

Spring 5-17-2019

Opening Weekend: The First-Year Experience

Matthew Nolan
mmnolan@bgsu.edu

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Opening Weekend: The First-Year Experience

Matthew Nolan

Honors Project

Submitted to the Bowling Green State University
Honors College in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation with University Honors

Dr. Jacob Clemens, Advisor

Amanda McGuire Rzicznek, Advisor

Megan Arnold, Advisor

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Forward

Thank you for your interest in Bowling Green State University, New Student Orientation, and Opening Weekend Programming. My name is Matthew Nolan, and I am currently a third-year, psychology major. Throughout my years at BGSU, I have been involved in New Student Orientation in multiple capacities. Serving as a 2017 Orientation Leader (OL), and 2018 Orientation Team Leader (OTL), I have had the opportunity to interact with first-year students through two Opening Weekends. Having a vested interest in the New Student Orientation program, this analysis is meant to serve as a guide and informant of future planning and implementation of Opening Weekend program, and is to be used at the discretion of the Assistant Dean of Students for New Student Orientation. From this project, I hope to provide context on past programming. For more information on New Student Orientation programming, please contact New Student Orientation at 419-372-0353 or at orientation@bgsu.edu.

Opening Weekend

Overview

Opening Weekend, at Bowling Green State University, is the four-day antecedent to the start of the Fall Semester in August. University sponsored programming during Opening Weekend provides academic support, social opportunities, and leadership opportunities for students. By providing a variety of activities and events for students to engage in, students may begin to acclimate to either living on-campus, commuting, and form connections with other new students. Opening Weekend, a collaborative effort from campus partners, aims to introduce new students to the resources that are available to them as they begin their journey at BGSU.

Objectives (from New Student Orientation)

The objectives of Opening Weekend are as follows:

- Familiarize students with the BGSU campus
- Introduce academic support throughout programming
- Provide opportunities for students to engage and connect with other students
- Foster community amongst new students
- Facilitate students learning about becoming part of the BGSU community

Staffing (as of May 2019)

Assistant Dean of Students for New Student Orientation

- Directs the New Student Orientation Program
- Oversees and manages budget of the program
- Supervises graduate and undergraduate students of the program
- Serve as liaison between university administration and student staff members

Two (2) Graduate Student Coordinators (*College Student Personnel Masters program students*)

- Plan the curriculum for the student staff training course (UNIV 2010 or UNIV 2020)
- Plan, execute, and manage the main hiring process for student staff positions
- Serve as mentors for Orientation Team Leaders
- Oversee all work done by Orientation Team Leaders

Four (4) Orientation Team Leaders (*Undergraduate*)

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- Plan, and execute various tasks including, but not limited to planning spring retreat, overseeing Opening Weekend Group Leader Recruitment, and Opening Weekend Group Leader training
- Lead a team of 16 Orientation Leaders
- Directly mentor a smaller group of four Orientation Leaders
- Work all 20 SOAR days during the summer

Sixteen (16) Orientation Leaders (Undergraduate)

- Work all 20 SOAR days during the summer
- Recruit for the Opening Weekend Group Leader position
- Facilitate interviews for Opening Weekend Group Leaders
- Mentor a group of Opening Weekend Group Leaders

Opening Weekend Group Leaders (Undergraduate)

- Escort first-year students to and from programming during Opening Weekend
- Facilitate discussion on diversity and inclusion with first-year students
- Work with Resident Advisors from a given Residence Hall to make connections with first-year students
- Serve as campus connections and guide to first-year commuters students

Methodology

Data for this analysis was gathered utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. In September 2018, a survey was distributed to first-year students. The survey yielded 121 responses. Survey respondents were residential students (94%), commuter students (5%), and one survey response identifying as a Non-Traditional student. A focus group was also conducted with 5 Non-Traditional students. *See Appendix I for survey questions and Appendix J for focus group questions.*

SWOT Analysis

Conclusions developed for this SWOT analyses were informed by the quantitative and qualitative data gather from the previously mentioned survey and focus group.

