

Convened by President Ribeau in May, 2007, the Strategic Positioning Group was chartered to explore alternative futures and be the pioneers – creative, committed, and unafraid – by providing a scenario to spark the planning and management that lie ahead in these challenging times for higher education in general and at BGSU in particular. This report conveys our vision for BGSU in the year 2020.

## ***Premier Learning: A Scenario for BGSU in 2020***

***Mission: Bowling Green State University is a premier learning community that serves Ohio and the nation by preparing students for their emerging careers and lives of engaged citizenship and leadership in a global society. Through the exploration of values and daily interactions with faculty and staff, students develop skills in critical thinking, communication and self-reflection. The university prides itself in offering a welcoming, safe and diverse environment where students can achieve excellence at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. BGSU is a university that changes lives. Its graduates go on to change the lives of others.***

The year is 2020. The university has completed full implementation of ***Premier Learning***, its multi-faceted approach to higher education. The Premier Learning model includes development of the whole person through quality advising, individualized major programs, living - learning communities, possibility-based learning, real world experience, and service to the community. BGSU students are engaged and clear about their personal goals and values. They take responsibility for their own learning, and they see how their current learning relates to their life and career aspirations.

**Quality advising** begins upon admission to the university, comes into focus with baseline assessments recorded during orientation and registration (or upon transfer), and involves personal goal setting. It is provided to each student by an advising team which gets to know the student in-depth, including their career and personal aspirations. Reflection and monitoring takes place semester by semester through structured interactions between the student and an advisor. Conversations focus on the student: her academic progress and accomplishments, evolving goals and interests, and the student's own understanding of how the courses they are taking are preparing them for their career and life goals. Within university guidelines and with faculty approval, changes can be made to the student's Premier Learning plan. Key resources for student reflection and faculty assessment are artifacts documenting mastery of course and program learning outcomes stored on-line in the student's electronic portfolio (ePortfolio). Students' learning shows in concrete activities, such as:

- Conduct, report on, and reflect upon a career or learning conversation with a faculty member.
- Write an essay about a problem or issue in one's hometown, and self-assess that essay.
- Conduct a career exploration activity, and document its outcomes.
- Make and save on video at least one oral presentation.

**Individualized major programs** can be customized upon entrance to the university or modified along the way as the student's career and educational goals evolve. Each student's individualized academic program is developed under the close supervision and with the approval of faculty -- faculty who have gotten to know the student's goals, interests, strengths and progress. An approved academic program will ensure that the student exceeds the university's published learning outcomes even as it addresses the student's unique career/graduate school goals and personal aspirations. Courses and activities ensure mastery

of core knowledge, critical and constructive thinking, communication, and social interaction skills while they prepare the student with excellence for their initial career (or graduate school) and a lifetime of continuing learning and change. The university applies a holistic approach to achieving student learning outcomes: out-of-classroom experiences are designed to support academic learning, and academic learning is applied to inform and enrich residential living, student organization, and other extra-curricular activity.

**Living - Learning Communities.** BGSU places eligible students in residential settings that complement the curriculum and permit close contact with faculty and staff members. Living environment and peer interaction are among the most powerful influences on students. Living-Learning communities create environments of manageable scale to harness these factors to enhance academic success, persistence in school, and provide richly rewarding extracurricular activities that facilitate both student growth and maturation and career readiness. Campus life activities promote personal responsibility, civic engagement, and leadership development.

**Possibility-based learning (PBL)** comprises four phases: meeting the problem, inquiry and investigation, building solutions, and taking action. At orientation, incoming students join an *Action Community*. These communities move as cohorts through the first year courses that include values and career exploration (BGeX, Values in Action, General Studies Writing, First Year Seminar). Many of these courses are tied together via a real-world problem, such as contaminated local water wells, the “brain-drain” of talented graduates out of the region/state, or harvesting alternative energy to meet our nation’s growing energy needs. *Action Communities* are led by interdisciplinary teams of faculty who plan and develop Possibility-Based Learning experiences. Each *Action Community* comprises smaller *Action Teams* (clusters of 5-6 students). As a culminating experience, each *Action Team* presents an interdisciplinary project that represents its solution to the problem under investigation, to a panel of university and community experts who provides feedback. Based on the specific problem being addressed, *Action Communities* and *Action Teams* may persist for a full year or longer.

**Real world experience** occurs in

- First year *PBL Action Team* projects in the community,
- Team-taught, project-based courses that take place in the real world or more clearly model real world, practical learning,
- Internships or other off-campus experiences required so that students can gain needed real world learning opportunities and interactions, and
- Senior year *Integrative, Capstone Projects* in the community, or alternative research or creative projects, presented to a team of university and community experts.

**Service learning** involves curriculum-based, credit-bearing educational experiences in which students:

- Participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs,
- Reflect on the service activity to gain further understanding of curricular content and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility, and
- Practice and enhance skills that will be critical for success in the world of work.

