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Faces of BG: Diverse Backgrounds, Many Stories, One Community

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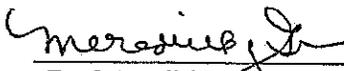
Faces of BG: Diverse backgrounds, many stories, one community

Holly Shively

Honors Project

Submitted to the Honors College
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Faces of BG: Diverse backgrounds, many stories, one community

FacesofBG.com

Faces of BG is a website that explores diversity on the campus of Bowling Green State University through the motto “Diverse backgrounds. Many stories. One community.” Dr. James Foust, chair of Bowling Green State University’s journalism department, created FacesofBG.com in 2015 as a way to compensate for a lack of diversity in the journalism faculty at the time. When professor Kelly Taylor showed me the site, which sat vacant for almost three years, I knew it was something I wanted to help update, both to enhance my video and web experience, but also to spread knowledge about the diversity present at BGSU. The site was outdated, and the videos were mainly of students who had already graduated, making the website less than ideal as the teaching tool it was meant to be. For this project, I first spent about six weeks redesigning the site and adding educational

LOCAL NEWS



The Obsidian 2018 | BG Falcon Media



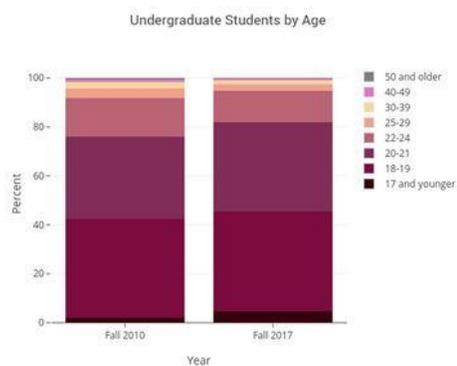
Not In Our Town celebrates five years of fighting hatred | BG Independent News

components such as interactive charts with diversity-related statistics from the BGSU Office of Institutional Research. Diversity in the local news is also extremely important when exploring inclusion, so I added a news section and updated it as local media organizations produced more content. Most important to the project, however, were the faces. For this aspect, I met one-on-one with 11 individuals who contribute to the diversity at BGSU, recording and editing their personal video testimonies.

One of my specific goals for the site was to represent more diversity than the videos produced in 2015 had. To do this, I widened my attention to more than just race and ethnicity, which seemed to be the focus of the 2015 videos. Examining race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and gender stereotypes, I attempted to paint the University through those that call it home. I asked each of the individuals to take about a minute, or more if necessary, to explain how the motto applied to their lives. What about their background added to the diversity present at Bowling Green State University? How did their stories reflect their identity? Perhaps they defied societal norms or had to grow accustomed to a new culture. What does diversity mean to you? What is the community like at Bowling Green State University? How did you become part of this community? Where did you find community?

How is BGSU one community?

BGSU's numbers don't necessarily reflect that it is diverse, with roughly 77 percent of students being between the ages of 18 and 21 years old and 78 percent being white. Additionally, data about sexual orientation and gender isn't even available. Perhaps because of this, it is even more important than at



The population of BGSU has gotten younger over the last seven years. The percentage of students 17 and younger has risen from 2.04 in 2010 to 4.66 percent in 2017. While there has been an increase in the number of students younger than the average college student, there has been a decrease in those older. Those nontraditional students over 50 years old have dropped from .52 percent to .34. As shown in the graph above, there is a smaller percentage of students in 2017 than 2010 in each of the categories 22 years old and above. Meanwhile, the sections encompassing the traditional college-aged student (18-21) have each gotten larger.

other universities to explore inclusion through interactive and interesting tools like FacesofBG.com. Within the University community, there are many smaller groups mentioned through the personal testimonies that help students acclimate to their surroundings such as the Muslim Student Association, Black Student Union, Latino Student Union, the Women's Center, and small groups of friends outside of organizations totally. The trend among all of the personal interviews seems to be that small groups make individuals comfortable in new environments, giving them the confidence to become active in the larger BGSU community. Faces of BG not only recognizes diversity, but can also help these smaller communities become more visible, so students who need them can find the resources more easily.

Throughout this process, I have learned about communities that I am not a part of and had the opportunity to evaluate social norms and interactions through a sociologic lens portrayed by the personal testimonies seen in a camera lens. As part of my research, I formatted the wording on the website around how advocates refer to diversity. In recent years, there has been a linguistic trend toward using diverse to refer to individuals. For example, when the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences released a press statement about why all 20 Oscar-nominated actors were white for the second year in a row, the board said it committed to "doubling the number of women and diverse members" rather than wanting its membership to be more diverse. However, an individual cannot be diverse. Merriam Webster defines "diverse" as "differing **from one another**." By calling an individual diverse, we have set them up as the "other"; By calling a group diverse, however, we have become inclusive and encouraged belonging.

This project shows that Bowling Green State University is a place where individuals of all races, genders, sexual orientations, societal roles, etc. can belong, stand out, and go far, as

well as find a second home. After I graduate, the goal is for the journalism department to continue the use of facesofbg.com as a teaching tool for students. This will include finding someone to manage and upkeep the site and most importantly, to continue finding and documenting individuals who contribute to the diverse backgrounds and many stories that make Bowling Green State University one community.



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