

*“Students who are thoughtful about values will be better able to understand how the views of others are also shaped by values.”*

Dr. George Agich, director of BGeXperience

# BGeXperience

## —the latest happenings

### STUDENTS INTRODUCED TO FORENSICS

**D**uring fall semester 2006, a 25-student section of Introduction to Forensic Science was made up of freshmen in the BGeXperience program. The class was filled to the maximum 25 students virtually overnight when it was widely announced on the eve of spring semester 2006.

Considering the popularity of the “CSI” television shows, the response wasn’t a surprise and it hasn’t disappointed.

The forensic science course is aimed at nonscience majors, as is a course on “Life in Extreme Environments,” which is being developed. Both courses are part of an effort by the College of Arts & Sciences “to explore new and exciting curriculum offerings in the sciences,” according to Dr. Roger Thibault, the college’s executive associate dean.

Dr. Stephania Messersmith, a visiting assistant professor of chemistry, created and teaches Introduction to Forensic Science, in which students learn the nature of scientific evidence, how it’s obtained and used in the scientific process, and how to solve problems using the scientific approach.

Mathematical and scientific concepts are kept on a fundamental level in her class, Messersmith says, but “we talk about a lot of the different facets” of forensic science, including basics of chemistry and analytical methods, DNA analysis, fingerprints, toxicological studies, document examination/authentication, and hair and fiber analysis.

Is the stable of “CSI” shows to thank for the level of student interest? “I think that’s a major reason why, but also the fact that forensic science has come a long way,” Messersmith notes, elaborating that technology now affords the ability to perform complex analyses and provide considerable information.

The BGeXperience section of the course incorporates discussion of values that are central to forensic science. These include discarding data if it’s not scientifically sound to do so and rejecting preconceived notions based on someone’s presumed guilt or innocence.

### AAC&U NEWS FEATURES BGEEXPERIENCE

**I**n one of its recent publications, the Association of American Colleges and Universities featured “AAC&U Member Innovations” and spotlighted the BGeXperience program. The story explained how the program was developed five years ago for incoming students at BGSU and traced its success since then.

The article pointed out that what distinguishes BGeXperience from other first-year programs is its focus on “critical thinking



Dr. Stephania Messersmith

about values across the curriculum” and how that has raised some questions about teaching values in college.

Dr. George Agich, director of BGeXperience, addressed that question, explaining that the program defines a value simply as “a principle, standard or quality considered worthwhile or desirable.” This approach to values is nonprescriptive, but it does prompt students to reflect upon their beliefs.

In the article, Agich said that students do not necessarily need to change their existing views to benefit from such reflection. “When students have thought critically about what underpins their values, they are more likely to be able to speak about their views with ‘authority’ and to recognize the boundary where knowledge begins to get fuzzy and they get limited by their own experience,” he says. “Students who are thoughtful about values will be better able to understand how the views of others are also shaped by values.”

Studies on the BGSU campus have shown that, when the performance of BGeXperience students is compared to that of students in comparable introductory courses without a values focus, BGeXperience students actually have a “slight edge.”

The article concluded by saying: “Perhaps the most significant benefits students take with them from the BGeXperience program are those that will contribute to their personal as well as their professional lives: openness to differing viewpoints, the ability to think critically about values and the integrity to act upon values. These ideals underlie BGSU’s recent efforts to integrate values into the curriculum.”

Agich summed it up by saying, “The opportunity to have free expression and to welcome diversity and even opposing viewpoints on campus is something that public, liberal institutions should be committed to. Certainly we are committed to try to convey those values to our freshmen from the start.” **A&S**