Strengths

- **Students are provided with a multitude of resources to support students academically throughout their transition to BGSU.**

During Opening Weekend, students are given the opportunity to engage with several different resources that could benefit them academically. Students are required to attend specific session (i.e., Get with the Program, First-Class session) that are designed to introduce students to the college that their major resides in, more in-depth information regarding their major, and help students become acquainted with faculty and staff members that work in their colleges and courses. In a reporting survey, over 90% (97/103) of students agreed or strongly agree that they were supported by academic staff and faculty, and they would have enough information to contact resources for academic assistance during the semester. *See Appendix C for visual representation of data.*

- **Students are presented with a multitude of opportunities to interact with students in a way that promotes social engagement.**

Opening Weekend programming provided students with the opportunity to engage in social connections with other first-year students. 79% (79/96) of individuals, in a reporting survey, agreed or strongly agreed that they could identify at least one new individuals, by name that they feel comfortable interacting with in their courses. Outside of academic programming, there were events (i.e., Dale K. the Hypnotist, Playfair, live music, etc.) that were intended to encourage facilitate social interaction. *See Appendix D for visual representation of data.*

- **Students in the Opening Weekend Group Leader position are a present and informational resource for first-year students.**

Opening Weekend Group Leaders (OWGL) are students that have previously attended Opening Weekend and are responsible for guiding a small group of first-year students through activities, events, and form connections between and with the students. 85% of students reported that their OWGL was a good resource of information during the time of Opening Weekend. 87% (87/94) reported that their OWGL was continuously present and identifiable to them throughout programming. By being present and engaging with OWGLs, first-year students can make connection with upper-classmen students at the university. *See Appendix F for visual representation of data.*

- **Opening Weekend adequately addresses a wide variety of social issues present to students on a college campus.**

Opening Weekend strives to present more than academic and social opportunities to students. Through programming, students should be introduced to several social issues that they might experience in their time at BGSU. It is hoped that students will become informed on this information and be able to apply it if they find they are placed in a situation that requires it. The standing issues that majority of students reported being educated on were Consent and Sexual Assault, Alcohol and Other Drug Use, Campus Safety, Bystander Intervention, and Diversity and Inclusion. 1% (4 students) of reporting students stated they felt none of these topics were covered through Opening Weekend programming. Through the given survey,

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students could give suggestions of other Social Issues that they feel should be integrated in programming for coming years. *See Appendix J for visual representation of data.*

Weaknesses

- **Lack of communication, or mixed information on attendance requirements**

As reported by open responses in a survey, many students reported that it was unclear of which were considered mandatory for them to attend. When asked if they have any additional events to be added in the future, responses came back mixed. Many students stated that they did not have additional events to recommend. Students reported a mix of not knowing which events were mandatory and requesting that there be less mandatory events for them to attend. A lack of information would most likely be resulting from inconsistency in information coming from leadership positions, such as Opening Weekend Group Leaders. *See Appendix H for extended response answers.*

- **Certain events were disliked because of necessary characteristics of activity to participate.**

Various events were disliked by various students because of certain attributes of the activity. For example, Playfair is a large, outdoor activity where majority of the incoming class of students engage in get-to-know-you activities. The event requires a lot of talking and many people in one space. One student reported that they went to Playfair, but they did not enjoy it because being around many people caused the student stress and anxiety. Another student reported that in general, they did not like it, and they would not recommend the events to other students. *See Appendix H for extended response answers.*

- **Non-Traditional students often do not receive adequate communication about university programming**

In an informal focus group, conducted with all Non-Traditional and Military students, majority reported that there was no communication from the university regarding Opening Weekend, and similarly for other university sponsored programs. Non-Traditional students are defined as a student who are 23 years or old, married, or a parent. Any communication that was received by the university was often non-descript and provided little to no information. Students felt that because of this, they had many unanswered questions. With an idea that Opening Weekend programming is specifically geared to first semester, first-year students out of high school, and the lack of communication, Non-Traditional students do not often attend Opening Weekend programming or other beneficial introductory programming such as SOAR. *See Appendix L for focus group responses.*

- **There is a lack of programming specifically for Non-Traditional students**

Each sub-population of student often requires different resources than other populations to be successful. One reason that Non-Traditional students do not often attend university sponsored programming is because it does not offer them the same amount of benefits or apply to these students as much as it does for first-year traditional students. Much of the information that is given from programming is not applicable to Non-Traditional students as they are beginning their education at BGSU. *See Appendix L for focus group responses.*

- **Opening Weekend presented was a stressful environment to engage in for some students**

35% of students reported that Opening Weekend was a stressful environment for them to partake in over the course of the weekend. Several students noted that Playfair was a particularly stress-inducing activity. Along with a busy schedule, students reported feeling

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that Opening Weekend did not provide them with an environment for them to interact with other students in a calm and engaging atmosphere. *See Appendix D for visual representation of data.*

Opportunities

- **Introduce new students to campus culture at BGSU**

Opening Weekend can introduce students to opportunities and aspects of college life that they have never experienced before. A university campus has much to offer any student that wishes to be involved and experience all that the university can offer. Opening weekend introduces students to various student organizations, study abroad opportunities, student employment, and various university traditions, such as Ay Ziggy Zumba. Opening Weekend is part two of the orientation process for students as they begin at BGSU, but it can also be a cultural orientation to a college life-style and the experience that they will have. Should students choose to participate, they are more likely to benefit fully from the resources that are available to them.

