Survey Report on the Attitudes of the Broome Community College and Binghamton University Student Population on Revitalizing Downtown Binghamton

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Introduction

In the spring of 2010, Binghamton Downtown Inc. and the City of Binghamton’s Economic Development office contacted Dr. Pamela Mischen of the Department of Public Administration at Binghamton University about studying the community’s interest in revitalizing downtown Binghamton. Under Dr. Mischen’s direction, students in the MPA program administered a survey and presented the results to the community that August. To gain further insight about student attitudes, the Center for Applied Community Research & Development (CACRD) was asked to re-administer the survey in the fall, specifically targeting the local student population. This report is a summary and comparison of the findings from both surveys.

Research Method

Using a census survey method, the CACRD administered an online survey to students attending Broome Community College and Binghamton University. Students received a link to the survey within their institution’s daily email. The four-week survey was open from Tuesday, November 2 to Tuesday, November 30, 2010.

- 425 respondents
- 336 completed the survey (79% completion rate)

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents were full-time, female students who attend Binghamton University. They are between 18 and 24 years of age (83%).

Frequency of coming to downtown Binghamton

Students most frequently come to downtown Binghamton for the nightlife, with 50% doing so one to four times a week.

Students’ second most common reason for coming downtown is to eat out--34% said they eat at a downtown restaurant once a month.

Students shop downtown less frequently. Twenty-three percent (23%) said they shop downtown once a month, 29% shop downtown “infrequently” and 37% “never” go downtown for retail shopping.

Consumer Behavior

Preferred Downtown Locations

Students most frequently shop at stores along the Vestal Parkway, with 32% reporting doing so at least once each week. And while only 9% of students said they shopped in downtown Binghamton once a week, the city’s retail shops ranked highest in comparison with other communities in Greater Binghamton (Johnson City, Endicott, and Owego).
When asked why they did not shop downtown Binghamton, students cited convenience as the greatest barrier followed by selection, specifically for the following items:

**Convenience**
- Furniture/Appliances
- Art
- Personal Care
- Pharmacy
- Wine/Spirits

**Selection**
- Clothing
- Gifts

**Extended Retail Hours**

In response to a question about extending downtown shopping hours, answers were varied. Evening weekday hours was most commonly chosen, followed by Saturday during the day (Figure 1). Evening weekday hours was also the most popular response in the spring 2010 survey.

Figure 1: If downtown hours were extended, which time period would appeal to you most? Choose one.
Siting new businesses to appeal to the local student population

For the fall student survey, several retail choices not included in the spring survey were added, including a movie theater, a big chain clothing store such as Banana Republic or The Gap, a used book store, and a boutique clothing store. Three of these retail types were the most frequently chosen new businesses students would like to see downtown.

**Movie Theater** 53%

About half of all respondents said they would like to see a movie theater sited in downtown Binghamton. This proportion was consistent among students who already live downtown, those who want to live downtown, those who would live downtown under the right circumstances, and those who have no interest in living downtown.

**Big Chain Clothing Store (Banana Republic, The Gap)** 47%

Those who already live downtown are more likely than the other three categories of respondents to seek a big chain clothing store, 57% versus an average of 45%.

**Used book store** 31%

A consistent average of one-third of respondents chose a used book store, regardless of their opinion about living in downtown Binghamton.

**Health Food Store** 28%

Here, we see a large percentage of those already living downtown in want of a health foods store, with the percentage dropping as the desire to live downtown decreases.

**Vintage Clothing Store** 26%

While the overall average percent of respondents rated a vintage clothing store as the fifth most popular choice of a new retail establishment in downtown Binghamton, only 16% of those who already live downtown would like to see such a store. The ratio hovers around 30% for those who would like to live downtown and those who would live downtown under the right circumstances. While we cannot assume respondents’ reasoning behind their answers, current downtown residents may be less likely to seek such a store due to their knowledge of the vintage clothing store that is currently located on Washington Avenue (Stephen’s Vintage Clothing).
Dining Downtown

Students chose late night venues as their first choice for dining in downtown Binghamton followed by a coffee shop, a Thai restaurant, a Mexican restaurant, a family restaurant, and a vegetarian restaurant (Figure 2). These choices have virtually no overlap with the spring 2010 survey responses, except for a Mexican restaurant, chosen by approximately 30% of both students and the community’s permanent residents.

![Figure 2: Student Restaurant Preferences in Downtown Binghamton](image)

n=334

Living Downtown

Most students (70%) have never lived downtown in any community, and 35% are not interested in living downtown (Figure 3). Broome Community College students are slightly less interested in living downtown (44%) than Binghamton University students (32%).

![Figure 3: Which of the following statements most accurately expresses your opinion about living in downtown Binghamton?](image)

n=330
Of students who are already living in downtown Binghamton, more than one-third do not shop in downtown Binghamton. However, more than half dine out at downtown restaurants anywhere from once each week to once a month (Figure 4).

Figure 4: I live in downtown Binghamton right now

Of those who would consider living in downtown Binghamton, most prefer student housing followed by a flat or a loft above a commercial space (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Student Housing Preferences of those who would consider living Downtown
As shown in Figure 6, nearly half of respondents live outside of the City of Binghamton. Of these respondents, 45% said they were not interested in living in downtown Binghamton compared to 32% who live in the city (but outside of downtown) at this time. This finding may suggest that students who live in Binghamton but outside of the downtown core may be more favorable to relocating downtown when more student housing is available.

Figure 6: Do you Live in the City of Binghamton?
**Downtown Events**

At least one-third of survey respondents have attended the St. Patrick's Day Parade, First Friday, or a Mets baseball game (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Which of the following events did you attend in the last 12 months in downtown Binghamton?**

- St. Patrick Day Parade: 45%
- Mets Baseball: 33%
- July Fest: 13%
- First Night: 13%
- First Friday: 44%
- Farmer's Market: 30%
- Event at the Forum: 14%
- Communiversity Fest Block Party: 27%
- Blues on the Bridge: 16%
- Event at Arena: 31%

(n=248)

**Community Assets**

Student responses to a question about community assets were similar to those received in the spring 2010 survey. Both sets of respondents chose walking trail/river trail and expanded parks/green space as their top two choices. By choice three, however, the community wanted to see bike trails and a dog park; students chose a community garden and whitewater kayaking.

**Figure 8: Choose up to THREE community assets that you or your family use or would use if developed.**

- Walking Trail/River Trail: 55%
- Expanded parks/green space: 39%
- Community Garden: 31%
- White water kayaking: 31%
- Bike Trail: 30%

(n=329)
Safety

Students’ perception of safety downtown is nearly identical to spring 2010 respondents’ perceptions: more than half feel “very safe” or “safe” visiting downtown Binghamton during the day. Similarly, more than two-thirds of students and the general public (68% in both surveys) reported not feeling very, or at all, safe at night in downtown Binghamton (Figure 9). Almost half of students indicated that better lighting and more police foot patrols would improve their feeling of safety (Figure 10). While these two options were at the top of the spring 2010 responses as well, 52% of the general public wanted to see more police foot patrols compared to 39% of students.

Figure 9: How safe do you feel visiting downtown Binghamton?

Figure 10: Which of the following items would most improve your feeling of safety in downtown Binghamton? Check one answer.