Focus Group Summary Report
December 6, 2018

Introduction

One of the fundamental elements of good strategy is good data. Data useful to strategy come from a variety of places. Some comes from existing sources that characterize economic, demographic, technological, and socio-cultural trends and developments pertaining to the market. Some comes from benchmarking other organizations that represent an aspirational level of excellence. Yet other sources of data comes an organization's own regular and customary performance measures as well as the plans and programs of internal units

However, a vitally important element of strategy data comes from stakeholders both inside and outside of the organization. Stakeholders bring a mix of perspectives on what the organization is at the present – its strengths and opportunities – and also what the organization can and should be in the future. One of the best ways to capture this information is through the use of focus groups. Focus groups offer an opportunity to gather varied and rich information that gives texture to the other sources.

Between October 15 and November 30, Strategic Focus Associates conducted 23 focus groups on the Purdue Fort Wayne campus with students, staff, faculty, administrators, and external stakeholders including local elected officials, members of the legislative delegation from Northeast Indiana, and leaders of regional businesses. In total, 261 people were interviewed. Details about the interviews including the interview questions can be found in the appendix (provide a hyperlink here).

Content analysis was performed on all aggregated interview notes to identify themes. The identification of themes is a combination of frequency and perceived importance and the themes are presented in priority order.

The summary of the focus group interviews is organized in the following way. Both the internal and external perspectives are summarized by current state and future state. This structure is intended to highlight what participants appreciate and value about the institution as well as contrast this to the future they would like to create.

Internal Current State

Content analysis of the interview notes across 20 internal focus groups for the questions directed at current state yielded eight important themes that characterize the current state of Purdue Fort Wayne.

1. Students and their circle of influence are unanimously seen as the primary beneficiaries of Purdue Fort Wayne. Many students are first generation and come from a lower socio-economic background. They are being afforded a first-rate education at affordable prices. To quote one

participant, “We are changing the trajectory of people and their families.” Small class sizes, programming to meet special needs, and lots of support in and out of the classroom were frequently mentioned as characteristics of the student experience.

2. In a companion theme, there is great deal of enthusiasm and support among faculty and staff for serving students. “People here are extremely student-centered.” “We make connections that *care*.” Faculty and staff believe the institution provides support and resources to help students find their “fit” and create their own experience. Class size offers students the chance for meaningful relationships with faculty. Intentional focus on admissions, retention, and student success programs draw students to the university and help them achieve academic success. Cooperative education, internships, externships, and capstone projects are instrumental to helping students broaden their experience and find meaningful employment.

3. The community at large is also currently big beneficiary of Purdue Fort Wayne, but the relationship between the university and the community is mutually beneficial. The obvious transaction is that PFW is a source of talent for the NE Indiana employers. In like manner, employers and community organizations are a great source of experiential learning opportunities for students. In addition, the community benefits greatly from multiple expressions of the arts, signature programs like the Omnibus Lecture Series, and resources that provide the local media with expert commentary.

4. The transition from IPFW to Purdue Fort Wayne and the big opportunity to change the university for the better emerged as a current state theme. “This is a new beginning and we can use what we did in the past to take into the future.” New leadership has “ignited a fire for those who were stagnant” and the process of transition itself has helped to breakdown barriers and to promote more collaboration. The chancellor and new administration were named in relation to the transition, as was better communication and improved image.

5. Branding itself was mentioned as a companion theme to transition. Two forms of acceptance were noted in interviews. First was the acceptance of the brand change and the pride it has generated. The second was that PFW needed and accepted outside help. The new brand “education with a purpose” has been well received. As one participant said, “We've gone from explaining who and what we are to explaining what we offer for you.”

6. Academics were frequently mentioned as a current state theme. From the faculty perspective, the range of academic freedom and support was noted. “There is a broad definition of what constitutes creativity and

scholarship here." "It's a gift to be in this environment." "There is tangible support for research." Particular programs like Engineering and Music were called out for their wide recognition. In addition, the number of course offerings and preparation of students for graduate education and Fulbright scholarships were highlighted.

7. In a related theme, the focus on faculty and staff was emphasized. Collegiality among faculty and staff was noted. "I can walk into an office anywhere and talk to someone; structure is flat and we're not burdened by levels and titles." On the faculty side, development opportunities were noted. One participant remarked, "…more resources are being directed here. There are opportunities to get consultation from senior faculty and workshops to get help with teaching."