- **Provide students with a diverse array of activities to partake in**

In a survey, it was reported that Opening Weekend provided a variety of activities for students to engage in. The activities and events that were put on by the university were both inside and outside, some physically demanding and others non-physical, and included other aspects like food, or music. The provided programming was varied to appeal to the interest of as many students as possible. Not every student will enjoy the same activities. As reported, some students loved Playfair, and for various reasons, other did not. It is important to make alternate activities available for students so that they feel welcomed and included on BGSU's campus in their first weekend here.

- **Promote future university sponsored events, like Campus Fest**

Opening Weekend can disseminate a large amount of information through programming to almost all first-year students. Through various events, faculty, staff, and current students highlight the upcoming events that will be hosted on campus. They promote involvement through events, like Campus Fest. For one day in the fall semester, nearly 300+ student organizations set up tables all over campus and allow students to walk through and ask questions, get information, or sign-up to be involved. Many students report attending Campus Fest and are wanting to get involved. Opening Weekend can provide insight for students on how to achieve connections with student organizations and various departments on campus. *See Appendix I for visual representation of data.*

- **Opening Weekend involves multiple types of students in a wide variety of programming**

Opening Weekend programming has the potential to bridge gaps between students of all types. For first-year students, residential, commuter, and Non-Traditional student all have the option to participate and connect with each other. All students are beginning their education at BGSU, therefore, all students should have the opportunity to connect with each and create support networks if they want to. Opening Weekend can also connect first-year students with upperclassmen through leadership positions like OWGLs. Bridging gaps between students helps to foster campus community and culture. Through a variety of programming that is available students who are introverted, extroverted, and all other student types can engage with each other in fun, stress-free, social activities.

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Threats

- **Attendance**

When planning University sponsored activities, such as Opening Weekend, attendance at events is a large goal. With other opportunities, or extraneous factors that play into a student's decision to attend programming, there is a decision that must be made on whether the student will attend programming or not. With less students that attend, it is less likely that events will continue. With a lack of direct information on whether events are mandatory, student may or may not feel the need to attend Opening Weekend events.

- **Over-scheduling**

When asked if students had any recommendations for programming, many stated that there was an overwhelming number of events scheduled into the weekend. Students mentioned there were so many events to go to, and they did not feel they had time to become acclimated to living on campus in their residence hall. It was perceived that students felt rushed, and they "didn't have enough time to breathe". There seemed to be a want of time to explore on their own and to acclimate to the university. Before starting classes, students dislike the highly-scheduled nature of Opening Weekend.

- **Outside/Family Obligations**

Some students reported that they did not attend Opening Weekend because of outside or family obligations that they had to attend instead of staying on campus. Students also had other university obligations, even over this first weekend. For example, marching band students move in a week early for band and practice during much of Opening Weekend. The marching band also performs during the University Welcome on Thursday of Opening Weekend. Even though students might want to attend Opening Weekend events, they might not be able to because of the prior commitments that take priority. Obligations pose a threat because of the intersectionality with attendance. As more students have obligations that they must attend to, less students are present at sponsored events. *See Appendix I for extended response answers.*

Recommendations

Increased messaging to sub-populations of first-year students.

Based on the information gathered, one of the main recommendations that I would make would be to boost communication that is disseminated to various sub-populations of students on campus. Residential students are the main sub-population that attend Opening Weekend programming. Creating new messaging or increasing messaging for other student sub-population might help to increase involvement from other first-year students at the university. Widespread university messaging is helpful, but also creating more of a presence in learning communities or student organization with high enrollment numbers of first-year students to engage in a different capacity.

Create one unified message regarding the attendance policy for Opening Weekend events

Another recommendation that I would make would be to create one unified message from New Student Orientation staff to the Opening Weekend Group Leaders (OWGLs) about the attendance policy for first-year students at events. When each OWGL is giving a different message to the first-year students that they oversee, there becomes confusion regarding the message of the attendance policy.

Create more opportunity for Non-Traditional students to be involved in programming

