# **Why Students Stay at BGSU Executive Summary**

Bowling Green State University (BGSU) undergraduate Student Learning Analysts (SLAs) from the Office of Academic Assessment conducted this assessment project. The SLAs designed a focus group protocol to gain knowledge about why students decide to continue to stay at BGSU. The SLAs facilitated five focus groups with 20 participants from varying class standings and majors from five colleges. Out of the 20 participants, 60% identified as female (n=12), 30% identified as male (n=6), 5% identified as genderfluid (n=1), and 5% identified as nonbinary (n=1). From the race/ethnicity information participants provided, 65% self-reported their race/ethnicity as White (n=13), 25% as Black/African American (n=5), 5% as Hispanic (n=1), and 5% as Biracial (n=1). Zoom was used as the online meeting platform, and the focus groups were recorded. These recordings were then transcribed and analyzed. The SLAs used a three-step coding process, which involved open coding, focus coding, and theme identification. Five themes with their corresponding subthemes emerged throughout these discussions and are highlighted below.

## 1. Connections and Community – Participants discussed the people that influenced them and their reasons to stay at BGSU.

1. Belonging – Students talked about how welcoming BGSU has been in supporting students’ identities and how they have built community while being a student at BGSU.
2. Faculty and Staff – Connections with faculty and staff that affected students staying at BGSU.
3. Peers and Family – Students, friends, roommates, and family members who have influenced students' decisions to stay at BGSU.
4. Extracurriculars – Participants discussed how clubs, sports, Greek Life, and other organizations on campus created connections with students.

One student talked about what being a student at BGSU means to them:

*I think that being a student at BGSU means just being a part of a community bigger than yourself and being able to interact and grow as a person. [It] just means the freedom to become who you're meant to be, like your individual self and the best version of yourself, and that could be achieved at BGSU. (T4, L421-424)*

## 2. Well-Being – Participants commented on how their health and adaptation to BGSU affected their experience.

1. Mental and Physical Health – Students talked about how they were impacted by mental health, such as loneliness and isolation, as well as physical health challenges and how that related to them choosing to stay at BGSU.
2. Adapting and Independence – Participants discussed the various ways that they adjusted to being a student at BGSU.

One student talked about their process in adapting to BGSU:

*I would say an experience that made me feel successful. I would just say in general, like, just adapting to life at BG. Like, before I went away, I was scared, I wasn't gonna be able to fit in or, like, just I don't know enjoy college or anything. But so far, I've liked it a lot. I've been able to fit in I thought I wouldn't be able to. But [I] met a lot of people and overall, it's pretty good. (T1, L144-147)*

## 3. Academics – Students talked about the aspects of BGSU that are related to degree attainment and the resources offered to bolster academics.

1. Majors and Programs – The specific degree programs offered at BGSU.
2. Learning and Studying – Participants talked about the different ways they received help with study habits, their experiences inside the classroom, and learning outside of the classroom.
3. Resources and Tools – The outside of class help that students receive related to their classes and overall experience as a student at BGSU.
4. Career Development – Internships and opportunities that students have at BGSU.
5. Motivation – Students talked about what encourages them to stay in their academic programs at BGSU.

This student mentioned the uniqueness of a BGSU education:

*I think it means, like, getting a real education ... because I'm actually learning stuff in my classes. And some of my friends from high school or, like, just around here that go to different colleges all of their homework or, like, tests are just like busy work. And, like, you can just look it up online and, like, it doesn't really do anything. And then they get, like an A, ... but like I actually have to like study .... (T5, L296-300).*

## 4. Characteristics of BGSU – Students discussed the aspects of BGSU that impacted their decision to stay.

1. Initial Events – Participants discussed transition events, such as orientation and welcome events, that they experienced at BGSU.
2. Cost – Students talked about scholarships and other financial aspects of being a student at BGSU.
3. Distance – Students chose BGSU because of the distance from their hometowns.
4. Campus and Town – The size of campus and the surrounding aspects of the town that students talked about in relation to staying at BGSU.
5. Thoughts on Staying at BGSU – Students talked about things that made it challenging to leave, the convenience of staying, and when students did not think of leaving BGSU.

This student discussed the environment of BGSU:
*What I like about BGSU would be the atmosphere. I feel like we have very close connection with our town and just the general community here has been amazing to me. (T2, L2-3)*

## 5. Room for Improvement – Students talked about thoughts that they had about improving aspects of BGSU and provided recommendations.

A student recommended increased staffing:
*For at least with my department, it's definitely more staffing and, like, increasing staff. Not even necessarily like not having professors teach those same classes, because I've had professors ...with their workload because they have to teach 4 classes a semester with ranging from, like, 25 to like 90 students in a class depending on what classes they are, and that is a lot of stress on professors, as well as like later down the line, the students. (T4, L402-406)*

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.

## **Why Students Stay Infographic** Dark Brown Rectangle with white text that reads: Why Students Stay at BGSU. Undergraduate Student Learning Analysts (SLAs) from the Office of Academic Assessment conducted an assessment project about why students stay at BGSU. There were five focus groups facilitated by the SLAs, with a total of 20 participants from varying class standings and majors from five colleges. The SLAs used a three-step coding process, which involved open coding, focus coding, and theme identification. Five themes with their corresponding subthemes emerged and are highlighted below.      Logo for the Office of Academic Assessment at Bowling Green State University       Tan rectangle with text that reads:   Connections and Community    The people that influenced students and their reasons to stay at BGSU   Belonging – How welcoming and supportive the BGSU community is   Faculty and Staff - Connections with faculty and staff   Peers and Family - Other students, family, roommates, and family members who influenced students’ decisions to stay at BGSU   Extracurriculars- Clubs, sports, Greek Life, other organizations    Next to it is a black and white cartoon image of three people’s outlines all holding a heart above their heads       Rose colored rectangle with text that reads:   Well-Being    How Students’ health and adaption to BGSU affected their experience   Mental and Physical Health - Mental health impacts, such as loneliness and isolation, as well as physical health challenges   Adapting and Independence – Various ways students adjusted to BGSU    Next to it is a cartoon head with a heart plant and EKG line      Teal colored rectangle with text that reads:   Academics   Students talked about the aspects of BGSU that are related to degree attainment   Majors and Programs – Specific degree programs offered at BGSU   Learning and Studying- Help with study habits and learning experiences   Resources and Tools- Help students receive outside of class   Career Development- Internships and opportunities that students have at BGSU   Motivation- What encourages students to stay in their programs   Next to it is a cartoon image of books and a graduation cap      Coral colored rectangle with text that reads:   Characteristics of BGSU   Students discussed the aspects of BGSU that impacted their decision to stay at BGSU   Initial events- transition events, such as orientation, that participants experienced   Cost- Scholarships and other financial aspects of being a student at BGSU   Distance- distance from students’ hometowns affecting choice   Campus and town- Size of campus and surrounding aspects of town   Thoughts on staying at BGSU- Convenience, challenges, no thoughts on leaving    Next to it is a cartoon image of a hexagon with 6 other smaller hexagons attached to the outside of it by a line. There is a cartoon bust inside of the larger hexagon.       Tan colored square with text that reads:   Room for improvement   Student’s thoughts and recommendations about improving aspects of BGSU   Advising   Finances/cost   Meal plans   Housing prices   Improving infrastructure   More online class options   Parking   Resource distribution    Next to it is a cartoon person walking upstairs with the top of the stairs being an arrow pointing forward to symbolize progress.