the Ohio Stadium had a sentimental value for students, it was mentioned that there are no such indoor spaces that foster the tradition and spirit of the Ohio State University.

- On a smaller scale, another space on campus that many felt is a high traffic area for students to grab food is mirror lake café. Students agreed that although Mirror Lake café is small, it is always bustling with students. "It definitely attracts many students daily and creates a social atmosphere that students enjoy."
- In general, focus group members relayed that for a campus of OSU's size, there is not really a central space for students to congregate and interact on a daily basis.
- A few students also mentioned that they had been to other Universities in-state as well as across the country, where their student union or recreation facilities acted as anchors for student life. These students went further to express that such contemporary facilities on campus that engage the student population on a daily, are missing at OSU.

4. What is the overall perception of the Ohio Union (Physical appearance, services offered, hours of operation, convenient location, etc.)?

Atmosphere and Spaces

- Students had a variety of comments on the way the Ohio Union felt, many agreeing that the most important was that it was uninviting to students, faculty and staff.
- In general, many felt that the atmosphere was not student friendly because there are not enough activity spaces that could create a lively atmosphere at the Ohio Union. "The spaces within the Union are not comfortable and Buckeye Spirit is definitely lacking," was the common rhetoric.
- Way finding was also a main issue commonly brought up in many of the focus groups. "The Union is extremely confusing to navigate," expressed one student. Some also pointed out that the building is fragmented and spaces are not laid out well.
- Participants also conveyed that the Ohio Union always felt empty. Many felt that the Union is underutilized and does not provide the types of activity and retail spaces that are commonly found at other unions. Participants also expressed that there is a disconnect between the purpose of Ohio Union as a social hub and the rest of the campus.

- Students complained that there are no comfortable spaces for students to 'hang out' or interact with their peers. Participants wanted to see more quiet study space, as well as social spaces that allowed students to rest and relax without being directly in the public eye. "It is embarrassing to walk a tour through here and have them see students sleeping all over. We need more lounge space," said a participant.
- Agreeing with this, some students went further to say that the Union had been taken over by meeting and conferencing spaces and so recreational rooms, social and study lounges, and retail outlets commonly found at other Unions were not provided.
- Students also complained about the lack of recreational spaces within the Union. Many felt that the Ohio Union should be a place where most students should turn to for leisure activities.
- Some participants relayed that the Ohio Union currently does not offer much in terms of retail to users. Faculty and staff also conveyed that it was important to have Buckeye memorabilia available at the union for alumni and parents who come back to campus on game days.
- Other comments and quotes from students are:
 - The furniture is out of date and the Ohio Union feels old fashioned.
 - The lighting in the Ohio Union is poor and there is a lack of natural light in the whole building.
 - You could put the Ohio Union anywhere in the country and it wouldn't make a difference. The building lacks the rich tradition and history of Ohio State.
 - The exterior of the building is not inviting.

Hours of Operations

- Most students feel the food service outlets should be open later. Students also complained that the postal service hours are believed to be "limited" and "very erratic."
- Some commuter students explained that they need the commuter lounge to be open earlier, to provide them with a space to study before or after classes that are scheduled early in the morning.
- Many students also commented that because they use the Union on a limited basis, primarily to eat and use the bank, the hours were satisfactory for them.

Food Service

- Comments on the current quantity and quality of food service offered at the Ohio Union were many. Students had concerns about the quality of food service and the present food options. Most students believed the food options to be limited and there were strongly voiced concerns about the lack of healthy options.
- Additionally, students found the food vendors to be overpriced with the exception of Wendy's. "Wendy's is cheap, but you can't eat that everyday," stated a student.
- Students also expressed that they found it uncomfortable to sit and eat in the Union because of the 'smoky haze' constantly hovering over the food court. Many said that they wouldn't mind hanging out with their friends during lunch, but were forced to eat and leave as fast as possible because of the smoke in the seating area.
- Participants also commented that they would like to see more brand name food venues in the Union because they know what they are getting. "It would be nice to see a Panera's or even Subway, instead of 'HD Dawgs' and 'E to W pasta place'."
- Students also expressed that they would like to have a sit down restaurant in the Union where they could bring their parents or siblings when they visited. "There are not many nice sit down restaurants around OSU's campus. It would be convenient to have one right in the Union," said one student.
- Many of these students were also unaware of Woody's Place and were excited to hear that they could use their Buckeye cards there. "I will definitely try Woody's out after this focus group. I honestly didn't know it existed," was one student's comment.
- In general, students and staff wanted more of a variety in the food service vendors and a more comfortable area to eat. Many felt that it was critical to provide improvements to the food service area in the Union because it will be a huge draw for student, faculty and staff.