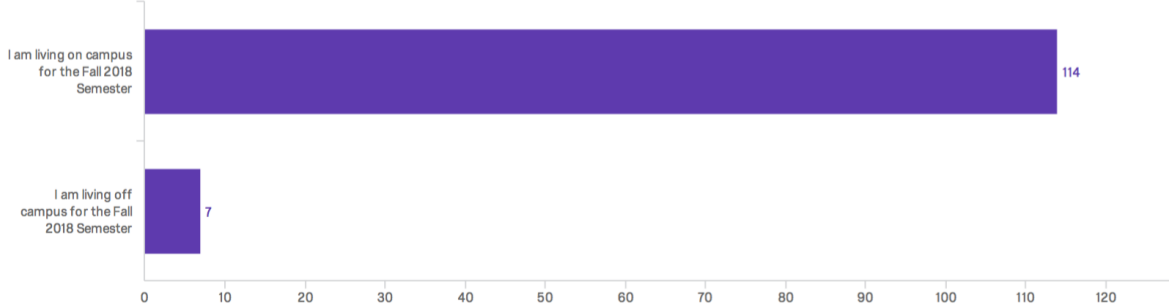
When talking to Non-Traditional students, some recommended and wanted more programming that was geared towards them or would be more helpful. Some ideas that were given were to create more family friendly events, where students can attend with their families and include them in their process to transitioning to BGSU. Other ideas were to program more events to provide more information to Non-Traditional students (i.e., off-campus housing). There was a general lack of information to help students become engaged, both on and off campus.

Create a schedule that allows for students to have down-time to acclimate to the BGSU Campus.

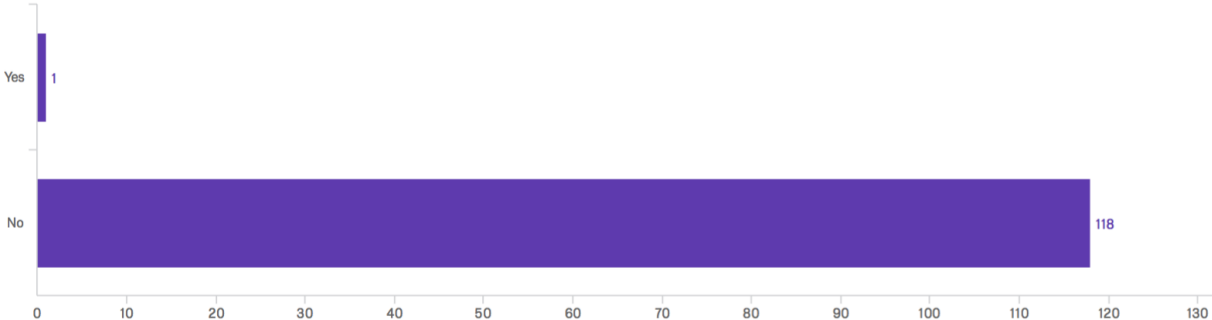
Based on information gather from the survey, many students felt that the Opening Weekend schedule was over-packed with events that they did not have the opportunity to interact with their campus in a way that they would have liked to before beginning the school year. Providing opportunities for down-time between fewer, larger events would provide adequate time for students to utilize their time for their own purposes. Over-scheduling programming can serve as a threat to Opening Weekend and allow students to engage fully with the university before the start of the academic year.

Appendix

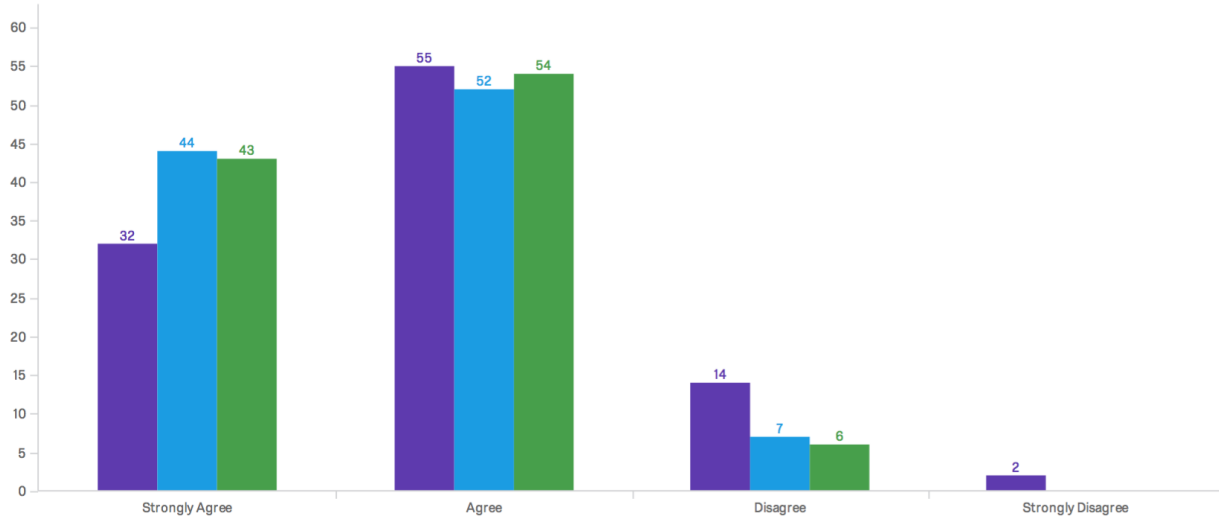
Appendix A. Survey Data: Do you live on or off campus for the Fall 2018 Semester?