8. Finally, Purdue Fort Wayne was mentioned as a university in transformation. Previous negative references to "by-pass U," "high school on the hill", and 'the back-up school of choice" are being replaced with a sense of positive renewal. The current moment represents a chance to start over and to shape a different institution.

Internal Future State

Content analysis of the interview notes for the questions directed at future state yielded six themes.

Before proceeding to the themes, it is important to draw attention to two substantial trends.

First, there is a shift in student demographics to which PFW must pay attention. While a great many students continue to be first generation, they are becoming more traditionally aged. More students are coming to campus straight out of high school. They are also coming from further away. The University is attracting more diverse students from urban areas and internationally. The latter represent a multi-cultural impact with implications for student services. More students are working full time and are interested in a connection in the real world in their academic preparation. There is also a balance to be struck with preparing students for employment opportunities beyond the region and for post-baccalaureate study.

Second, there is a clear sense that higher education in general and Purdue Fort Wayne in particular is facing a major shift. The shift in student demographics is part of the change for sure, but it is certainly not the only driving force. Other driving forces include the rise and pervasiveness of on-line learning, competition in a dense space for a declining number of students, the demand for more flexibility in curriculum, scheduling, and delivery, emphasis on active and

experiential learning with global reach as a feature, cross-disciplinary offerings, condensed courses, tailored degrees, and certificates.

These lead to the following considerations for strategy and the future of PFW.

1. *Become a 21st century, future-focused campus*. The 21st century campus was characterized as having more open spaces, being technology friendly and accessible, leveraging traditional, non-traditional, and hybrid course offerings and night classes to "meet students where they are." "Education for life" was also mentioned as a characteristic of the 21st century campus.

   The future-focused part of this theme focused on differentiating qualities of the institution. These include creating a unique identity and narrative to go with it and then marketing our story, becoming more entrepreneurial in the way the university goes to market, and becoming more global, i.e. reinforcing cultural and ethnic diversity and expanding housing for international students.

2. *Think out of the box* is a theme closely related to 21st century campus. This theme focuses on support for students. An often-mentioned idea was to provide no-cost childcare for students with children to be run by early education students. Given the difficulties with access to food service mentioned by students, another suggestion was to have hospitality students run food service on campus. A third component of this theme was to increase mental health services for students in an increasingly stressful environment.

3. *Pedagogy.* There was frequent mention of the need to retool instruction. Hybrid and on-line courses already exist. Wider use of these forms of course delivery is anticipated. The active learning environment – classrooms ready for flexible pedagogical approaches – was promoted as upsetting the status quo. Cross-disciplinary offerings were mentioned as a way to promote collaboration and to create institutional differentiation. Experiential learning including study abroad creates unique settings for students and faculty alike.

   Other novel approaches to retooling instruction included shorter, condensed courses, adding certificates to the degree mix, moving away from established curriculum to tailored degrees, "offer content in a subscription-based service," and "crowd-sourcing classes" such as "class for a day" or "pop-up academics."

Three additional themes emerged from the data. These are qualitatively different from the cluster of themes mentioned above and each of them is important in its own right.

1. *Build community partnership.* Recognition of the mutual benefit between the university and the community suggested intentionally deepening the

existing relationship. Establishing signature events was noted repeatedly. Signature initiatives emerged in two senses. In one sense, the university could start signature initiatives that invite engagement and collaboration from the community. In the second sense, the university can become involved in signature initiatives being undertaken by the city, county, and surrounding area.

2. *Attend to employees.* Largely in response to the question "How do you see the University needing to change overall to respond to these trends and developments?" several matters were mentioned. These include pay gap issues and the need for regular salary increases, the desire for more professional development, the wish for staff to be seen more as human assets, the wish to be more engaged and have input to all aspects of university business, and equal voice for all faculty and staff.

3. *Attend to alumni.* Alumni represent a significant opportunity for Purdue Fort Wayne that is not realized. Three suggestions for addressing the matter emerged from the data. One is to hire an alumni director as soon as is practical. A second is to get alumni engaged. A large portion of PFW alumni live in the area and this represents a golden opportunity for alumni relations. The third is to get alumni back on campus for continuous learning or an advanced degree.

External Current State

Three groups of external stakeholders participated in focus groups. There were three primary themes that emerged from the interviews as participants discussed the current state of Purdue Fort Wayne.