Throughout their studies, students add artifacts to their electronic portfolios (e.g., an oral presentation, a “commencement address”). By the time of graduation, BGSU graduates have repeatedly demonstrated successful performance, showing how they can apply the knowledge, skills, and dispositions developed through their Premier Learning experiences to future problems that will be encountered both at work and at home.

We commend Premier Learning for consideration by the BGSU community. This scenario is highly challenging, requiring much research and development as well as high consensus to support the faculty development, curriculum, materials and organizational changes needed to implement it. Premier Learning builds on BGSU's present strengths, embraces developing trends and best practices, and will allow us to better meet the needs of our students under tomorrow's conditions, even as it allows us to control our institutional destiny in challenging times.

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The Strategic Positioning Group

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# Appendices

## ***Appendix A. Charge to the Strategic Positioning Group***

### **Process**

The Strategic Positioning Group (SPG) is being convened by the President to explore alternative futures and do visioning for the university. It is being asked not to step out of the box, but rather to blow open the box. It will identify and explore, collaboratively and through discussion, what issues the university will confront, not necessarily addressing how to confront them.

The Strategic Planning Group, adopting a university-wide perspective, is not intended to do any type of detailed planning. Rather, it is the precursor to planning -- brainstorming and visualizing the future(s) of BGSU. The purpose of the SPG is not focused on improving the management or current effectiveness of the university. Its charge sets before it a process of reflecting on and articulating the key dimensions of the world 10 years out and specifically the environment in which higher education will operate. Then it will proceed to explore what the university might “look like” in terms of its programs, culture, relationships, business model, and other aspects of its strengths, programs, self-perception and identity.

Members may be asked to do some background work outside the group. Face-to-face discussions at the group meetings will be the primary form of interaction for achieving the purposes of the SPG. Discussions on specific topics may be led by members designated by the group. An outside facilitator can be brought in at the group’s request. The modalities for interaction will be established by the group itself, but it is intended that the members of the group will, through a process of “thinking in teams,” discover unthought-of opportunities, explore possibilities and models, and together develop a vision of that university, a new and different BGSU, ten years out. Aspects of the vision could be explored by constructing and evaluating scenarios, developing mind maps that cluster related information, or using other facilitating and documentation tools. It is hoped that the interaction among the creative, diverse and intellectually stimulating membership of the Strategic Positioning Group would also prove to be an enjoyable experience for its members.

### **Background**

We know the world is changing at a dizzying pace, and universities are often one of society’s least responsive actors. Yet, like it or not, 10 years from now the environment within which BGSU operates will be predictably very different. Students will be different, the mix of career opportunities for BG graduates will be different, understanding the human learning process and the ability to apply that knowledge will be more advanced, technology will be both far more capable and more affordable, and the financial support structure for public higher education in Ohio is likely to be different. The expectations of universities by key constituencies including funding agencies, and the basis for the evaluation of universities state-wide and nationally will both be significantly changed.

How will BGSU respond to such a different environment? Can BGSU without purposeful steering, a large university with strongly established patterns of behavior, naturally grow into a successful organization that can thrive in that new environment? Or, with focused energy, can it, perhaps must it, vision a future in awareness of its changed environment and then use that vision as the basis for intentional planning? That is the charter of the Strategic Positioning Group: to explore alternative futures and be the pioneers – creative, committed, and unafraid – for the planning and management that lie ahead.

## **Tasks**

The Strategic Positioning Group should:

1. Identify key issues and trends to which the university should be proactively responding. These might include changes in the preferences and styles of students, the expectations of higher education, the economic environment, the technological environment, and the landscape of higher education at the state and national level.
2. Determine the dimensions and metrics on which the university will be evaluated by prospective students, parents, alumni, and public, philanthropic and corporate funding sources and any other critical constituencies.
3. Determine how to relate differently, more creatively and more effectively with competitors, prospective partners, and other organizations, both in higher education and outside it. Are new forms of cooperation possible with new partners (e.g., community colleges, K-12, other Ohio public universities, businesses); organizations initially viewed as competitors; and actors outside our local geography (recognizing that changing patterns of communication, travel, living and education will enable BGSU to engage on a much broader front including internationally)?
4. Consider and explore creative, out-of-the-box approaches to reconceptualize the major issues facing, even the purposes of the university. Is the university a machine for producing graduates, or is it a place explicitly tuned to facilitate maturation and personal development, with a much broader focus on the individual? Is it a location and academic programs, or is it a place instilling values and aspirations in pursuit of some higher calling, or many higher callings? Often important realizations become apparent from such exploratory reconceptualization.
5. Assuming we are going to be very different, what will the university “look like” in 10 years?