Appendix B. Survey Data: Do you identify as a Non-Traditional (i.e. a first-year student that is 23 years or older, a parent, and/or married) or a military student?



Appendix C. Survey Data: To what extent do you agree with the following?

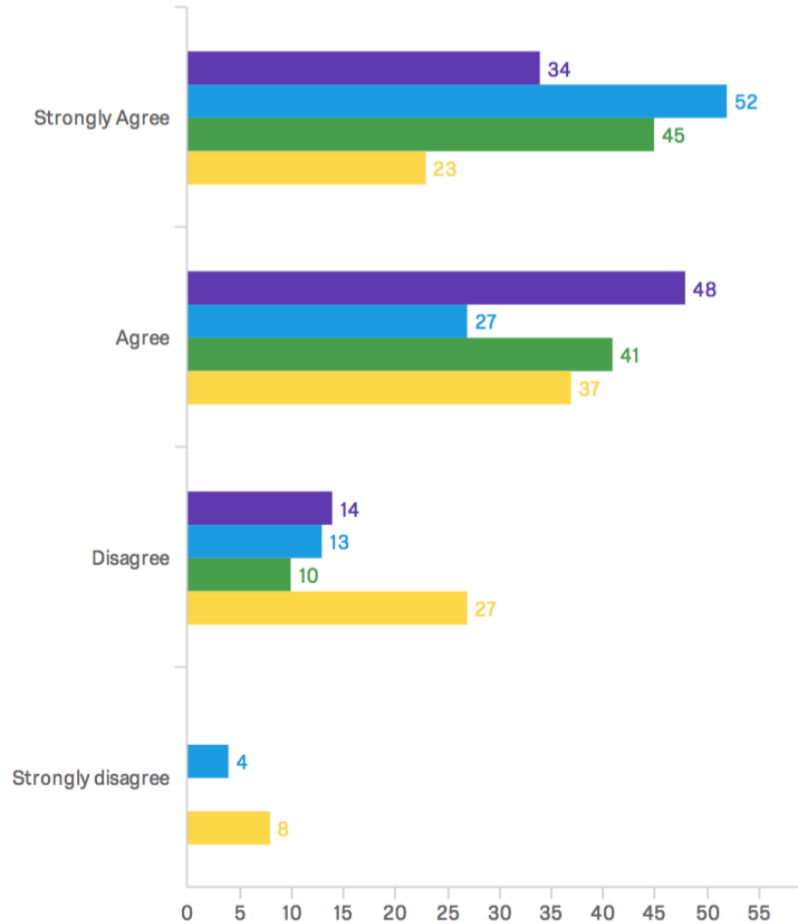


■ “Get with the Program” and the First-Class session on Friday of Opening Weekend increased my understanding of my major and coursework.

■ If, during the semester, I needed academic help in one of my courses, I would know who to contact and how to contact them for assistance.

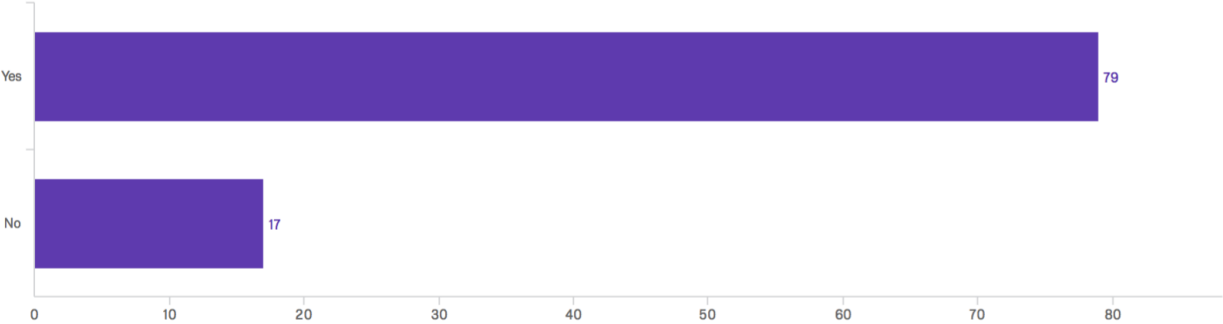
■ When I began the fall 2018 Semester, I felt supported by the faculty and staff members in my course academic classes.

Appendix D. Survey Data: To what extent do you agree with the following?

