

# History of the BGeXperience (BGeX) Program

## Vision

*Developing good hearts as well as able brains is a responsibility that must be assumed by universities, now more than ever... Colleges and universities must commit themselves to creating values based communities, for knowledge is merely a tool, and it is human affection that makes for the constructive use of knowledge.*

*Sidney A. Ribeau, 9<sup>th</sup> President of Bowling Green State University*

*"Who will lead us?" We know of course, that we will be led by those we have taught, and they will lead us as we have shown them they should." William Richardson, President and CEO of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation*

## BGeXperience Program

During the past twelve years, under the leadership of President Sidney A. Ribeau, Bowling Green State University has developed an innovative approach to creating a student-centered learning community in which values, civic engagement, and character development are central. This process began in 1995 with a "Building Community Initiative" that generated ideas and aspirations that informed the University's vision statement and its core values. The core values signified that values are central to higher education, the community we are, and the graduates we hope to prepare.

Since 1995, the University has made great strides in promoting values and civic engagement. The core values have become an important part of residence life programming, new student orientation, the student organization funding process, staff training and development programs, and more generally campus discourse. A number of new residential learning communities have created academic programs that approach education holistically and encourage critical exploration of values and character development. Service learning opportunities have expanded dramatically, encouraging students to channel their academic knowledge into community service. The Leadership Development Program has grown, and the President's Leadership Academy has nurtured leadership skills and commitment to service among students from underrepresented groups.

To build on these successes, in April 2000 President Ribeau appointed a task force of respected faculty, staff, and administrators and asked them to develop a plan to integrate values exploration, critical thinking, civic engagement, and character development throughout the curricular and co-curricular experience. This group concluded its work in May 2001 with a proposal to create the BGeXperience (BGeX). This program seeks to make critical thinking about values the unifying theme of students' experience, in and out of the classroom, thereby bringing greater coherence to undergraduate education and preparing students who have the skills and dispositions necessary to become principled citizens.

The BGeXperience seeks to build more meaningful relationships between students and faculty; integrate students' curricular and co-curricular experience; prepare students to recognize and **think critically about values** that underlie important social, political, scientific, and professional issues; encourage students to **act on their values**; and, ultimately, graduate individuals who are **ethically aware, thoughtful citizens**.

The BGeXperience consists of five closely linked components. The first, an **intensive August introduction**, consists of small groups of students, each led by a faculty member and a peer facilitator, who introduce incoming students to the University and its focus on critical thinking about values, expectations, community building and service learning. The second component of our program is a **first year course on critical thinking about values** offered in a variety of subject areas to be taken by all first-year students in their first semester. Limited to 25 students and taught by the faculty member who led the introduction group, this class will build on the bonds created during the intensive introduction to help students explore complex moral and ethical issues. In the process, they will begin to develop the skills and habits of mind necessary to become reflective citizens.

While the curriculum is critically important, students spend most of their time outside class. The third component of the BGeXperience, therefore, is a **program of co-curricular experiences and service learning opportunities** that encourage students to explore and act on their values in their day-to-day lives.

We recognize that the seed, planted during the first year, requires cultivation to help students mature intellectually and personally. Therefore, the BGeXperience will ultimately include an **intensive junior year experience** and a **senior capstone course in the major** that weave values and civic engagement throughout the undergraduate experience.

Fall 2007 marks the sixth year the BGeXperience has been offered; the third during which all first year students are participating. This year 140 BGeX or “V” courses are scheduled. A listing of this year’s courses can be viewed at URL:

<http://www.bgsu.edu/students/bgexperience/page24980.html>

BGeX has thus become the common pathway for first year students to become part of the BGSU academic community.