## **Outcomes**

While no formal report is mandated, at least a written synopsis is requested. Observations, reflections, conclusions and perhaps even recommendations will be shared with the President, who in turn may share them with the Cabinet or others. He may ask that the Strategic Positioning Group to participate in dissemination of their outcomes to the Cabinet and other groups, as these outcomes may serve as valued input to other processes.

## **Appendix B. Comments regarding the five tasks in our charge**

The Strategic Positioning Group was asked to address five tasks (the full charge is shown in Appendix A). Here we present a summarization of our deliberations for each task, followed by resources and references that we consulted.

### **Task 1: Identify key issues and trends.**

*Identify key issues and trends to which the university should be proactively responding. These might include changes in the preferences and styles of students, the expectations of higher education, the economic environment, the technological environment, and the landscape of higher education at the state and national level.*

#### **What Will Change**

##### **The Students**

- Media aware and influenced
- Technology savvy
- Shorter attention span
- Will share their opinions and complain as they wish
- Always connected (by cell phone, wireless, TV, social networking, etc.)
- Drawn from a consumer society
- Students feel:
  - More privileged
  - More entitled
  - Despite the above, parents or others may need to periodically “bail them out” of the results of their own decision making
- Tension caused by mismatch between students’ expectations of their sponsors (e.g., parents, institutions) and the sponsors’ expectations of the students
- Students don’t take responsibility for their own learning: rather they “follow the formula” of the courses required in their curriculum, and uncritically use course grades as the measure of their learning
- Students want to be individuals, and be seen and treated that way

##### **The World**

- Greater exposure to and experience of diversity and other cultures
- Competitive world environment
- Greater competition for energy
- Growing concerns for clean water and renewable and sustainable natural resources
- U.S. has competitive advantage and remains the world leader in higher education
- Scientism continues its long-term rise, but politics motivates many decisions

##### **The Economy**

- Greater realization of Thomas Friedman’s “Flat World”
  - Fierce rivalry among nations and regions to compete for new business and to retain businesses
- Technology permeates all aspects of the developed-world’s economies

- The US is an “information, service and creative” economy
  - Job growth built around health, medicine, long-term care, technology, computing/communications, and small and medium sized business
  - Professionals should expect 5+ careers per lifetime
- U.S. advantages are economic infrastructure, skilled work force and entrepreneurship
- Customers want their individual needs addressed. Enabled by technology and a better understanding of the relevant production processes, “mass customization” is becoming a preferred approach for the production and delivery of a wide range of goods (e.g., cars, blue jeans) and services (e.g., insurance, investment advice). It offers potential applications to one-to-one learning in higher education.

### **Higher Education**

- Many more robust models of higher education will develop and coexist:
  - Traditional, mastery-based, media based, delivery-mode based, hybrids, franchises of big brands, schools that emphasize “delivery” of instruction and not research or service, for profit, on-line self-instruction, etc.
  - The premium for higher education certification will increase
  - The expectation of a job for every graduate (regardless of degree) will diminish
- Face to face delivery will remain the predominant modality
- Teaching quality will receive increased attention as students have more choices and more effective ways to express themselves
- Much greater use of technology by students and faculty, with resulting different cost and support issues

### **Ohio & Higher Education in Ohio**

- Continued out-migration, particularly college grads
- Poor economy struggling with declining industries or industries which believe they can more effectively operate elsewhere
- Underinvestment in higher education, undermining economic development
- Cost of attendance at Ohio public universities will rise faster than inflation
- Greater emphasis on the private rather than the public social benefit of higher education means greater reliance on student self-finance of higher education
- Students will increasingly rely on loan support for their expenses, with students individually responsible for repaying student debt beginning at graduation
- Ohio will continue to emphasize STEM disciplines to support economic development
- Ohio will mandate coordination and cooperation between higher ed segments and institutions for reasons of cost and accountability
- Increased demand for accountability including prescribed measures
  - Accountability will be academic as well as financial, with financial penalties
  - Accountability will emphasize basic skills and traditional learning outcomes

### **BGSU**

- Information literacy (including video and audio) becomes crucial
- Use of modern tools by students and faculty
- Modernized instruction
  - Instruction explicitly designed to support different learning styles
  - Less lecture and more interactivity

- On-line and hybrid instruction selectively used
- Greater use of media including seamless use of media in the classroom
- Nature of student work-product is different (e.g., development of media)
- Based on distinctiveness and reputation, students will increasingly be drawn from outside NW Ohio including out-of-state and international

### **Teaching, Assessment and Accountability**

- Mismatch between faculty capability/preferences and student needs/preferences
- Need for on-going attention to faculty development with particular emphasis on teaching methodologies and course design and evaluation
- Greater attention will be given to individual student learning styles
- Courses will include much greater reliance on media in instruction
- Faculty and students will be more proficient in and much more reliant on technology (which in turn will be easier to use and much more capable)
- Individual courses will have to more clearly demonstrate that they fit into and effectively contribute to the larger learning objectives of the academic program and the institution