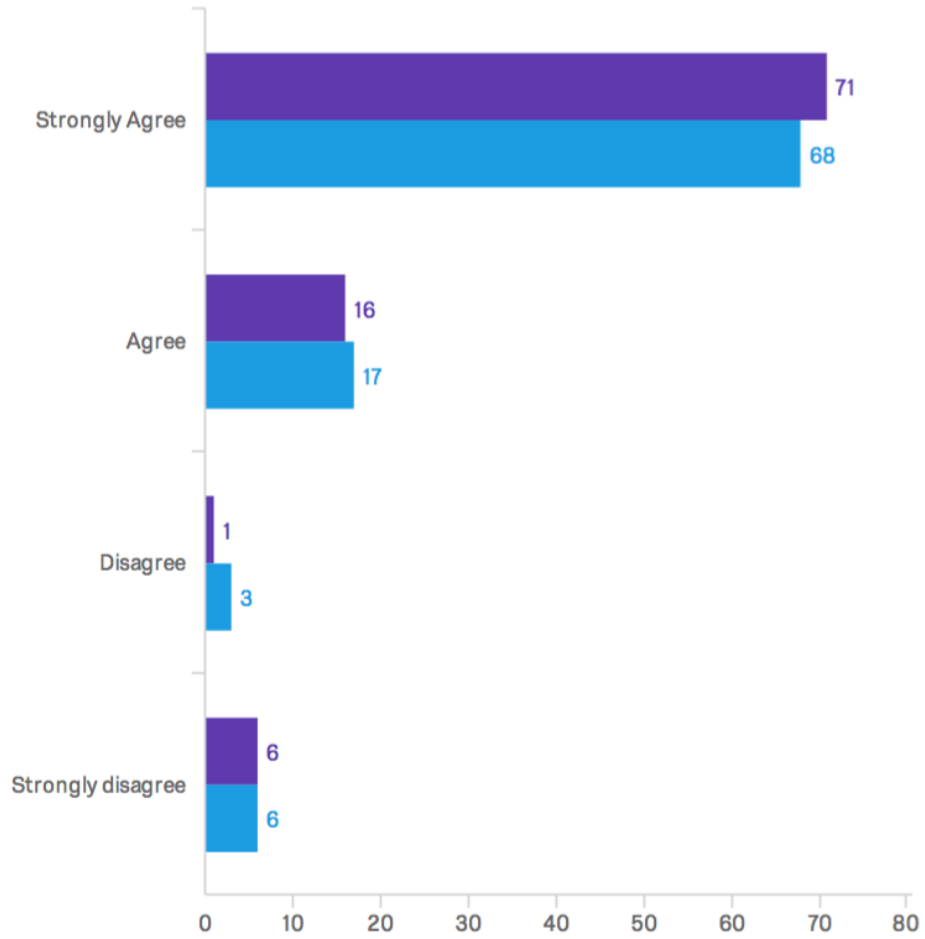


- I felt that Opening Weekend programming provided me with many opportunities to meet and connect with other first-year students that were in similar majors and courses that I am in.
- After Opening Weekend, I can identify at least one individual, by name, that I feel comfortable interacting with in one of my courses.
- Opening Weekend Programming provided me with many opportunities to meet and connect with other first-year students.
- Opening Weekend programming provided a stress-free, social environment.

Appendix E. Survey Data: I attended social events in the evenings during Opening Weekend. (i.e., Late Night at the Field House, Michael Kent, Dale K., It's Ice to Meet You...)



Appendix F. Survey Data: To what extent do you agree with the following?



- My Opening Weekend Group Leader (OWGL) was present and identifiable during Opening Weekend.
- My Opening Weekend Group Leader (OWGL) was a good resource of information during Opening Weekend

Appendix G. Survey Data: Of the following events of Opening Weekend, please select all the events that you attended



Appendix H. Survey Data: Please discuss your thoughts on each of the Late Night event(s) that you selected in the previous questions

“I went to Playfair, but only because my OWGL told us it was mandatory. I did not enjoy it at all because it was late, I was tired, and being around a ton of people cause me stress and anxiety.”

“These events provided me with the opportunity to meet new people in many different environments while enjoying the activity.”

“It was the night after move-in and all my roommate wanted to do was set up our room and digest the idea of having had to say goodbye to our families earlier. This event should not have been mandatory.”

“It was almost completely student driven, and very fun.”

