

The BGeXperience (BGeX) program, a Bowling Green State University (BGSU) initiative designed to promote critical thinking about values, began its third year with the BGeX Introduction in August 2004. Approximately 1,700 incoming BGSU first year students participated in the three-day orientation prior to the beginning of the Fall semester. During the closing ceremony on the last day of the orientation, students were given a questionnaire, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative items, to evaluate their reactions to the program. Three hundred of the 1,700 BGeX participants completed and returned the questionnaires. The following are descriptions of the questionnaire results (See Appendix A for full questionnaire).

The questionnaire began with an open-ended question asking students to provide three responses to the following item: **As a result of my involvement in the BGeX Orientation, I...** In responding to this question, students were asked to reflect on the aspects of the orientation that *most* affected them including possible influences it may have had on beliefs, values, attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships.

Several themes emerged from the students' responses to the open-ended items. The most frequent response was "met new people," which encompassed getting to know classmates and professors, with approximately two-thirds of students mentioning this outcome. The next two most common themes dealt with the transition to college and understanding values. Approximately one-half of the respondents "felt welcomed and supported at BGSU and more confident in their role as a student." The last most common response encompassed students understanding of values and critically thinking about values with approximately one-fourth of the students responding in this manner.

Clearly, the aspect of the program that many students enjoyed the most was the

opportunity to meet new people and begin adjusting to their new surroundings. From this information, the program assisted them in feeling more comfortable at BGSU.

Additionally, many students were aware of the values component of this program although this was expressed in two different themes, one revolved around learning about values language while the other addressed students' learning to critically reflect on their own values.

Self Reported Impact of the Orientation

The next component of the survey consisted of 9 items regarding the way in which various facets of the BGeX Orientation affected the students. Each item was followed by a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) "not at all" to (6) "to a great extent." Immediately following the item, students were given an opportunity to explain their rating in writing.

The data were analyzed to find measures of central tendency for the numerical responses given by each student. These numerical responses were tallied for each item across all students to obtain the overall distribution of responses for each item. Next, students' responses to the open-ended "explain your rating" questions were analyzed for common themes, which were then tallied to determine frequency. Item results are presented in two ways descending order of response favorability (See Table 1).

My group leaders were effective. (Item 3; $X=5.35$, $SD=0.85$)

This item, with a mean of 5.35, was the highest reported for any item on this questionnaire. Additionally, of the 169 students responding to the open ended prompt component of this item, an overwhelming majority of the responses were very favorable concerning the effectiveness of the group leaders with only a few dissatisfied. Some of

the more common themes include references to the positive qualities of the group leaders such as “encouraged student participation”, “knowledgeable and answered questions thoroughly”, “created a comfortable and welcoming environment”, and “energetic and friendly”. The results of the questionnaire suggest that the students were overall very satisfied with their group leaders with an emphasis on the extent to which the leaders were supportive of students and knowledgeable.

The relationship that I developed with other students in my group was beneficial.

(Item 4; $X=4.76$, $SD=1.21$)

Most participants responded positively when asked about the relationships they developed within their group as evident in both the mean for this item and the responses to the open-ended follow up question. Of the 155 students responding to the follow up question, 92 percent made positive remarks about the opportunity to interact with students in their group. Of those that responded, the majority made general comments such as “met new people who I can call my friends,” “established a support network for class,” “campus is more personalized when I see familiar faces,” and “it eased the transition to college.” Overall, students seemed very satisfied with the relationships they made during the orientation with a particular appreciation for how those relationships contributed to helping them adjust both to college life in general and the classroom setting.

Involvement with BGeX Orientation has facilitated my understanding of what will be expected of me as a student at BGSU. (Item 2; $X=4.32$, $SD=1.11$)

Of the 138 students who responded qualitatively to this item, approximately one-third believed they “learned about the expectations of the class and the professor” and

others better “understood the expectations of college.” A small amount students shared that BGeX “reinforced the expectations they knew prior to attending college.” Overall, the students did feel that the expectations for them were conveyed adequately.