### **What Will NOT Change (or at least not change that much)**

- The human maturation process (rooted in 1.5 million years of evolutionary development)
- The basic structure of society (social values, traditions and expectations, cultural myths)
- The dependence on and fondness for the college/university model (robust over 500 years of social change)

### **Task 2: Determine dimensions and metrics.**

*Determine the dimensions and metrics on which the university will be evaluated by prospective students, parents, alumni, and public, philanthropic and corporate funding sources and any other critical constituencies.*

#### **Dimensions on which the university will be evaluated:**

1. Relevance of the university's mission to the needs of
  - a. the state of Ohio (particularly related to possibilities for state funding)
  - b. prospective students as evaluated by the student's themselves and their parents/families (particularly related to the appeal of attending BGSU)
2. Ability of the university compellingly to demonstrate accomplishment of its mission (historic approaches and rhetoric will no longer suffice)
3. Distinctiveness of the university including its basic approach to education and campus life (relevant to all constituencies but crucial for philanthropic, grant and other external funding)
4. The quality of the student experience (as perceived by students primarily but also as observed by parents, feeder schools, alumni, and external funding sources)
5. Career readiness of graduates (particularly as judged by employers and graduates themselves) including:
  - a. Discipline-specific academic preparation



- b. Generic academic skills (i.e., communications, critical thinking, creativity etc.)
  - c. Social interaction skills (i.e., personal attributes such as work ethic, responsibility, honesty, reliability, leadership, entrepreneurship/initiative etc.)
6. Ability to raise external and private funds to supplement state and tuition/fee funding (support by philanthropic organizations and alumni is ordinarily related to demonstrated success)

### Metrics

For inter-institutional and fiscal accountability purposes, state authorities and other outside reviewers will continue to use traditional metrics

1. Primary metrics used by the state and for segment oversight:
  - a. Time to graduation
  - b. First year attrition and six year graduation rates
  - c. Library and information resources; technology resources
  - d. Costs per student; tuition and fees per student
  - e. Scores and pass rates on various standardized exams

Internal and external reviewers of the university will use additional, sometimes less quantitative metrics for evaluating university performance:

2. Selectivity (standardized test scores; percentage of applicants accepted)
3. Number of out-of-state and international students enrolled
4. Diversity
5. External resources generated (by department, school/college and the university); endowments; endowed chairs; total scholarship support awarded
6. Career placement and graduate-school attendance rates; average starting salaries for certain majors/programs
7. Career placement for Masters and Doctoral degrees
8. Existence of a number of high profile programs and well-recognized faculty
9. Various subjective “reputation” and “ranking” (e.g., USNWR) measures

### **Task 3: Determine how to relate differently, creatively and effectively.**

*Determine how to relate differently, more creatively and more effectively with competitors, prospective partners, and other organizations, both in higher education and outside it. Are new forms of cooperation possible with new partners (e.g., community colleges, K-12, other Ohio public universities, businesses); organizations initially viewed as competitors; and actors outside our local geography (recognizing that changing patterns of communication, travel, living and education will enable BGSU to engage on a much broader front including internationally)?*

I. The need and motivation for public investment in higher education is overwhelming, with the benefits of higher education touching on almost every area of life in the state: economic growth and renewal, health, an informed citizenry, the arts, and so on. The public and through its instrumentality, state government, wants to employ a coordinated approach to having Ohio’s colleges and universities address these statewide needs, and will see inter-university competition as useful only insofar as competition improves quality and effectiveness. In an era of inadequate budgets,

the state will mandate roles for specific universities or segments, require various forms of assessment and use these as the basis for its imposition of accountability, and reward those institutions which are more politically and/or educational effective given their designated mandates/missions. It will be far better for the universities themselves to guide and if possible supplant this process, as it is they who are more knowledgeable, more concerned, and can approach these issues (such as roles, assessment) in more nuanced and thoughtful ways.

This suggests that BGSU should work with the other Ohio public universities in

- a. Reducing needless overlap and duplication
- b. Facilitating taking courses at other schools
- c. Offering joint programs where these programs are dependent on scarce resources (which could be faculty, lab resources, library resources)
- d. Joint planning, coordination and operation of major regional projects, including fund raising to support these projects
- e. Joint lobbying and positioning for state and external support

II. There is a great deal of mutual incentive for universities and business to cooperate more closely. Business and industry employ most of the graduates of the university, and thus have a strong interest in supporting the university generally as well as the specific programs from which their prospective employees are drawn. In many cases businesses have specialized personnel, technology, and information resources that could be helpful to the university for maintaining currency of academic programs, providing faculty development opportunities, and providing student internship experiences.

