

# Mountain State University

## Serving Constituents as Customers

While some people in academia are reluctant to apply the term “customer” when referring to students and other key constituents, many Jenzabar clients see value in this perspective. In today’s environment, where evaluation of higher education in terms of cost, competition, accountability and other business-related metrics becomes more pervasive, many institutions are finding an advantage in a customer-centric, service-oriented approach to offering their educational services.

West Virginia-based Mountain State University embraces the student-as-customer paradigm. The institution, founded in 1933 as Beckley College (named after the town in which the main campus is located), changed its name to Mountain State University in 2001. The change reflected more than just a new name as MSU evolved from a regionally-focused institution serving southern West Virginia into one delivering programs to a student body drawn from 43 states as well as internationally-based students. Many of MSU’s 6,000 students do not attend classes at the University’s four campus locations, but take advantage of the University’s flourishing distance learning programs.

Jenzabar’s Total Campus Management framework is an integral part of MSU’s evolution into an institution with a global constituency. The University utilizes a flagship Jenzabar ERP system, along with Jenzabar’s Learning Management System and Jenzabar’s Internet Campus Solution. Another key element is MSU’s adoption of a service-oriented approach to education, bringing the attributes of “relationship management” and “customer service” into its interactions with students.

“Everything that comprises our student relationships is inter-related, and must be backed up with good customer service,” said Dr. Jill Hopkins, the



*Bell Tower at Mountain State University, West Virginia*

University’s Provost. “We have a strategic plan that mandates improvement in the quality and efficiency of our processes,” Dr. Hopkins continued. “Giving constituents access to information and providing self-service capabilities are components of good customer service that also address process improvement.”

Mountain State offers not only traditional classroom-based academic studies, but also innovative programs in distance learning, non-traditional credit options, and collaboration with a variety of industry and education partners. MSU’s distance learning programs include: Independent Study (self-paced), Online Programs, Cohorts (learning communities), Degree Completion,

and Spectrum (beginning degree program). This range of offerings necessitates a flexible, integrated Internet-enabled administrative system to manage each program's unique features.

Jenzabar's systems are particularly beneficial to the University's fastest growing constituent group, distance education students. "Jenzabar has been a huge addition," said Randy White, Mountain State University's Senior Officer for Information Technology. "We are one of the few institutions in West Virginia with online registration and payment capabilities," he continued, "which has greatly contributed to the growth in our Distance Education and Independent Study programs." Dr. Hopkins concurs. "Our students are responding well; they are gravitating to the online services. They like being able to access their transcripts, make online payments, and interact with us within their own schedules."

The University's customer service mantra extends to its cohort model as well. "It is a sales process," continued Dr. Hopkins. "We build relationships with corporations in order to work with their employees and in that environment we really need to be focused on customer service." The University needs the ability to respond to a range of customer requirements as to when, where and how educational services are delivered.

Jenzabar's Learning Management System continually helps propel the University's growth and service-centric approach on campus as well. Mountain State instructors have their syllabi handouts and class

assignments online, allowing for better full devotion of class time to the actual learning experience—furthering the customer service objective.

Certainly one aspect of the successful partnership between MSU and Jenzabar is Jenzabar's own approach to customer service. Behind the scenes, Mr. White has been impressed by Jenzabar's customer support. The University has had few implementation issues to report, and Jenzabar provides superior response time and service when an issue does arise. Jenzabar also supports Mountain State via onsite training as well as training at Jenzabar's Harrisonburg, Virginia facility. In Mr. White's view, "Jenzabar's software is very beneficial to us. Each release is getting better, with more thought put into what a university needs."

Enhancement of services for its non-traditional students is an ongoing endeavor for Mountain State University. The University has expressed an interest in working with Jenzabar as a beta site for its Non-traditional System. Jenzabar NTS will help the University better manage their non-term-based programs and help to better serve their cohort groups and independent study students.

"It is our goal to keep our students, and to do that we need to deliver great customer service," stated Dr. Hopkins. "From application through registration to the completion of their studies, we strive to provide an enriching experience and build a lasting relationship with every student. The systems provided by Jenzabar give us the service platform we need to fulfill that mission." ■

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