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Freshmen explore issues through BGX

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Reporter

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“The place to improve the world is first in one’s own heart and head and hands,” someone once said.

A group of freshmen recently embarked on a journey to bring about improvement and change in their lives through a University program called the Bowling Green Experience, BGX for short.

The program is more than a first year experience, according to Dr. Eileen Sullivan, Assistant Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs and Director of the Values Initiative.

“BGX is designed to be a four year experience, not just a freshmen experience,” Sullivan said.

The concept for BGX emerged from a letter written two years ago by University President Sidney Ribeau. In his letter, Ribeau addressed the need for values to be discussed during a student’s college experience.

“It is time to connect vision and values with curricula and in so doing, establish a coherent academic program,” Dr. Ribeau said.

Following this charge to incorporate critical thinking about values into the college experience, the University Committee on Vision and Values was formed. This group of faculty, staff, and students spent a year discussing the best way to promote character development while exploring values. The result was a recommendation for the BG Experience program.

“The program has 5 basic components,” Sullivan said. “An intensive orientation, a first year course on critical thinking about values, service learning opportunities, an intensive junior year experience and a senior capstone.”

The first step for participants began with the intensive orientation, which took place Aug. 21-24 at a cost of \$75. Students spent the majority of their time engaged in social activities, a service learning project and a general education course taught by faculty members in several areas of study such as philosophy, biology and popular culture.

When it came to the general education classes, the atmosphere surprised Dr. Don McQuarie of the American Culture Studies Department, who was selected to teach a course about cultural pluralism.

“I’ve never seen students feel so comfortable in a classroom,” McQuarie said. “They had a level of comfort and trust you normally don’t see with freshmen students.”

McQuarie believed that having the students arrive early and participate in BGX built a rapport that most freshmen never achieve.

“I wish all freshman had the opportunity to go through an experience like this,” McQuarie said.

The classroom experience during orientation also included upperclass student leaders acting as facilitators and discussion builders. Senior Alex Frondorf assisted Dr. Carney Strange’s philosophy class and enjoyed his experience with the program. “It was exciting to try to infuse values into the classroom and help show students that values are the underlying current in our everyday lives,” Frondorf said.

According to participant Melissa Coyle, where faculty might have had difficulty teaching a concept, the students were

able to comprehend more from a peer's explanation.

"The student assisting my class helped me understand that this program is not meant to determine values but helps you to start thinking about them," Coyle said.

BGX participants and their instructors were afforded another opportunity for growth through a service learning project. For Jill Carr, a facilitator from the Office of Student Life, these projects were the greatest part of the orientation.

"Service learning was my favorite part because it gave students the opportunity to reach out to communities in ways they never experienced before," Carr said.

Students were divided up into groups and sent to 12 area locations to complete service projects. Alterra Sterling House, a senior citizens' community in Bowling Green, was one of the facilities where students made a difference.

"When the kids from BGX came to Alterra, the place just seemed to vibrate with excitement," Dorothyann Strange said. Strange functions as the Life Enrichment Coordinator for the facility and said the senior citizens taught BGX students a thing or two during their stay.

"I think a lot of the young people were surprised by how young at heart these seniors are," Strange said. "The kids seemed to get just as much of a kick out of their visit as the residents did."

With an intensive, thought-provoking orientation under their belts, BGX participants have experienced values firsthand and given themselves a foundation for further growth during the next four years. Hopefully, each student will reap as many benefits from the BG Experience program as McQuary expressed.

"If these students are touched just a little by this program and their college experience is more profound because of it, then we have done our jobs."

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