I was an active participant in my group. (Item 1; $X=4.27$, $SD=1.15$)

On average, students perceived themselves to be active with regard to participation level, however, there is a discrepancy in the level of activity. Approximately two-thirds of the people believed they were active participants by “expressing their thoughts and opinions,” “answering questions,” and “talking a lot.” The other one-third of the students were not as active because they felt “shy and uncomfortable” and believed they “could have opened up more.” As students’ comfort level in the group increased, they felt more confident in opening up. Most students felt that they actively contributed to the group with only a few commenting that they were too “nervous” or too “shy” to talk.

Involvement in my orientation group helped me feel comfortable discussing issues that were important to me. (Item 5; $X=4.24$, $SD=1.30$)

Of the 128 responses to this item, a split existed between those who felt comfortable voicing their opinions, while another group felt the “discussion was not relevant to them,” they “did not feel comfortable” sharing in the group,” or they “did not know people well enough.” The students who were comfortable in the group believed important and interesting discussions created a higher comfort level and people were accepting of differing opinions and ideas.

Involvement with the BGeX Introduction has helped me critically reflect on values and value conflicts. (Item 6; $X=3.99$, $SD=1.26$)

Of the 123 students who responded to this question, people responded in a variety of ways. The four themes that emerged dealt with “reinforcing existing values”, “assisting students understanding what values are,” “encourage the reflection of values,” and “creating an awareness of different values.” Overall, the majority of students stated a greater understanding of values.

I expect the BGeX Introduction experience to influence my future actions as a student at BGSU. (Item 9; $X=3.89$, $SD=1.37$)

Ninety-four students responded to this questions. Of their responses, a small handful stated that the program “did not influence” them. Others believed the program assisted them in critically thinking and reflecting about the decisions they make as students and it helped them developed a social network to make the transition to college easier.

The BGeX Introduction has clarified my thinking about my own values. (Item 8; $X=3.84$, $SD=1.34$)

Of the 119 student responses to this item, the majority of students felt that BGeX helped clarify their values. This occurred in three different ways. For many students it reinforced their current values. While others were able to better understand their values and feel more confident articulating those values. And another group of students believed that this was the first time in their life values has been addressed. For them it brought values to the forefront of their mind to help them begin thinking about what is most important in their life. Students were able to better understand and clarify their values through BGeX.

Reading and discussing *The Things They Carried* influenced my beliefs and values.

(Item 7; $X=3.09$, $SD=1.36$)

This item concerning the influence of *The Things They Carried*, the BGeX common reading, was the lowest reported mean of all the items on the questionnaire. In spite of this lower rating, approximately half of the respondents answering the open ended portion of this item answered favorably toward this book. However, the other half did not see value in the book because the “book did not influence beliefs and values,” “did not read the book,” or “did not like the book.” The students responding positively felt that the book made them “think differently about values and helped them understand their values and beliefs better.”

Overall Reaction to Orientation

My overall reaction to the BGeX Orientation has been... (Item 10; $X=1.37$, $SD=1.22$)

The rating for this item differed from previous items in that it was a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from -3 (very negative) to $+3$ (very positive), with 0 being the midpoint (neither positive nor negative). Of the 125 students who answered the open ended portion, the majority stated that meeting people and making friends was the most positive aspect of BGeX. This response is followed by easing the transition to college and it was too overwhelming moving in and attending sessions. The overall reaction to the BGeX Orientation was rather positive with a mean of $+1.37$. This rating was consistent with the results from many of the individual items on the questionnaire.

The final section of the questionnaire asked students to respond to three open-ended questions concerning their general reactions to the event. These questions did not contain a quantitative component.

What did you like best about the BGeX Orientation? Why? (Item 11)

The most common theme for this item dealt with meeting new people. A large portion of students commented on the small group experience and how that facilitated discussion, prepared them for college classes, and offered them a venue to interact with peers and faculty in a more comfortable environment. Other frequent responses touched on meeting new people and the social activities. Several respondents enjoyed moving in early. In general, most students responding to this question liked best the small groups to connect them to campus.

What did you like least about the BGeX Orientation? Why? (Item 12)

The most common response to this item was that students did not care for the length of the program and the length of the sessions. Students felt the overall program was too long and could be condensed, while noting there was too much time allotted for individual sessions. The other concern students noted was the inability to settle into their residence hall after moving in. They did not believe there was enough transition time and felt that starting on the same day as move in was too soon. Several other responses emerged. They included not liking the common reading book, *The Things They Carried* and feeling as though they did not have enough downtime. These were much smaller than the other themes that emerged.

