

OREGON STATE STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

- 48 students in 4 groups; 2 sessions on campus; 2 sessions in Portland
- 2 groups of high school freshmen from all over Portland Metro region; 2 groups of college freshmen.
- 50/50 male and female
- All students interested in STEM majors; forestry and wood science excluded; most aspired to engineering, science or business careers.
- 2-hour sessions facilitated by professional group leader
- See table below for some results of preferences based on word combinations and perceptions of what they meant. Each student could pick two likes and two dislikes.
- Summaries prepared by professional leaders and by 4 OSU faculty who observed all 8 hours of sessions by camera or one-way glass. See summary.

Appendix 6: High School Seniors and Freshmen Majors Combined

COMBINED DATA	Most Interesting	Least Interesting		Difference
Wood Science + Technology	2	4		-2
Forest Resources & Forest Products	3	5		-2
Wood Materials Science	2	5		-3
Bio Materials Science	1	3		-2
Sustainable Woodcraft	1	5		-4
Renewable Materials	12	1	<i>Most Liked</i>	11
Green Products Technology	7	0	<i>Liked</i>	7
Bio Based Materials/Products/Fibers	0	10	<i>Least Liked</i>	-10
Sustainable Bio Based Technologies	2	2		0
Bio Based Fibers	1	6		-5
Bio Forestry Engineering	6	1	<i>Liked</i>	5
Forest Operations Science	4	5		-1
Green Technology & Renewable Science	8	1	<i>Liked</i>	7
Forest Health & Forest Ecosystem Science	5	6		-1

College Freshmen liked the following majors:

- Renewable Materials
- Green Technology & Renewable Science

They disliked the following major:

- Wood Materials Science

INITIAL SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP OBSERVATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WSE

- **“Forestry” created a strong negative reaction with students.** With on-campus group the issue didn’t seem to be related to cutting trees, but more an aversion to working outdoors in rain and muck. With Portland seniors, cutting trees was seen as more of an issue, but there was little interest in outdoor work.
 1. There is no real understanding of what forestry is all about. Maybe a more favorable reaction with greater awareness, but the starting point for most is negative, not neutral.
 2. Suggests that WSE needs to downplay connection to “College of Forestry” in our recruiting materials, web site, etc.
 3. Suggests that we need to emphasize activities and opportunities more toward end user in the value stream.
 4. This issue is, in part, connected to flexibility concerns.
- **Freshmen are generally looking to keep their degree/career options open and maximize flexibility as they explore their future. Also true for HS seniors but they are less thoughtful at this point.**
 1. WST can be seen as too narrow a focus—perhaps true of forestry as well?
 2. Suggests a need to emphasize breadth of opportunities that are available, the notion that WST gives students a leg up over more generic majors and that specific degree doesn’t limit opportunities after entry.
 3. Web is the primary information source—need to see how students can find us and what they learn when they do.
 4. Definitely need video testimonials from current students and recent grads!
- **Job titles aren’t very helpful without some explanatory information.**
 1. If students don’t know what they mean then they make stuff up. Suggests that we shouldn’t use titles alone without some explanations.
 2. Need to create some testimonials or video about what WST majors do in their jobs to build better awareness of what WST jobs are all about. Video of grads at work?
- **Opportunities for advancement and challenge appear to be an important factor.**
 1. Suggests need to enhance that message for WST and broaden our focus beyond first professional position.
 2. Need to emphasize problem-solving and challenges—both big picture and small.
 3. Might be a good message to get a testimonial from a 5-8 year grad.
- **“Mills”, Hard hats and safety gear were very negative images to this group—goes with aversion to working outdoors and with perception of manual labor jobs.** Hard hats with a tie might be ok?
 1. Need to use alternative language such as manufacturing plants, facilities
 2. Selection of visual images for web and other materials needs greater care.
- **“Wood” was seen as too narrow and/or boring.**
 1. This is an issue with lack of knowledge, a mental connection to crafts, and to commonality of material.
 2. Suggests using “biomaterials, renewable materials, or green materials” (need to see C2C analysis of dots exercise).
 3. Suggests that we need to reconsider course titles and other descriptors—or take a more proactive role in education via web.

- **Most participants desired comfortable lifestyle and didn't obsess about potential salary or earnings potential. Both groups espoused emphasis on helping people. Neither group had a clue of what salary level would be necessary for them to have enough to "...not worry about money...", or to support lifestyle.**
 1. Suggests that we need to emphasize how WST grads contribute to society and have challenging, rewarding careers.
 2. Suggests describing WSE jobs as having above average earnings potential rather than specific dollar figures. (Note: anecdotal evidence suggests that 2nd year transfer students may be more connected to salary levels)
- **Avoiding debt was important to freshmen. The problem hasn't yet hit seniors.**
 - Suggests playing up scholarships.
 - Some emphasis on above average WST salaries to help pay debt?
 - Mixed signals on debt issue with some students.
- **Research was interest of freshmen, less so for seniors. This seemed to depend on input from relatives and friends more than inherent interest.**
 1. Suggests we might connect UG degree with WSE research—jobs, senior project. Other?
- **Geographic parochialism didn't seem to be a major issue with freshmen, though most see themselves staying in the west and traveling internationally. Seniors were more place-connected—probably because they haven't been confronted with question.**
- **Recession has a major impact on these groups and career stability is a highly desirable goal. They are sensitive to fields with plant closures. Suggests that we need to be careful describing reality that most graduates will have multiple jobs. Some mixed signals from Millennials on this.**
- **Others:**
 - Working in a team interested freshman, less so seniors.
 - Strong interest in fitness and health
 - E-mail is out, texting is in;
 - Twitter not used—Facebook is big!
 - Web and handouts need much fewer words and more visual elements.
 - Video, video, video—short clips, 1-2 min max.
 - Boring = death.