## **Career Path Perspectives at BGSU Executive Summary**

This project was a student-led assessment of Bowling Green State University (BGSU) undergraduate students. It was conducted by a team of undergraduate students identified as Student Learning Analysts (SLAs) from the Office of Academic Assessment. The SLAs designed a focus group protocol to gain insight about students’ career path experience at BGSU. The purpose of this assessment was to gather information on how students at BGSU view a career path, how they are preparing, and BGSU’s involvement. In addition, we wanted to learn how students perceived a meaningful life and public good. There were 4 virtual focus groups facilitated by the SLAs, with a total of 17 participants from varying class standings and majors from six different colleges. Out of the 17 participants, 53% identified as female (n=9), and 47% of the participants identified as male (n=8). From the race/ethnicity information participants provided, 64.71% self-reported their race/ethnicity as White (n=11), 17.65% as African American/Black (n=3), 5.88% as African American/White (n=1), 5.88% Hispanic/Latino (n=1), and 5.88% as Hispanic/White (n=1). Zoom was used as the online meeting platform, and the focus groups were recorded to ensure that all information was properly documented. These recordings were then transcribed and analyzed. At the beginning of the focus groups, the SLAs asked participants to define the terms meaningful life and public good. Below are the definitions that best reflected the information participants gave.

*Meaningful Life* – a state of content and/or fulfillment that can be obtained by participating in key experiences, higher education, and/or self-development

*Public Good* – intentionally, positively impacting others’ well-being or giving back through service and initiatives in order to better communities

The SLAs used a three-step coding process, which involved open coding, focus coding, and theme identification. Throughout these discussions, themes with their corresponding subthemes emerged and are highlighted below.

## **1. Social Capital** – Students discussed the connections of people, or lack thereof, who helped further their career paths and lives.

* 1. Peers – Participants discussed other students who they talked to about their career paths.
  2. Faculty/Advisors – Participants acknowledged professors and advisors who they talked to about potential career paths and opportunities.
  3. People in the Field – Students identified professionals who students explored their career paths and opportunities with.
  4. Resources – Students talked about the Career Center, Marvin Center for Student Leadership, new College of Business building, and campus events that aided in their career development.

A student mentioned how their major impacted their connections and the people associated: *I'd say the choice of major definitely influences the people you network with. Uhm, your professors [and] the people you surround yourself with. Basically, I think the major you choose will impact where you work in the future or the people you meet. (T1, L40-43)*

## **2. Key Experiences** – Students discussed opportunities that they participated in that have or will further their career development; students also identified these as important encounters.

a. Internships and Job Opportunities – Participants described undergraduate research with faculty, work experiences, and internships.

b. Field Experiences – Participants talked about encounters with K-12 classrooms, field trips, and studying abroad.

This participant described the steps taken within a career path: *Um, I would say find something that you're interested in, and then, like, spend time working on that, whether that is going to college and learning more about it, or like picking up a trade. Or, like, doing research about it, and then you apply your knowledge of what you learned about that career. And then work towards ... like doing that career and ... become successful in doing it, possibly make some money doing it ... (T1, L25-31)*

## **3. COVID-19 Impact** – Students described how the pandemic influenced how they navigated their college life.

a. Influence– Participants discussed how changes impacted their decisions and/or plans.

b. No Influence– Students talked about how changes did not impact their plans.

This participant talked about how difficult it was for them to find opportunities off campus during COVID-19: *This one hit home because ... I had difficulty finding just, like, off campus ... internships and stuff because a lot of the places I was looking at and government agencies, campuses were closed down .... There was literally no research to be done in person, so I have yet to have an in person, like, internship on research outside BGSU, which is a bit nerve wracking. Because I have one more summer to do that, so I definitely feel the anxiety of that*. *(T4, L198-202)*

## **4. Mindset** – Participants discussed views and perceptions on academics and career paths.

a. Academics – Students talked about their outlook on majors and class impact.

b. Finding Your Fit – Students expressed figuring out what they want to do and who they are.

c. Future – Participants discussed individualized plans for their future and/or how planning impacted their feelings.

d. Recommendations – Participants provided suggestions regarding things BGSU can do or should continue.

When discussing their mindset related to the impact of their career path on mental health, one student stated: *I think it does both positively and negatively impact mental health. I mean positive when you feel like you have a good plan and like things are going to kind of work that I want. And then negative when things don’t work out because I mean there’s always going to be something. So, it’s just having resources to kind of be prepared that, like, not everything is going to go exactly how you want, but there’s you know alterations that you can make to your plan to still get or need. (T4, L385-390)*

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