III. Modern communications and computer technology are reducing the impact of geography in the provision of educational services. Students need no longer come to campus for courses, or even live in the geographic region of the campus. Educational resources including faculty, advisors, fellow students and information resources may, depending on the mode of instruction, be accessed remotely. Such technologies as “lab virtualization” which enable students to do chemistry lab experiments or dissect a virtual frog are allowing more courses to be completed remotely, depending on the policies of the university and the systems in place to monitor and assure integrity and quality of instruction as well as the authenticity of student work submitted to fulfill course requirements. BGSU should explore these approaches for purposes of improving quality, reducing cost, reaching a broader student base, and improving student access (including for students with handicaps).

Soon it will be possible for joint academic programs to be developed among cooperating institutions with little regard to the geography. BGSU should consider participating in or developing such relationships in fields where it is difficult to create or sustain independent programs, or in which there could be other distinct advantages, such as partnering with schools with leading reputations in particular fields. It is entirely possible to use such an approach to begin the development of new programs in areas in which starting a stand-alone program from scratch would be too expensive or difficult.

## **Task 4: Reconceptualize major issues and purposes.**

*Consider and explore creative, out-of-the-box approaches to reconceptualize the major issues facing, even the purposes of the university. Is the university a machine for producing graduates, or is it a place explicitly tuned to facilitate maturation and personal development, with a much broader focus on the individual? Is it a location and academic programs, or is it a place instilling values and aspirations in pursuit of some higher calling, or many higher callings? Often important realizations become apparent from such exploratory reconceptualization.*

I. Universities such as BGSU think of themselves (and consequently organize themselves and market themselves) as being in the “programs of study” (majors/degrees) segment of the education business. But the role of a residential university with a large undergraduate population is far broader than that: universities like BGSU are engines of economic development, key providers of community and social services, regional and national sources of scientific and cultural expertise, and educators for and protectors of democratic and cultural ideals.

In service to their undergraduate students, universities particularly mischaracterize themselves: they are as much about supporting personal growth and maturation as they are institutions which prepare students for specific jobs and careers or graduate school. Students and their families anticipate that an undergraduate residential student will, in a somewhat mysterious and unspecified way over a period of 4 or more years, be personally transformed by the experience of being an undergraduate. However, this transformative experience is treated and marketed as ancillary to choosing a major, taking courses, and meeting all the requirements for completing a degree. In reality the personal growth and maturity are key and deliberate outcomes of the residential undergraduate experience, and should be recognized, planned for and marketed as such. In the absence of such recognition, BGSU will find itself competing with schools which do not provide the environment and dedicate the resources in which such student personal development takes place, and will be taking credit for only half of what it is actually accomplishing for students and their families.

II. Many of the characteristics and practices of universities are related to prevailing attitudes and technology of earlier decades or even centuries, and some of these may no longer be necessary, suitable or helpful. BGSU could explore whether some of these historically-derived practices could be modified or eliminated by new administrative systems, or new or modified record keeping systems (for example, through use of ePortfolios that enable assessment and reflective review, by increasing the availability of self-paced courses or independent study, etc.). Among the historically derived attributes of universities that may now be subject to reconsideration are:

- a. course assessment schemes (letter or number grades provide limited feedback and an insufficient permanent record of student learning, particularly when such feedback will be used by the student for self-assessment and reflection, and by faculty and the institution to evaluate longitudinal progress)
- b. academic schedules including fixed length terms (two semesters per year, with most classes taught in approx 16 week modules – historically derived from the

- c. credit hours (a crude measure in which seat time is considered to measure one facet of the amount of one's learning)
- d. physical attendance (modern media, computer and communications technology now allow other options beyond face-to-face instruction)
- e. fixed academic programs (done to encapsulate expert thinking about what should be required to receive a degree in a particular discipline – this has been maintained to allow relatively simple record-keeping systems and to simplify student advising)

III. Faculty want to teach students engaged in and committed to their own learning. Similarly, when students take responsibility for their own learning, students like the experience better and learn more. Universities must find and apply a variety of approaches to have students engage earlier and more completely with their studies and with the whole university experience. Approaches that can be applied individually and in combination include:

- a. Explain to students earlier, more clearly and effectively what to expect of college and how their college education is relevant and important to all aspects of their lives
- b. Make the students responsible for more of their own academic planning, including allowing and gracefully facilitating changes in academic plans (e.g., changing majors) where appropriate
- c. Within each course provide better context of the role of the course in fulfilling ultimate major, career and life aims
- d. On an on-going basis, require students to contribute to record-keeping and assessment activities regarding their own progress and academic and personal development, including completing and recording assignments that are necessarily reflective as well as forward looking
- e. Where possible use “real” projects and authentic assessment (e.g., such as assessment performed by the provider of the “real” project) as students find “real” projects more motivating and the feedback more worthy of being taken seriously

IV. Where possible, take a longer-term view. For example, reach out not just to high school students, teachers, advisors and administrators but increasingly to middle school and younger students, disadvantaged populations, reentry students, etc.; assert the possibilities and benefits of higher education, options for paying the costs, and other aspects of returning to or going on to higher education. Reduce other aspects of short-term thinking that permeate many university operations.