What would improve the BGeX Orientation experience for students next year?

Why? (Item 13)

The main themes from this item reflect students' responses to Item 12. Most students responded to this item by stating that sessions needed to be shortened and the program should start the day after move in to allow time to settle into the residence hall. Students did state that there should be more fun, social activities to meet people from

other groups. A few would like to see small groups interact with one another and the would like more free time. Overall, students would encourage not beginning the program on move-in day.

Concluding Thoughts

Overall, students generally responded favorably to the BGeXperience Introduction. Most notable are the higher means and very positive remarks made regarding the effectiveness of the group leaders and the opportunity to meet new people. The common reading experience of *The Things They Carried* seemed to have less of an impact for the students than some of the other aspects of the orientation. Most frequently emphasized in the open-ended prompts were the benefits of making new friends, reflecting on values, moving into the residence halls early, and becoming acquainted with the campus.

APPENDIX A

BGeX Introduction Questionnaire

General Information:

Sex (Circle One): M F

Group Facilitators: _____

Part 1: Sentence completion

We are interested in your response to the following question: In what three ways do you believe the BGX Orientation has *most* influenced you? Please reflect on that question and then answer it below by completing the sentences. You will want to consider possible influences in multiple facets of your life, including beliefs, values, attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships.

1. As a result of my involvement in the BGeX Introduction, I _____
2. As a result of my involvement in the BGeX Introduction, I _____
3. As a result of my involvement in the BGeX Introduction, I _____

Part 2. Rating the influence of the BGeX Introduction

1. I was an active participant in my group (circle appropriate number).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					To a Great Extent

Explain your rating:

2. Involvement in the BGeX Introduction has facilitated my understanding of what will be expected of me as a student at BGSU (circle appropriate number).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					To a Great Extent

Explain your rating:

3. My group leaders were effective (circle appropriate number)..

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					To a Great Extent

Explain your rating:

4. The relationship that I developed with other students in my group was beneficial (circle appropriate number).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					To a Great Extent

Explain your rating:

5. Involvement with my orientation group helped me feel comfortable discussing issues that were important to me (circle appropriate number).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					To a Great Extent

Explain your rating:

6. Involvement with BGeX Introduction has helped me to critically reflect on values and value conflicts (circle appropriate number).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					To a Great Extent

Explain your rating:

7. Reading and discussing *The Things They Carried* influenced my beliefs and values (circle appropriate number).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					To a Great Extent

Explain your rating:

8. The BGeX Introduction experience has clarified my thinking about my own values (circle appropriate number).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					To a Great Extent

Explain your rating:

9. I expect the BGeX Introduction experience to influence my future actions as a student at BGSU (circle appropriate number).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					To a Great Extent

Explain your rating:

10. My overall reaction to the BGeX Introduction has been (circle appropriate number).

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
Very Negative			Neither Positive nor Negative	Very Positive		

Explain your rating:

Part 3. General Reactions and Comments

11. What did you like best about the BGeX Introduction? Why?

12. What did you like least about the BGeX Introduction? Why?

13. What would improve the BGeX Introduction experience for students next year? Why?

APPENDIX B

Table 1. Student Evaluations Overall Means and Standard Deviations

The following scale was used for the items below:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all					To a Great Extent

Item	Mean	SD
3. My group leaders were effective.	5.35	0.85
4. The relationship that I developed with other students in my group was beneficial.	4.76	1.21
2. Involvement in the BGeX Introduction has facilitated my understanding of what will be expected of me as a student at BGSU.	4.32	1.11
1. I was an active participant in my group.	4.27	1.15
5. Involvement in my orientation group helped me feel comfortable discussing issues that were important to me.	4.24	1.3
6. Involvement with the BGeX Introduction has helped me critically reflect on values and value conflicts.	3.99	1.26
9. I expect the BGeX Introduction experience to influence my future actions as a student at BGSU.	3.89	1.37
8. The BGeX Introduction experience has clarified my thinking about my own values.	3.84	1.34
7. Reading and discussing <i>The Things They Carried</i> influenced my beliefs and values.	3.09	1.36

The following scale was used for the item below:

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
Very Negative			Neither Positive nor Negative			Very Positive

Item	Mean	S D
10. Overall reaction to BGX Orientation	+1.37	1.22