Student Organization Space/Meeting Space

- Students complained about the limited office space available for student organizations. In particular, it was brought up that OSU currently has well over 500 student groups on campus, yet less than 10% of them are housed in the Union.
- Students also agreed that apart from the minimal office space, little else is provided for student organizations in terms of storage, meeting space, technology and resources.

- The majority of students complained about having to pay for the use of meeting spaces, particularly the ballroom. "I don't think students should have to pay for this," commented a student.
- A few students pointed out that the student organizations are tucked away and not very visible in the Ohio Union. One student expressed that for symbolic reasons, students offices need to be located in a high traffic area within the Ohio Union.
- In reference to what students felt was an overabundance of conferencing spaces and a limited number of student social and recreation spaces, a few felt that the University was making it clear statement that students do not come first.

Retail

- Sparse retail offerings in the Union were a major complaint for many. Students expressed that they had been to other university unions that offered a large number of retail options that provided convenience to the campus community, and felt a dire need that such conveniences be provided to OSU students.
- Students also claimed that they did not use the Union regularly because it offered very few amenities and retail outlets. Many commented that their usage of the Ohio Union would increase if food and retail offerings were improved upon.

5. Which other Union facilities have you visited and what did you like about those facilities?

- Even though some students were able to mention numerous student union facilities that they had visited, many focus group participants did not have a point of reference to union facilities elsewhere.
- Most commonly, the student unions referenced were University of Indiana, University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, Bowling Green and Miami University.
- In contrast to the Ohio Union, students expressed that what impressed them most about other student unions, was their liveliness and the fact that they were bustling with students and activities. Some of the buildings that were very light and open were favorites of many students.

- It was also mentioned that contemporary union facilities found at other universities offer a wide variety of retail, food and recreation, as well as social/study lounges, and ample student organization spaces. Because these spaces are deficient within the Ohio Union, many students were in awe of the facilities that offered them.
- Students also expressed that the most attractive part of visiting their friends on other campuses, was the ability to hang out in a central place on campus where most students congregate daily. "I was very excited to find that other Union's are actually the central meeting place for the campus. At any time of the day, there are students playing pool, eating, or watching television in the Union. At Ohio State, we just don't have that."

6. What range of services would you like to see at a newly improved Ohio Union?

Food Options

- Many students voiced the opinion that an improved union should have a food court with a wide variety of available options, including:
 - Branded food
 - Healthy food choices
 - Expanded hours (24 hours if possible)
- Students also stated that it was important to be able to use their meal swipes at the eating venues in the Union and believed this would attract a lot of students who would normally not use the Ohio Union.
- Some students expressed that they would like to see a restaurant with sit-down service. Many of these students also expressed an interest in being able to bring their parents or other family members to a sit down restaurant on campus when they visited.
- Most students suggested that a new union include a coffee shop with a lounge area for students to gather, study, or read while having their coffee. It was also suggested that this area have a small stage area for performances.

Recreation

- Participants also wanted to see a large recreation area that could have foosball, table tennis, arcades and a bowling alley.

- Students agreed that recreational options are necessary improvements to the Union because they provide a social 'hang out' spot for the campus community and also provide student activities that help to mitigation stress.

Retail

- Many students asked that a new union facility contain basic retail space that would be convenient for students, including the following:
 - A convenience store for school supplies and snacks at affordable prices.
 - A copy center with extended hours.
 - A Laundromat or dry cleaning service.
 - A music store with compact discs and possibly video rentals.
 - A hair salon.
 - A gift store with Buckeye memorabilia.
- Overall, even though students highlighted a wide variety of options in terms of retail outfits and student services, there was also a caution that retail improvements within the Union be complimentary of the Gateway project and the retail services currently offered on High street.

Social and Study Lounges

- Students couldn't stress enough how important it is to include comfortable lounge spaces in the Union. Many felt that the Union should be very warm and welcoming and that comfort is a big part of that.
- Many students also felt that the Union would be utilized by more students between classes if, there were more comfortable social/study areas available.
- Some participants expressed that there is also a need for individual and group study spaces in the Union.

Satellite Offices

- Most students agreed that some of the student services offices located in the towers are inconvenient to a lot of students. Many also felt that it would be logical to create satellite offices for these services in the Ohio Union.
- The offices requested by most students include:
 - Parking and ticketing

- Financial Aid
- Registrar
- Buck I.D

7. How high a priority should renovations or new construction be for the Ohio Union?

Priority

- Overwhelmingly, a majority of the students believed that the Ohio Union needs significant improvements and that these improvements should be a high priority for the University. "The current state of the union sends a message to students that the University does not put students first," expressed one participant.
- Along with providing a wide range of activity spaces and services to students, many groups also agreed that any new improvements to the Union need to project it as an icon and a showpiece for the campus and the architectural style needs to reflect this. Many students echoed the sentiment, "We want it all or we want nothing. Let's do it right or not at all."
- Even though students expressed that they would like to see new construction for the Ohio Union, what was of utmost importance to them was to make the building timeless. Many expressed that a very traditional 'collegiate-like' facility would bring back the tradition and history that is currently missing in the Ohio Union.