### **Task 5: What will we "look like" in 10 years?**

*Assuming we are going to be very different, what will the university “look like” in 10 years?*

The Premier Learning framework, presented at the outset, is our recommendation for what BGSU should look like in the future.

Ten years from now the university might look very much like it currently does if it evolves on a piecemeal and year by year basis, responding to the short term concerns and opportunities of that year. It might become more or less successful, but it is unlikely to thrive and have successfully adjusted to the significantly different student, educational and fiscal environment of that time (as discussed above). Taking a year-by-year approach, BGSU is unlikely to see and seize the large opportunities that arise in any dynamic environment.

Exploration of strategic positioning, and the related follow-on planning, should be done recognizing BGSU's history, strength, possible roles, and resources: not setting goals that are too low nor restricting thinking to only those possibilities similar to what is currently in place.

### Additional Resources and References Consulted

“Strategic Visioning Process.” - <http://www.nea.gov/resources/Lessons/GROVE.HTML>

Values in Action project summary memo, “Core Commitments Action Plan August 2007.doc,” dated August 10, 2007

Building Community at BGSU, a report on the consultative process conducted in 1995-1996.

Did You Know? The YouTube video accessible via this link paints an astonishing picture of changes now taking place around the globe. Watch the Shift Happens video, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMcfLYDm2U>

All of our students will be highly proficient with computers. Some kindergardeners are now making QuickTime movies, and reflecting on what they learned in the process. Check out the ePEARL project website at Concordia University - <http://doe.concordia.ca/cslp/ICT-ePortfolio.php>



Clemson University has dramatically transformed undergraduate education. For example:

## Small Group Learning for 14,000 Undergrads

Paul Dawson, a professor of food science at Clemson University, has received a lot of attention in the last few months. As author of a study debunking the "five second rule" – the popular myth that food that falls on the floor or any other dirty surface is safe to eat if retrieved quickly – Dawson was mentioned in articles in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and interviewed on-air by CNN and NPR.

Read the full story at <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/08/01/clemson>

Another path-breaking example comes from Evergreen College:

## Curriculum Overview

### Just One of the Things We're Recognized For...

#### Innovative Academics

Students enroll in a single, comprehensive "**program**" rather than a series of separate courses. You'll explore many aspects of a theme or topic through different but related academic subjects. By tackling topics in an interdisciplinary way, you'll learn not only about a broad range of subjects and issues, but you'll become a critical thinker and a skilled communicator.

Read more at <http://www.evergreen.edu/about/curriculumoverview.htm>

University Studies						contact us   sitemap
our program	freshman inquiry	sophomore inquiry & clusters	transfer students	senior capstone	mentor program	
Welcome to University Studies						our 4 goals program map transferring credits

Portland State University has blazed new trails with its university studies program – take a look at <http://www.pdx.edu/unst/>

In 1994, Portland State University adopted a general education program, University Studies, which provides students with a coherent and cohesive program of integrated learning experiences. The ultimate goal of University Studies is to facilitate the acquisition of the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes that will form a foundation for lifelong learning among its graduates. This foundation includes the capacity to engage in inquiry and critical thinking, to use various forms of communication for learning and expression, to gain an awareness of the broader human experience and its environment, and appreciate the responsibilities of persons to themselves, to each other, and to community.

## **Appendix C. A “Student’s Viewpoint” Scenario**

Premier Learning was described at the outset of this report from an institutional point of view, which we adopted to enable faculty, staff members and administrators to grasp quickly its key elements.

In the future BGSU will need to address many different audiences, and thus we may also need to convey our scenario at several different levels of granularity. It should make sense and be clear and understandable when presented at each of several levels of detail, ranging from one sentence, to one paragraph, to one page, to 5-10 pages or more.

Because students themselves and parents, family members, and other external stakeholders may find a scenario about a student studying within the Premier Learning model to be more approachable than the institutional version presented at the outset, we here present Premier Learning as seen by Maria Williams, a student graduating from BGSU in 2020. It serves as a complementary scenario, one illustrating the depth and personal impact of the benefits we believe will accrue from adoption of the Premier Learning model.

### **Scenario**

**This scenario tells the story of Maria Williams, a student graduating from BGSU in 2020.**

Maria Williams entered college in 2017 as just the kind of student every college or university wants: bright, energetic, and well prepared. She also entered just as BGSU was completing the implementation of its Premier Learning model. With many offers in hand, she decided to attend BGSU. This scenario tells why she chose to attend BGSU, key elements of her experience as she attended, how BGSU treated her as an individual with her unique interests and strengths, provided her with real world experiences that allowed her to explore career directions and solve real problems, and then allow her to customize her academic program and enrich it with many extra-curricular experiences – together supporting her personal growth and preparing her with excellence for her life and career.