1. The connection between the University and the community was a dominant theme. "The stronger the University is, the stronger the community is. We're on a trajectory to have one million people. Any great city has a great university and great research." The strength of the Purdue brand and name recognition should be highlighted in order to better connect the growing population to northeast Indiana. As one stakeholder put it, "the excitement for me is to bring the power of Purdue to northeast Indiana and to enhance the relationships we have had.

   There are so many more cultural opportunities to be appreciated than there were half a decade ago. Additionally, businesses can be the community connector as they grow and employ students from the University. The move to Division 1 Athletics was also mentioned as a big boost that helped put the city of Fort Wayne on the map in terms of name identity and should help to continue to attract top athletes.

2. There are positive perceptions of Purdue Fort Wayne that the external focus groups articulated. "The University brings the power of Purdue to northeast Indiana." The school has great research and offers a huge value, being an integral part of the community. It is viewed as a major university with regional impact. "Years ago this was a commuter school (feeder school) and that has of course, changed." On-campus housing has enhanced the quality of student life. Another positive perception is the strong relationship that Purdue Fort Wayne has with West Lafayette. Conversely, there was discussion that the University needs to be more agile in order to keep up with the pace of our changing society.

3. When asked about Purdue Fort Wayne's identity, the most common response was, "It is important to identify what we want to be – nothing really stands out." It should be known for Business, Agricultural Biology, Research, Advanced manufacturing, Entrepreneurism, Music Therapy, and Bio Med, to name a few. There should be some signature initiatives that give the University a way to showcase its uniqueness. "Signature initiatives create a culture of possibilities and growth for faculty."

External Future State

As the University's future impact was considered, four primary themes emerged from the discussions. These themes were in alignment with the current state themes.

1. The University's connection to the community and region should be maximized at all costs. "There's opportunity for students, staff and faculty to have access to world class employers and education", and it is important to pay attention to what these employers need. The Chancellor should take advantage of legislative connections and "keep landing on people's radar". The University needs to take a leadership role in the community and capitalize on economic development. Infusing the University into the workplace can help to retain employees. Another opportunity for connection is by reaching down into the region's high schools. Finally, stronger ties with community organizations such as the Community Research Institute were seen as critical to future success.

2. Purdue's global brand should be leveraged, as it is strong and well recognized. As for Purdue Fort Wayne's future identity, "the notion that if a student within a 100 mile radius says he/she attends Purdue, this should mean Purdue Fort Wayne". Further discussion of identity suggested that a new one should be created, along with an expansion of the scope of the University. The expanded footprint should include Biotech, Insurance, and Medical. "Purdue Fort Wayne is well positioned geographically – how do we become a destination university?" The University should figure out what the Business school is and be great at it, as it affects so many segments of the community. It should evaluate, create and fund signature programs.

   There's a good story to tell, and it should focus on what is new and exciting. The emphasis of the story should start and finish with the students. If the story is told well, it will create demand.

3. The University's relationship with West Lafayette was another theme that surfaced. "Need to shorten the distance to West Lafayette, it is about perception." Additionally, with respect to PhD programs, "it is about growing the relationship with West Lafayette and importing it here. The distance between West Lafayette and Purdue Fort Wayne needs to be down the hall."

4. The Chancellor should be at the table with the community and broader region. A suggestion was made to poll the six counties in the region to determine what degrees should be offered. The story of the University's new identity should be expanded outside of Allen County to include all counties in the region. There is very much of a sense of urgency to act on

many of the aforementioned opportunities – “We have a moment in time and it is NOW.”

Summary Analysis

1. Shift in student demographics

   The student profile is shifting away from what the university has known in the past and moving toward a more traditional age, coming from further away (including urban areas and international), working full time, and interested in good educational value at a reasonable price for whatever their graduation plans may be. PFW must attend to this shift in its strategic planning.

2. Focus on student success

   Given current retention and graduation rates, PFW must consider as part of its strategic planning initiatives to address the lifecycle of attract, engage, and retain.

3. Focus on faculty and staff needs

   Faculty and staff are very clear about the importance of students and their enthusiasm for supporting them. However, faculty and staff and the central role they play in the university require attention as well. Faculty generally feels a great deal of support for scholarship. However, matters of pay, pay parity with other institutions and employers, the desire for professional development, and equal voice in consequential matters at the university require attention in the strategy overall.

