## Factors Impacting Success at BGSU Executive Summary

Four undergraduate Student Learning Analysts (SLAs) from the Bowling Green State University Office of Academic Assessment from a variety of majors conducted focus groups to gather information about and understand first-year students’ experiences at BGSU and the factors that impact success. The SLAs collaborated to develop questions and protocol, recruited participants, and facilitated two focus groups with a total of 5 participants. All students were in their second semester of their first year. These focus groups were recorded in order to preserve the most accurate version of the data. Participant demographic data are as follows: 40% (n=2) self-identified as female, 40% (n=2) self-identified as male, and 20% (n=1) self-identified as “no” for gender; 40% (n=2) identified as White, 20% (n=1) identified as African American/Black, 20% (n=1) identified as African American/Black and White, and 20% (n=1) identified as Asian. Participants represented various colleges and majors. After the focus groups, the SLAs transcribed and coded recordings. The steps in this process included: 1) open coding, 2) focused coding, and 3) identifying themes and subthemes. Six major themes emerged with corresponding subthemes and are detailed below.

## Atmosphere: Students discussed what makes BGSU unique and the feeling behind their experience at BGSU.

* 1. Friendly: Participants noted that people at BGSU were easy to talk to and nice.
	2. Inclusive: Students described the university-wide environment that promotes belonging and identity representation.

When discussing what led them to BGSU one student said: *...I kind of came in not really sure what to expect. I was gonna go to [another university] until this summer, I randomly decided, like, I just had a gut feeling to switch. So, it was just kind of...throwing stuff on the wall and seeing what sticks, but it’s ended up being really, like, great personally. (T1, L9-12)*

## BGSU Organization and Structure: Students discussed how the organization and structure of BGSU influenced their success and described different opportunities campus has to offer.

* 1. Transition: Students discussed that the experiences they had before coming to college and the beginning of the first semester impacted the rest of their time on campus.
	2. Communication: Students talked about different ways the university sends them information and how it impacted their experience both inside and outside the classroom.
	3. Resources: Participants talked about BGSU specific events, communities, people, and offices that support the student experience.
	4. Instruction: Students discussed their interactions with professors and how that has affected their experience and success at BGSU.

Talking about a resource a student shared: *Learning communities are very, very helpful. Because you’re bringing together people who are kind of like very like-minded but kind of different. And um that way like it helps you form better bonds. (T1, L338-339)*

## Finances: Students voiced concerns related to paying for BGSU, both in their need for seamless financial information and resources and in personal financial hardships.

* 1. Personal Struggles: Students noted financial concerns stemming from family and personal situations.
	2. BGSU Challenges: Students discussed challenges navigating financial concerns on campus, including offices that relate to paying for BGSU and the steps involved.

One participant noted a personal struggle: *When I came here, like I’m super independent, so that was fine. But financially, numbers were much bigger, so that was really scary sometimes, um trying to figure out how to pay tuition and everything. Um, and working with people here on campus and figuring out how to do that.* (T1, L47-50)

## Connections: Students talked about the importance of establishing relationships and having someone to rely on for help.

* 1. Social Networking: Student discussed interactions with others that enhanced connections/relationships through support, involvement, clubs, organizations, and/or friends.
	2. Academics: Participants noted engagement in classes and programs helped them feel linked to their majors/specializations.
	3. Family: Students talked about parents, aunts/uncles, and other family members helping with their connection to BGSU.

One student talked about the importance of having a strong support system both with friends and professors: *And there’s just so many people around that like understand, especially on this campus specifically, who understand like not just physical health, but mental health is super important. And also, professors who like understand that and are willing to give you some leeway when you’re like really struggling. If I didn’t have that support system here, I don’t know where I’d be. Being able to have these friends who understand, who are there for you, and who are willing to like care about you individually is like, lifesaving. (T1, 314-324)*

## Initiative: Participants reflected on their experiences as students and how they have personally taken charge of their student experience.

* 1. Self-Care: Students discussed exerting effort to improve their quality of life and mental well-being.
	2. Time Management: Participants discussed how it took additional effort to manage their time effectively and find balance between academics and social life.

A student noted steps they took to feel comfortable in their space: *...first I like made my dorm just kind of like how I wanted it and then just knowing that my dorm is like, kind of my space. My roommate and I are like really cool together and it just looks nice and everything. It’s just made it feel like my own personal space where I’m more independent and everything, and I’m friends with a ton of people in like the same hallway. So, it’s just nice knowing like you’re just like living with your best friends. (T1, L143-149)*

## Suggestions: Students provided examples of things they would like to see at BGSU to enhance their experience.

When thinking about what could improve BGSU one student said: *Not more events where not a specific- year student, but just in general, I would want to see BG actually offer more [events]...I would want to see BG actually offer just other things where it would it would um just allow for a better feel of not only meeting people and having a good time but also feeling great that you’re in BG. Because you know, maybe you can even have something where it’s like you know like, only BG does that. Like uh like nobody else like no other college does that, only BG. And that’s something that we could have. (T3, L 271-281)*

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

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