“I actually met up with some old friends at the Playfair who I haven’t seen in a while. I also made some new friends at the Game Show Mania and we are really close now”

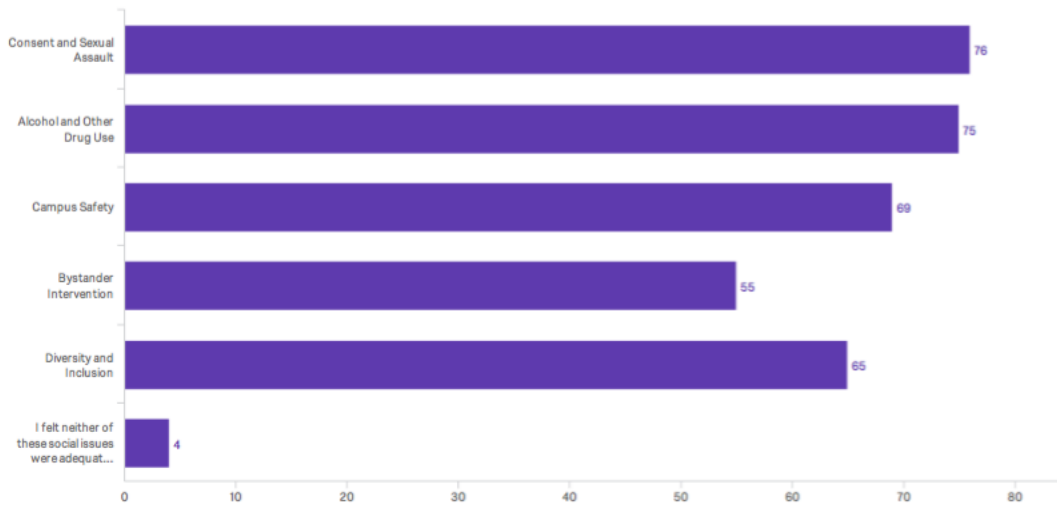
Appendix I. Survey Data: Please discuss your decision to not attend any of the Late Night events of Opening Weekend

“I had other obligations.”

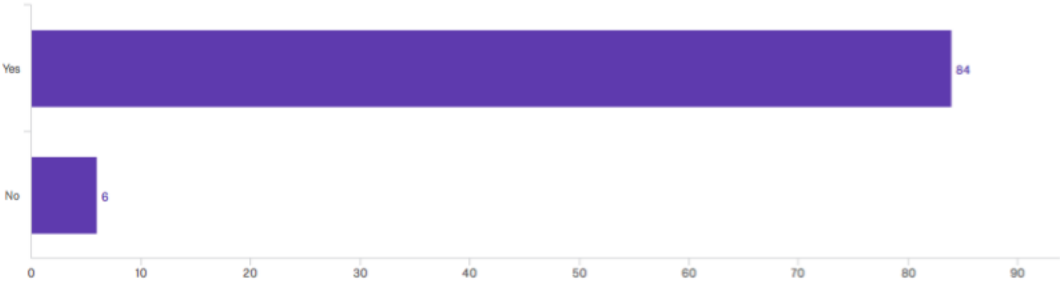
“I’m in marching band, so I had very little time to attend any of the events and activities.”

“I went home for the weekend, after “Get with the Program” & “First Class.”

Appendix J. Survey Data: The following social issues were addressed through Opening Weekend programming. Please select all the social issues that you felt were adequately addressed



Appendix K. Survey Data: I attended Campus Fest



Appendix L. Non-Traditional and Military Focus Group Responses

“Non-descriptive communication.”

“Reach out to students sooner.”

“No sense of community”

“Not going to spend an entire day when I didn’t know what was included”

“More family-friendly events”

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Appendix M. 2018 Opening Weekend Schedule

Thursday, August 23

All day	First-year and Transfer Student Move-in	Residence Halls
7:15-8:30pm	Residence Hall Welcome and Floor Meetings	Residence Halls
7:00-8:30pm	Off Campus Student Welcome and Social	BTSU Ballroom
9:00-10:30pm	University Welcome and Playfair	Doyt Perry Stadium <i>(Rain location=Perry Field House)</i>
10:30pm-1:00am	Late Night Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meijer Madness Shopping - Late Night @ the Field House - Open Skate (10:30-11:50pm) and Broomball (12:00-12:50am) 	Leaving from Field House Perry Field House Ice Arena

Friday, August 24

7:30-8:30am	Off Campus Student Breakfast	Jerome Library
8:30am	OWGL Meet-up	Campus
9:00-10:00am	Convocation	Stroh Center
10:30am-12:00pm	Get with the Program	Various Classrooms
11:45am	College of Arts and Sciences Meet and Greet	Admin Lawn
12:00-2:00pm	Lunch Rotation	Dining Facilities
12:00-2:00pm	College of Education and Human Development Bell Ringing	Little Red Schoolhouse
2:30-5:00pm	First Class Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BGSU 1910 - First Course in Major 	Various Classrooms
5:15-7:30pm	Dinner Rotation	Dining Facilities
6:00pm	Evening and Late Night Events <i>(Falcons After Dark Events)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Game Show Mania (6:00-9:00pm) - Music with Jared Mahone (7:00-8:30pm) - Dining Drive-in Movie <i>(Marvel's Avengers: Infinity War)</i> 	Falcon's Nest Union Oval Oaks Lawn
7:00-9:00pm	SMART Start	BTSU Room 308
11:00pm-12:30am	Hypnotist Dale K <i>(Falcons After Dark Event)</i>	BTSU Ballroom
11:00pm-1:00am	Residence Hall Activities	Residence Halls