4. Connection to the community and the broader region

   The university's current and potential value to the community and the region is evident throughout the data. There is a strong consensus that this relationship (partnership) be nurtured and grown deliberately as a strategic thrust.

5. Innovate instruction

   On-line and hybrid courses are already part of curriculum delivery. Beyond these forms, there was a strong sentiment present in the data that PFW must focus on innovating approaches to curriculum. Innovation in instruction delivery can help PFW differentiate itself and elevate the student's learning experience and help with persistence and success.

6. Create a regional campus identity as part of the Purdue System

   PFW has an important opportunity to continue beyond what has been accomplished so far in the transition from IPFW to craft a new identity and solidify its brand. Two aspects of this stand out. One is leveraging the Purdue brand and "bringing" Purdue West Lafayette to Ft. Wayne. The other is the university's designation as a metropolitan campus. Together

these are important parts of the narrative that establish the university's uniqueness and help to tell the story in a powerful way.

7. Leverage the alumni connection

   Alumni represent a significant opportunity to grow community connection and to grow enrollment in graduate, certificate programs, and other continuing education.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus Group Interview Questions

Interview Question for Students, Staff, Faculty, and Administration

Current State

1. Thinking about your time at the University, what do think the University has done well and gotten really right?
    a. Faculty supplement: What are you most proud of accomplishing in your time here as faculty?
2. Who do you believe are the primary beneficiaries of the University?
    a. Senior leadership supplement: What do you think the University stands for (to students, the community, etc.)

Future State

1. What are the trends (things happening today that you believe will continue into the future) that will influence the University to change the way we educate students? Conduct research?
2. How do you see the university needing to change overall to respond these trends and developments?
3. What are the things the University could do to upset the status quo over the next 10 years?
4. How would you like to be communicated with (re: the strategy planning process) going forward?
5. If all constraints were removed from our conversation, what more would you wish to include?

Interview Question for External Stakeholders

1. From your perspective, what is Purdue Fort Wayne's value to you and the organization you represent today (or impact PFW has on your organization)?

2. What would you like Purdue Fort Wayne's impact on the community to be over the next 10 years?
3. What are three things Purdue Fort Wayne could do in the near future to strengthen its alignment and contribution to the community?
4. What do you see as future collaborative opportunities between PFW and your organization?

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP STATISTICS

23 Focus Groups Conducted

- Senior Leadership
- Deans
- Enrollment Management
- Faculty (6)
- Athletics
- Associate Deans and Chairs
- Student Affairs
- External Constituents (3)
- APSAC
- CSSAC
- Development/Alumni
- Staff (2)
- Students (3)

Numbers of Participant

Category of participant	**Number of participants**
Professional and administrative staff	131
Students	24
Faculty	93
External Stakeholders	13
Total	261

APPENDIX B

WORD CLOUDS

With the exception of focus groups with external stakeholders and one internal group (due to a technology failure), each focus group began with a word cloud poll based on the following question.

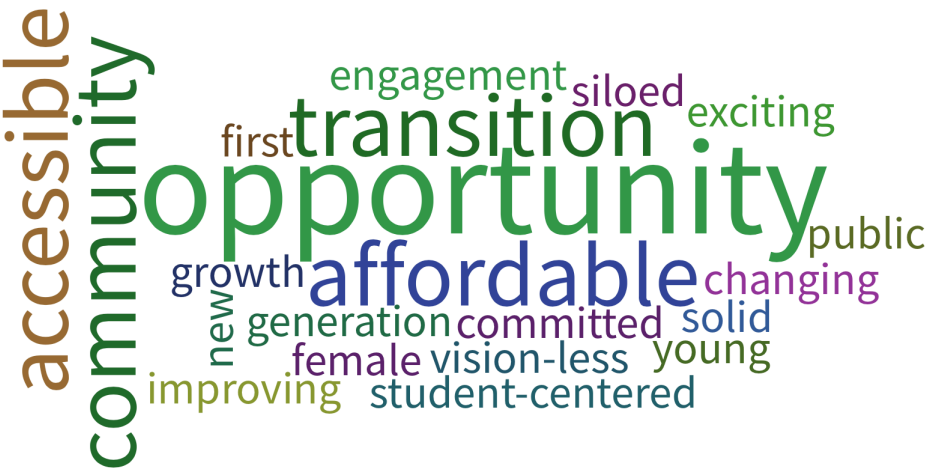
“What 3-4 words best describe Purdue Fort Wayne for you?”

