# **Fall 2022 Classroom Environments Executive Summary**

Four undergraduate Student Learning Analysts (SLAs) from a variety of majors working for the Bowling Green State University (BGSU) Office of Academic Assessment conducted focus groups to gather information on classroom environments. The SLAs collaborated, developed questions and a protocol, recruited participants, and facilitated four focus groups with a total of 18 participants. Participant demographic data are as follows: 55.56% (n=10) self-identified as female, 33.33% (n=6) self-identified as male, 5.56% (n=1) self-identified as gender non-conforming, and 5.56% (n=1) self-identified as nonbinary. Of the participants, 5.56% (n=1) self-identified as White/Asian, 5.56% (n=1) self-identified as Iranian American/White, and 5.56% (n=1) self-identified as not specified, 16.67% (n=3) self-identified as African American/Black, and 66.67% (n=12) self-identified as White. Participants represented various colleges and majors. After the focus groups, the SLAs transcribed and coded recordings. The steps in the analysis process included: 1) open coding, 2) focused coding, and 3) identifying themes and subthemes. Five major themes emerged with corresponding subthemes, and they are detailed below:

## **Mindfulness** – Students talked about the importance of respecting people around them, professors’ impact on a respectful environment, and professors being mindful of how to treat students and provide and receive feedback.

1. Respect – Participants talked about both students and faculty being considerate of each other and their needs, such as preferred names and pronouns, accommodation, etc.
2. Behavior – Participants talked about student and faculty actions that either positively or negatively affected the learning environment of others.
3. Professor Feedback – Students talked about opportunities to provide and receive feedback about classes and experiences.

This student noted how being recognized as people not just as students by the professors is important:

*I think the baseline is really just, like, listening to students, and being understanding, and realizing that while we are students, we're also people, too. (T3, L304)*

## **Comfortability** – Students discussed physical and mental aspects of classes that have or have not accommodated their learning.

1. Sensory – Students talked about preferences for temperature, lighting, sound, visibility, comfort of desks, and the impact of stimuli on their ability to focus and learn.
2. Accessibility – Students discussed how accessible the class was in terms of physical or mental health aspects, content accessibility, and accommodations provided.
3. Flexibility – Students discussed being able to participate in classes at their own pace or in their preferred setting and time.

One student mentioned how they like their classes to be flexible because it makes it easier for them to learn:

*Um, I would say, flexible, so like a classroom where I’m able to, like, get up and do different things. Because, like, I struggle just being in the same exact seat for the entire time. (T3, L24-25)*

## **Class Structure** – Students talked about how the class was set up and its impact on their learning.

1. Size – Participants discussed the number of students in a class and the physical area of the classroom, as well as the size of desks and chairs and how it impacted their learning experiences.
2. Layout – Students discussed desk placement, spacing, arrangement, and windows making the class feel open and effective.
3. Class Mode – Students discussed face-to-face, virtual, and hybrid courses, and their impact on learning.
4. Interactive – Students talked about group work and opportunities to connect with other students and professors.

One student explained how they preferred smaller classrooms because they can build connections with the professor easier:

*...I definitely do better in smaller classrooms as opposed to large lectures. Um, with the larger classes, I don't feel like I'm able to pay as much attention. Because, with the smaller classes you kind of get to know, like, the professor more, and it seems to be a lot more helpful. Where in, like, a large two-hundred-person lecture, you don't really build that connection. You're just kind of there for attendance, and that's about it. (T1, L78-82)*

## **Technology** – Students talked about the impact of laptops, electronic devices, Canvas, Wi-Fi, and online textbooks on the class experience.

1. Advantages – Students discussed the pros of using technology.
2. Disadvantages – Students discussed the cons of using technology.

This student mentioned:

*I* *definitely benefit from the professors uploading their PowerPoints, or whatever they're using to Canvas. Because, instead of like typing notes and worrying about getting everything down before they change the slide, I can just see the slide highlight and add my own little notes as they're speaking, and actually listen. (T1, L154-157)*

## **Recommendations** – Students gave suggestions to BGSU on how to improve classroom environments.

One student suggested:

*When … I got into college everybody had to take a class that you had to take to, like, get oriented to college. And I really think it would be beneficial...Okay, you're in college, let's, you know, make sure that everybody's got kind of an even playing field with regards to … how we treat other people. Um, and assess our own internal biases and prejudices. I think [that] would help with a lot of student level issues um, particularly with people who literally are just coming from backgrounds where they, like, don't have the information, like they grew up in a really sheltered town or something...
(T3, L418-425)*

For more information about this assessment project, please contact Dr. Jessica M. Turos, Associate Director of the BGSU Office of Academic Assessment, at jmturos@bgsu.edu.