HOUSING

8. Why do students choose to live on campus? What is the reputation of on-campus housing at OSU?

Community and convenience

- In general, residents relayed that they were very happy about their choice to live on campus. Many expressed that they enjoy the sense of community fostered by the residence halls and had developed very strong attachments to the University through their on-campus experiences. One student commented, 'living in a residence hall is something every student should experience.'

- Students mentioned that the convenience associated with on-campus housing makes it a very favorable housing option for many. Participants commented that the proximity and accessibility to academic and administrative buildings, as well as the interaction between peers, was a key benefit of living on campus.
- Students also expressed that problems usually encountered when living off-campus, were easily preventable on campus. The idea of not having to rely on a roommate's part of the rent every month was comforting to some.

Amenities and cost

- Students also pointed out that amenities and utilities that come at an additional charge off campus, are provided for free on campus. 'Cable, phones and Internet access are all amenities that the University provides in the residence halls. Living off campus, those services would account for a good portion of your monthly bills, explained one student.
- Graduate and non-professional students interviewed provided positive feedback about living in university housing. In particular, students noted that the Buckeye village provided a lot of value for housing.

Security and safety

- Overall, students commented that the security of being on campus allowed them to feel safe, which made it more than worth it to reside on campus.

9. When do students start considering off-campus housing alternatives?

- Most of the focus group participants, agreed that at Ohio State, the culture is that most students don't stay on campus after their sophomore year in college. In fact, most of the freshmen interviewed concurred that they were already planning to move off campus.
- On the other hand, international students are more likely to remain on-campus throughout their academic career at OSU.

10. What areas of on-campus housing do you feel need improvement?*Room Sizes and Amenities*

- The most common complaint about the residence halls on OSU's campus was the size of the rooms. Students expressed that they would enjoy having bigger rooms that included a living space, so that their visitors don't always have to sit on their beds.
- Many participants also conveyed that private bathrooms are a high priority for them and the 'gang bathrooms' located in few residence halls at OSU, do not provide a conducive living experience.
- Even though the undergraduate students complained about 'gang showers', they were more accepting of shared bedrooms.
- Students had a desire to see more kitchens provided in their residence halls. Many said it would be preferable for them to be located on every floor of the residence halls, while others said that providing kitchenettes with just a sink and a counter top satisfied their needs.
- Lack of amenities like vending machines and game rooms in some residence halls was also of concern to many.

11. How would you feel about living in a new residence hall if it were attached to a new/improved Ohio Union?*Positive*

- A large majority of focus group participants liked the idea of having a residence hall adjacent to the Union. Many felt that it should be slightly detached from the Union to provide students living in the residence halls with increased privacy.
- One student stated, 'I like the option of having food, recreation and study lounges all where you live. It is the ideal situation.' Another student commented that 'it provides a privileged on-campus housing arrangement.'

Negatives

- Although many students felt positively about a new residence hall attached to the Ohio Union, a few participants had some concerns about noise, safety and privacy.

- Some participants expressed that many students choose their residence halls based on proximity to academic buildings. A few students conveyed that the location of the Ohio Union was too far away from their classes and so did not provide any benefit to them.

12. If you lived in a residence hall attached to a new/improved Ohio Union, how would you feel about sharing programming spaces with the Union?

- Many students agreed that it would be beneficial for the Ohio Union and the proposed residence hall to share program spaces. Spaces that are more academic in nature such as group and individual study rooms, and computer labs were often viewed as spaces that could easily be shared.
- However, students felt that spaces such as social lounges, television lounges and game rooms would need to be duplicated in both areas. Most of all, students expressed strong concerns for safety and privacy, saying that they wouldn't want random Union users walking into their residence hall to use a game room or TV lounge.
- Many conveyed that it is essential to provide community spaces in the residence halls to encourage student interaction in their halls.
- All in all, students stated that for the use of shared spaces to be maximized, these spaces needed to be conveniently located for the residence hall students to be able to use freely.

13. Should housing improvements be a priority for OSU?

- Focus groups participants generally agreed that because housing is in high demand at OSU, ventures to provide more housing for students should be undertaken. One student went on to say, 'it doesn't matter what type of housing is built, it will be fully occupied.'
- Students who knew about the Gateway project, agreed that providing improvements to the Ohio Union as well as a new residence hall proximate to High street, would be very attractive to many OSU students.