The following pages display the output from each group’s poll.

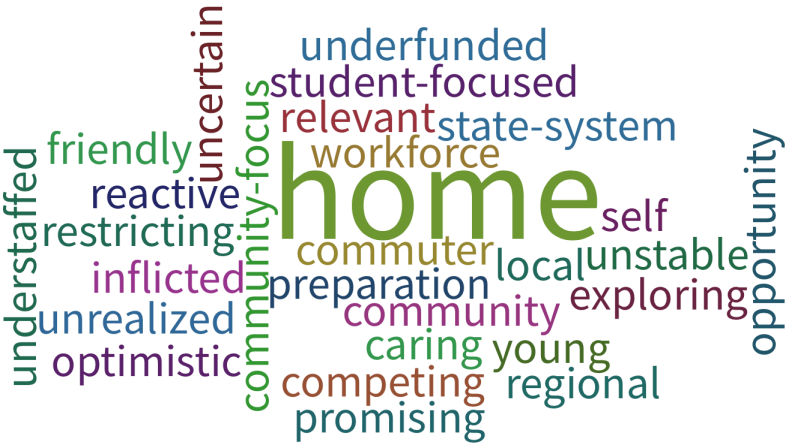
Senior Leaders, October 16

Deans, October 17

Enrollment, October 17



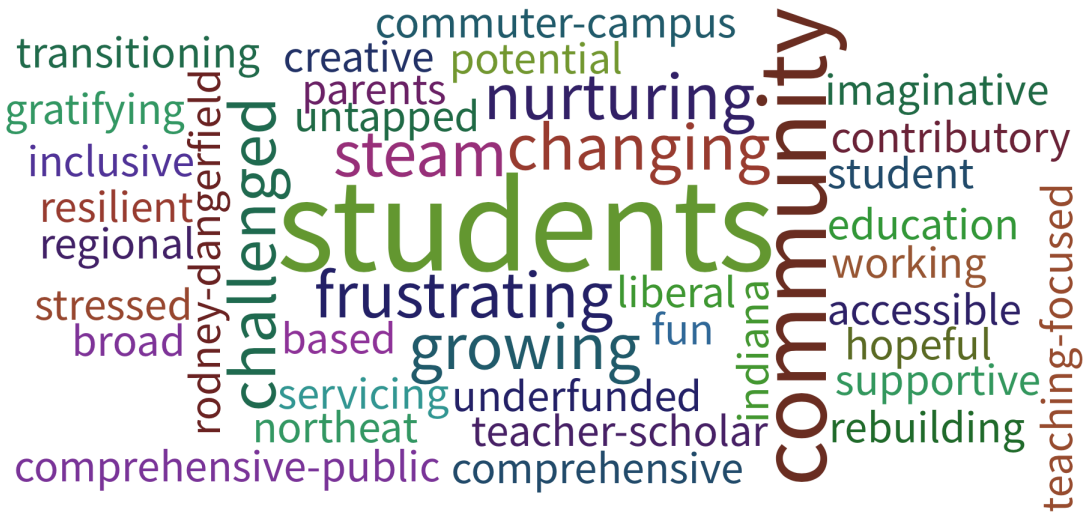
Faculty, October 17



Athletics, October 18

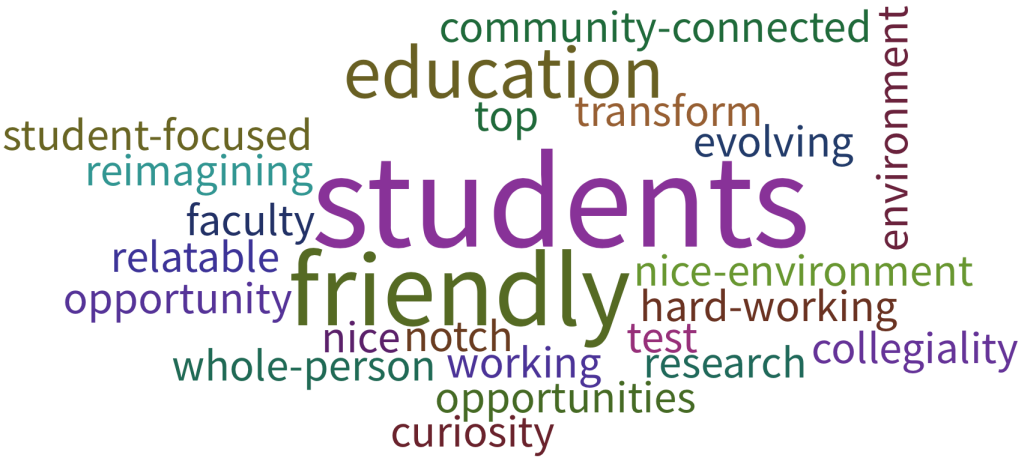
Associate Deans/Chairs, October 29

Student Senate, October 29



Student Affairs, October 29