Growing up in Ohio, Maria was a first grader way back in 2005-06. As with more than 70 percent of students that year, as she entered primary school Maria had already begun using educational technology as a tool. Whether it was improving her vocabulary or learning some basic geography, Maria used the computer and communications technology of that time – both at school and at home. Even as a first grader Maria learned how to store records of her various assignments and projects on her school’s ePortfolio system.



<picture here of first grade students using an ePortfolio system – secure approval for use>

Encouraged by her teachers and parents, throughout her school years Maria was interested in science and math, while at each grade level also displaying good talent as a writer. In high school Maria was active in student clubs and student government, in some years serving as a club officer and an elected student leader, while maintaining grades that would get her into a selective college of her choice. When it was time to apply for college, Maria knew she wanted to attend a school with the resources and academic choices of a large university, but was reluctant to go to a place where she would be “lost in the crowd” or taught by graduate assistants while the senior faculty worked on research or only taught graduate courses. For Maria there was one university that stood out, BGSU. Its Premier Learning system of personalized education coupled with real world experiences would provide her with a realistic introduction to the career choices in which she was interested, while allowing her to customize her academic program to meet her individual career interests and needs.

It was also important to Maria that the university she attended would provide the best possible residential living and outside-the-classroom learning and social experiences. She was aware that the living - learning environment not only shaped student satisfaction with their college experience, but also could provide unique opportunities for self-discovery, leadership, and a sense of community. It would only be years later that Maria would fully appreciate the intentionality with which BGSU created these experiences in a way that so completely complemented and supported what she was learning in the classroom.

As she thought about important college choices such as selecting a major, Maria realized that while BGSU would allow her to follow a standard set of courses in her preferred major, she could customize these with the approval of her academic advisors. In choosing a major as with other academic decisions, Maria would be guided by the most comprehensive academic advising program in the country. In all of her interest areas Maria found strong programs at BGSU, and she liked that the residential living experience was treated as an integral part of her education.

Prior to beginning classes at BGSU, Maria spent a week at “camp.” There she had a chance to meet some of her fellow students, and it was there she first experienced quality advising and was introduced to her *Life Team*. As a biology/pre-med student, Maria’s *life team* included a Biology Department faculty member, an advising specialist, a Student Life counselor, and a peer mentor. It was in that informal “camp” setting that Maria began working with her team on detailed planning of her college career, while being introduced to some of the tools that would allow her to record and assess her own progress towards personal, professional and career goals. Here she



learned how to enter samples of her own work and accomplishments into the BGePortfolio system, and how this system would serve as an on-going record and demonstration of her growing list of accomplishments and developing levels of performance as measured with respect to BGSU's published learning outcomes.

It was also at "camp" that Maria was assigned to an *Action Team*. This team would work together on a real project for a public agency or not-for-profit organization in the community. Her Action Team's project was to explore how to deal with ground water pollution in a local town, and to recommend how best to involve the community in addressing the problem. Applying *Possibility-Based Learning* (BGSU's specially developed model of problem-based learning), Maria's *Action Team* would learn how to confront and solve real problems, addressing each of the phases of the solution process: meeting the problem, inquiry and investigation, building solutions, and taking action. As a science student Maria would have an important role to play in the work of her interdisciplinary *Action Team* as it worked on the water quality problem.

During her sophomore year as a biology/pre-med student, Maria used some of the material in her BGePortfolio to make a compelling application for a highly competitive summer internship working in medical clinic. There she was exposed, for the first time in her life, to the detailed workings of a medical practice. While she enjoyed the experience, and appreciated the additional funds she had earned, she came back from the internship realizing that this was probably not what she wanted to do with her life. While changes in career direction are common, in many cases students are forced to follow their initially chosen path for reasons of financial pressure or to be able to graduate on time. Upon her return to campus, Maria discussed her situation with her *Life Team*, who understood and supported her in the decision to further develop another of her strengths, writing, and to change that into a primary direction for her career. She added a Journalism professor to her *Life Team*, and worked with all its members including both the biology and journalism professors to develop a customized academic program that would provide the strongest possible academic background for her newly involving career interest, journalism specializing in science and medicine.