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Saturday, August 25

10:15am	OWGL Meet-up	Campus
11:00am-4:00pm	Track 1 Rotation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being Part of the BGSU Community - Finding Your Fit: Getting Involved on Campus - Traditions Tour 	BTSU Ballroom Dining Facilities Campus Campus Dining Facilities Campus BTSU Ballroom
5:15-8:15pm	Dinner and Living in a Community Rotation	Campus
6:30-8:00pm	Off Campus I-Scream Bingo	BTSU Sky Bank Room (201)
7:00-10:00pm	FSL Carnival	Greek Village
9:00-11:00pm	Movie (<i>Marvel's Avengers: Infinity War</i>)	Olscamp 101
9:00-11:00pm	It's Ice to Meet You	McDonald Beach
11:00pm-12:30am	Magician/Comedian Michael Kent	BTSU Ballroom

Sunday, August 26

11:00am	OWGL Meet-Up and Opening Weekend Reflection	Campus
12:00-2:00pm	First-Year Student Picnic	Lawn outside Carillon Place
1:30-3:00pm	Roadmap to Success-GWTP (Pre-Professional Programs)	BTSU 308
2:00pm	"Hire" Education	BTSU 207
2:00-4:00pm	TRIO Student Support Services Welcome Orientation	BTSU Sky Bank Room (201)
4:00pm	The Sex and Drugs Show (Sexual Assault Awareness and Education Program)	BTSU Ballroom
2:30-5:00pm	Just in Time Advising	Library + College Offices
3:00-4:00pm	Men of Color Meeting with Jeff Jackson	Math Science 210
6:00pm	The Sex and Drugs Show (Sexual Assault Awareness and Education Program)	BTSU Ballroom
6:00pm	"Hire" Education	BTSU 207

Appendix N. Survey Questions

Do you live on or off BGSU's campus for the 2018 Fall Semester?

Do you identify as a Non-Traditional or military student?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

- "Get with the Program" and the First-Class session on Friday of Opening Weekend increased my understanding of my major and course work.
- If, during the semester, I needed academic help in one of my course, I would know who to contact and how to contact them for assistance.
- When I began the Fall 2018 semester, I felt supported by the faculty and staff members in my core academic classes.

- I felt that Opening Weekend programming provided me with many opportunities to meet and connect with other first-year students that were in similar majors and courses that I am in.
- After Opening Weekend, I can identify at least one individual, by name that I feel comfortable interacting with in one of my courses.
- Opening Weekend programming provided me with many opportunities to meet and connect with other first-year students.
- Opening Weekend programming provided a stress-free, social environment.
- I attended the social events in the evening during Opening Weekend, e.g., Late Night at the Field House, Michael Kent....
 - I enjoyed attending the social events in the evening during Opening Weekend.
 - I met and connected with other students because I attend Opening Weekend programming events.

- My Opening Weekend Group Leader (OWGL) was present and identifiable during Opening Weekend.
- My Opening Weekend Group Leader (OWGL) was a good resource of information during Opening Weekend.

Of the following events of Opening Weekend, please select all events the events that you attended.

- Please discuss your thoughts on this event
- Please discuss your decision to not attend any other the Opening Weekend programming events.

Do you have any recommendations for additional events to be added to Opening Weekend in the future?

Do you feel that the Opening Weekend programming addressed the following social issues properly and to an acceptable extent?

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Do you have any recommendations of social issues that should be addressed through opening weekend programming?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

- I am already involved in or plan to get involved in at least one student organization during my first year at BGSU.
- I attended Campus Fest.
 - Yes-I felt that Campus Fest provided me with an opportunity to get involved in student organizations.
 - No-I was not interested in attending Campus Fest.
 - No-I did not know Campus Fest was taking place.
- I felt satisfied with Opening Weekend 2018
- I would recommend that incoming first-year students attend Opening Weekend programming.

Appendix O. Non-Traditional Focus Group Questions

1. When you started at BG, did any of you attend any of the Opening Weekend programming? Opening Weekend is the four days before the start of the school year.
2. If yes, can you please discuss your thoughts on the programming that you attended?
3. Are there any specific programming that you can think of, that you feel would have been helpful before the start of the school year, as a Non-Traditional student?
4. Do you feel that you have the resources available on campus to be successful academically?
5. Do you have any general comments about Opening Weekend/Fall Welcome that you feel could benefit Non-Traditional students?