Faculty, October 30



Students (Student Housing) November 7

APSAC, November 8

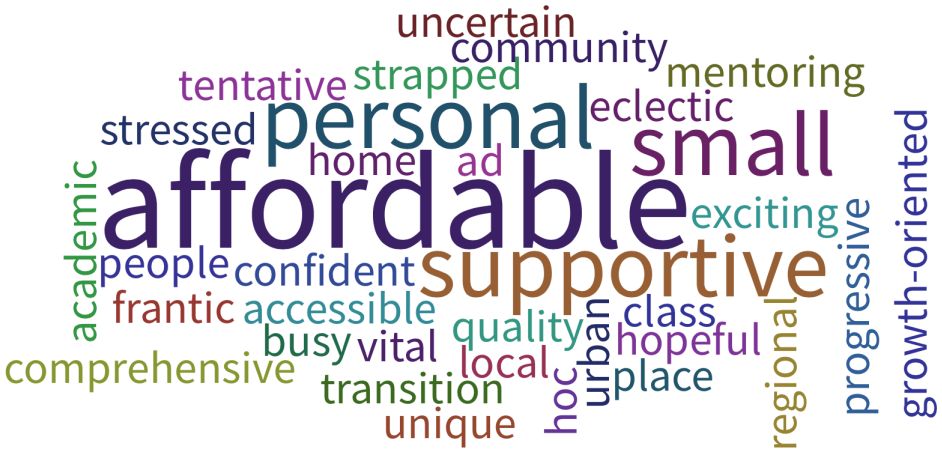
Advancement and Alumni, November 8

CCSAC, November 9

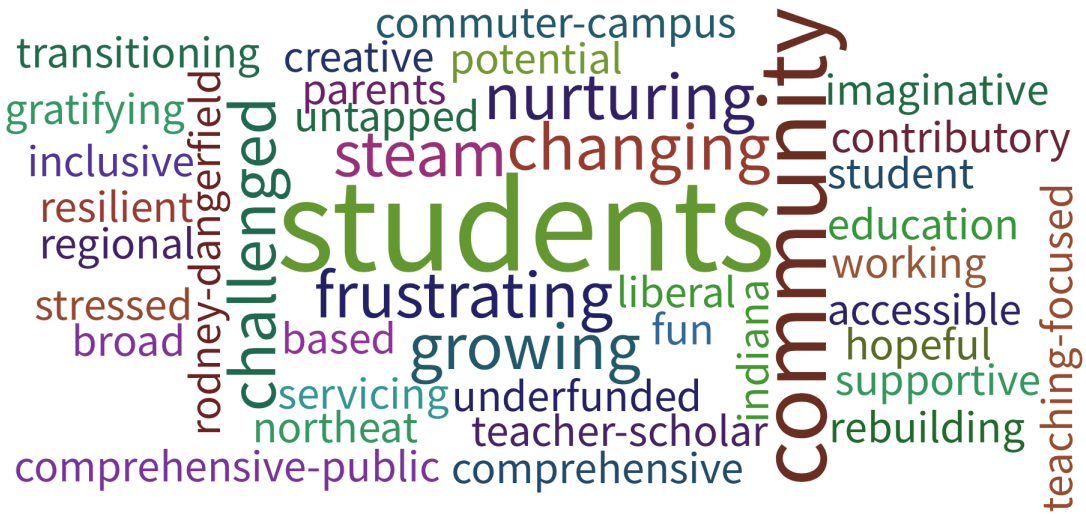
Staff Group Walb 222, November 28

Staff Group Walb G21, November 28

Faculty, November 28



Faculty, November 29

Students, November 29

Faculty, November 30