Maria lived on campus in the Edison Science/Medicine Living-Learning Community (named after Thomas A. Edison, the Ohio-born scientist and inventor). Following the internship experience which helped Maria clarify her career goals, she joined the Student Journalism Association. After a semester of active participation in Association activities, Maria was elected 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President to serve on the following year's Executive Board of the Association. Rather than just step into this role, Maria prepared for it by participating in leadership development workshops presented jointly by Student Affairs professionals working with faculty drawn from the colleges of Business and Arts and Sciences. As she assumed her duties in the Student Journalism Association Maria was not only mentored by the other more experienced officers of the Association, she was reassured by the fact she could call upon Student Affairs personnel and resources (dedicated to this purpose) to guide her to the extent she determined would be helpful in carrying out her new responsibilities. Not only did this help her develop as a leader, it also strengthened the performance of the organization. While developing and practicing leadership was something that Maria knew would be very helpful, even necessary in the years ahead, it was also part of her personal and professional development that the University recognized and intentionally assisted. Having completed the initial leadership workshops, Maria decided to continue participating in on-going leadership development activities, recording examples and evidence related to her developing leadership experience and skills in her BGePortfolio. When she reached Senior status she would be able to enroll in a capstone leadership seminar, after which she would be eligible to receive one academic credit in organizational leadership which could be applied to meet her individualized degree requirements. Maria's *Life Team* supported her in the development of her leadership skills, and approved her request that the joint Academic

Affairs/ Student Affairs program in Organizational Leadership be included as one of the courses which would count towards completion of her degree.

As was expected of BGSU students, Maria knew how every course that she took related to the attainment of her individual career plans and her personal and professional development goals. She knew and could articulate how each course was one stone in a carefully and thoughtfully crafted educational mosaic of her own design and choosing. Each course taken was not just to scratch one more item from a standardized list of required courses, to be “gotten out of the way” on the trip to graduation; rather, with help of her *Life Team* Maria realized that each course was the best possible use of her time to prepare her optimally for the educational, career, professional and personal challenges she would face. The plan Maria was working on was her own (albeit requiring faculty approval), and she took responsibility for it; she could (and did) reflectively justify and explain it to herself and others – in sum, Maria was taking ownership of her own education. Her faculty liked having students like Maria in class as they were “engaged,” working hard and productively, and aware how what they were studying fit into the broader context of their education and the fabric of their lives.

As a Junior Maria was selected for an internship with the Dutch company, Elsevier, the world’s leading publisher of science and health information. Working in their New York office for a semester, and making several trips to Elsevier’s home office in Amsterdam, provided Maria with real world experience which, as before, helped Maria understand the types of preparation (academic and otherwise) which would prepare her well for her chosen career direction. Her work experience motivated her to propose making a few further changes in academic program, changes which were approved by her academic advisors.

As a regular element of the classes she was taking and the extra-curricular and work experiences in which she was engaged, Maria continued to add exemplars of her work, activities and accomplishments to her BGePortfolio. These were periodically assessed by the BG Academic Assessment Office to confirm her progress towards mastery of each of BGSU’s published learning outcomes: critical thinking, written communication, oral communication, and so forth. The Assessment Office’s independent evaluations of performance gave Maria confidence that she not only “knew the material” but could apply what she had learned and demonstrate performance at a consistent and high level, even as it confirmed the same for the university and prospective employers. Maria was provided with independent feedback that allowed her to tailor her own academic program and activities to work on any areas of weak performance, with lots of time to do this, and needed resources being available, to assist her in strengthening performance in any area where the assessments indicated this was needed.

Senior level students participate in an integrative, capstone experience. For many students this is a team project working on a real problem for a local company or public agency. For others it is a faculty supervised independent research project or a joint faculty-student research project. Maria worked on an interdisciplinary team on a science-based project for the local office of an Ohio state agency. Her role in this project made her responsible for understanding the science and designing the printed materials that would explain the relevant science to a non-scientific public audience. By now the phases of problem solution including understanding the problem, independently doing background research, developing prospective solutions, and so forth, were second nature to her, but now, unlike parallel work when she was an incoming first-year student, the problems were more complicated and solutions she developed were far more sophisticated. Maria’s capstone project reinforced to her personal values of the importance of service to others, and what she felt were universal responsibilities of citizenship and community service.

Despite the major change in career direction Maria had made mid-stream in her college career, she graduated in 4 years. Virtually every course Maria had taken made sense in relation to her

unique career and personal goals. Her individualized curriculum, while a somewhat non-traditional mix of disciplines, was of her design and had been approved by her faculty advisors and *Life Team*. Maria understood and could confidently explain to prospective employers and others her career and personal goals, and how each of the courses she had taken contributed to her preparation to achieve these goals. She could demonstrate convincingly to those around her how she, now a very different person than when she entered BGSU 4 years before, was an independent thinker, taking responsibility for her own performance and able to continue her own learning. Maria's BGePortfolio was a rich store of convincing evidence of what she could do, and her ability to manage her own life and learning. While her BGePortfolio definitely helped her get the job she wanted, over the years Maria Williams treasured what it held about her, and her own journey of self-discovery, personal and academic growth, and maturation.