## **Experiential Learning Executive Summary**

A group of Student Learning Analysts (SLAs), comprised of three undergraduate students, explored the topic and students’ perceptions of Experiential Learning at Bowling Green State University (BGSU). The SLAs collaborated to develop questions for the focus group protocol and then recruited participants through a variety of ways. The SLAs facilitated three focus groups with a total of 22 participants. Afterwards, the SLAs transcribed the focus groups and then went through a three-step coding process. These steps included: 1) open coding, 2) focused coding, and 3) an analysis of the focused coding to identify major themes. Students offered their initial definitions and at the conclusion of the focus groups gave their clarified perceptions. Through the focus group discussions, four major themes emerged: 1) Connections to Learning, 2) Career Development, 3) Support, and 4) University Emphasis. More details about these themes and their subthemes are listed below.

## **Connections to Learning:** Participants linked experiential learning opportunities to learning in general.

* 1. From Experience to Classroom: Students communicated how they gained valuable knowledge and skills from experiential learning opportunities that could be applied in their classes.
  2. From Classroom to Experience: Participants communicated how knowledge gained from coursework could be applied in different experiential learning opportunities.

One participant explained: *I think that like um I’ve like developed better time management skills in terms of like how to run projects and meet and process deadlines...That’s been really helpful [for my classes] based on the internship experience. (T3, L87-89)*

## **Career Development:** Experiential learning opportunities can help students in their future careers by helping them gain skills and experience to make them more marketable and explore potential career paths.

* 1. Major and Career Exploration: Experiential learning opportunities can help students determine the right major and career path for them.
  2. Employability: Experiential learning opportunities help students get hired for a job after graduation through skill and knowledge development.

A student mentioned: *The experiential learning we’re given is...applicable, it’s going to be worth it for us as students putting in, whether it be the money or the time or the effort or the blood, sweat, and tears. I think that making it applicable is really just gonna be kind of our push, so I know that I’m taking a class that’s really just going to kick my butt, ...but knowing in the end it will make me a better clinician in what I choose to do. Then it’ll be worth it. (T1, L249-254).*

## **Support:** Participants identified faculty and other university resources that provided them with varying levels of help and guidance throughout their experiential learning.

* 1. Faculty: Students related their experiential learning opportunities to how faculty have helped and influenced the experiences to make them beneficial.
  2. University Resources: Participants identified different offices and programs on campus that provided assistance to help obtain and enhance experiential learning opportunities.

A participant noted: *... so if it weren’t for the mentor that I worked with [on an undergraduate research project] I probably wouldn’t have continued [the research outside my major]... but um my professor has been really great about allowing me, giving me the knowledge that I need to meld it into something interesting for me um and something that is applicable to what I’m studying um and [they] also [are] just very relatable um and [have] been really nice as far as collaboration and things... (T1, L265-272)*

## **University Emphasis:** Students discussed how BGSU highlights the importance of experiential learning to enhance the student experience and perception of the University.

* 1. Program Dependent: Students discussed that different majors and programs emphasize experiential learning more than others.
  2. What BGSU is Doing Right: Participants gave examples of what BGSU is doing “right” in terms of experiential learning and its emphasis to students.
  3. Suggestions: Students detailed how BGSU can improve experiential learning opportunities for students.

One participant said: *I think it’s promoted more for certain majors and not others. I think it’s definitely expected for like art majors, business majors, architecture students, and those similar fields to do internships and co-ops and search for experiential learning. Whereas, I think more of like the purely science like biology, chemistry, that it seems more like sit in class and learn. Not actually like go out and try to get an experience where you’re going to learn there. (T3, L130-134)*

For a copy of the full report, please contact Dr. Jessica Turos, Associate Director, Office of Academic Assessment at jmturos@bgsu.edu.

## **Experiential Learning**

Infographic title: Experiential Learning

Image 1: Survey protocol.

1. Study development: The SLAs researched the topic and collaborated on study design and question development.

2. Data collection: The SLAs conducted 3 focus groups with a total of 22 participants.

3. Data analysis: The team then transcribed the focus group recordings and utilized a three-step coding process to analyze the data.

4. Results: After coding and further analysis, 4 major themes with subthemes emerged. Throughout the focus groups, participants provided insights and gave their own definitions of experiential learning. 

Student definition: "Being able to apply what you learned inside the classroom to an outside opportunity and vice versa. Like taking those opportunities from the outside and implementing it into what you're learning, so you have a deeper understanding of it."

Themes:

1) Connections to learning: with subthemes of from experience to classroom, and from classroom to experience.

“This past summer I got to do one of the…study abroads, and I think taking advantage of that I learned from a very cultural perspective.  I like took four classes and had like professors from England, France, Canada, and South America and like just learning just a more global perspective on things was really interesting, and it kind of ties back into coursework…”

2) Career development: with subthemes of employability and exploration.

“I feel like in general it could help you almost, I don’t know, be ahead of other candidates for a job because if you have that experience, they would hire you over someone who doesn’t.”

3) Support: with subthemes of faculty and university resources.

“One of my professors actually [they] helped me get an internship and helped me talk to companies, and like ‘hey talk to this company my nephew works for them, they’re cool’, so I’m like ‘alright thanks professor’… I think, a lot of them have…found an opportunity they pointed me to them, so they’ve just help me get the opportunities so I can gain that experience.”

4) University emphasis: with subthemes of program dependent, what BGSU is doing right, and suggestions.

“Some majors in the [college] actually like need an internship anyway to graduate, so…you got to find that you need to have these kinds of experiences and they’re so important that they want us to have them before we graduate…”