

COLLEGE STUDENT DEMANDS AND PREFERENCES: AN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT OF DOWNTOWN BLOOMSBURG, PA

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ABSTRACT: *The growth of the downtown region of Bloomsburg, PA, has slowed dramatically over the past decade. The businesses that inhabit the small college-town's Main Street and the surrounding avenues are not able to grab hold of a solidified customer base. The residents, including those of Bloomsburg University, look elsewhere to purchase their daily necessities. This results in heavily sought revenues being lost to businesses outside of the town. Bloomsburg University is home to approximately 8400 undergraduate students, thus identifying as a market of patrons. However, a town-university disconnect exists, causing the underutilization of this market. A rigorously developed Qualtrics survey profiled the market in terms of accessibility, defined the needs of that market, and qualified the features of Bloomsburg that could be improved upon in order to expand that market. The study results highlight economic opportunities the town could utilize to grow and become a destination for students, visitors, and residents. Such opportunities include a fresh food option, enhanced entertainment venues, promotional avenues geared toward students, aesthetic improvements, and ultimately a cohesive relationship with Bloomsburg University.*

Keywords: *College-town, businesses, markets, growth, Bloomsburg*

INTRODUCTION

Interactions between local governments and higher education institutions have an incredibly long history. The interactive relationships are known as town-gown relations (Kemp, 2014). Many times, such relationships become debauched throughout the years because of disconnection created from adversarial perceptions. Mahoney (2015) of Durham, NH, wrote, "The relationship between Durham and the University of New Hampshire was, in a word, ugly. Town officials were exasperated by hard-partying students and drunken bashes that sometimes erupted into riots involving hundreds of kids" (p. 31). Massey, Field, and Chan (2014) at Queen's University highlighted the streets that held student housing around campus as a "student 'ghetto,'" synonymous with noisy student parties and behavior (p. 156). Such dissidence, exemplified by media and insistent perceptions, creates an aura of non-compliance when it comes to town-gown relations.

Beyond that, some colleges and universities use their state-granted weight to impose their will on their host communities. A prime example of this is the University of Chicago in the 1950s. Tom Heaney (2013) pulled from an argument by Arnold Hirsch, "the university wielded tremendous financial and political muscle" (p. 37). The University of Chicago attempted to expand their campus by overtaking the neighboring low-income residences, resulting in the relocation of 20,000 residents (Heaney, 2013).

In the midst of all this animosity, there is hopeful potential. Many universities and colleges are able to work together with their host communities and build valuable relationships. Milestone partnership projects include the following: University of Chicago's Neighborhood Initiative, the University of Maryland's Urban Community Service Program, Howard University's Community Association, the University of Illinois' comprehensive and long-term East St. Louis Action Research Project with residents of the city in 1987, and the rural, design-build program to assist impoverished communities through Alabama by the late Sam Mockbee of Auburn University (Laninga, Austin, & McClure, 2011).

Furthermore, universities and colleges can be pillars of economic growth, development, and research. Kemp (2014) stated "Today, most local government officials are probably familiar with the positive employment and other economic contributions that the higher education sector has on a community, along with the purchasing power that school officials, faculty, staff, and students have. The revenues generated from those individuals associated with it are very significant" (p. 27). Richard Florida, who has written extensively on the creation of the creative class (2002; 2004; 2005), stated in an article about the recipe to create an innovative incubator like Silicon Valley, "Take two-parts

research university, one-part venture capital, and shake vigorously” (Wink, 2015). In Laninga, Austin, and McClure’s paper (2011) that discusses the intercommunity relations of the University of Idaho, they describe the research and development partnerships as well as the success stories that have come out of those partnerships.¹ Also, they describe the student teams coordinated with and the growth of the students through service and experiential learning. Tom Heaney describes how the City Colleges helped to defend and reinvigorate a grassroots Latin American educational program called El Universidad Popular. Massey, Field, and Chan (2014) developed a framework for what affects retention of student populations after graduation. There are countless stories of universities and colleges being foundations and supporters of economic growth, development, and research. This model of community-university partnership is a model this research hopes to bring to the town of Bloomsburg and Bloomsburg University.

Economic growth is always an elusive objective sought by small and struggling municipalities. Similar to the small towns analyzed in Idaho, Bloomsburg has experienced an economic shift from natural resource extraction to recreation, manufacturing, and service-based economies (Laniga, Austin, & McClure, 2011). Unfortunately, this transition has not been a smooth one. The Columbia County area lacks many amenities desirable to businesses in high trade sectors of the economy. Many of the townspeople do not have the education or skills necessary to pass an order qualifier for major employers, raising training and human capital maintenance costs. In 2000, only 26% of the 5,252 residents 25 years and older had attained a bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2009). The number of professors, graduate school students, and Bloomsburg University graduates living within the town could have skewed that statistic, thus making the statistic for permanent residents even lower. Additionally, the town of Bloomsburg has very little capacity to expand, making the construction of a large factory, warehouse, or office building expensive and difficult to execute. The resulting situation for the Bloomsburg area is a low-income, low-opportunity environment. In the year 2000, Bloomsburg had an unemployment rate of nearly double that of the state of Pennsylvania, taking the student population into consideration (U.S. Bureau of the Census, et al., 2009). This research has sought to define other opportunities for the town and its residents. Among those that do employ in the area, Bloomsburg University ranks the largest in Columbia County (Columbia Montour Chamber of Commerce, 2016).

According to the Columbia Montour Chamber of Commerce (2016), per capita personal income in Columbia County is \$31,025 and the median household income is \$44,136. The presence of students in the community could be the reason that wages are lower. Per Ward (2016), college towns tend to have higher costs of living and lower wages due to the presence of the student population². Ward (2016) suggests that students working lower-wage jobs create a market movement towards lower-wages. Additionally, there is a higher supply of workers in the labor market with few employers demanding laborers, which economically would lower the wages offered. Moreover, in contrast to larger university cities, small college-towns similar to Bloomsburg do not have the industry or the trade sectors to provide high skilled employment and the wages associated with them. This research aims to provide solutions to the slow economic progress within the town of Bloomsburg.

Currently, the town of Bloomsburg, the Columbia Montour Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Bloomsburg Inc., Facility Design & Development, Ltd., The Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development, and Bloomsburg stakeholders have come together to coordinate a revitalization project for the town. Several of the project proposals include the following: improve and widen sidewalks, add greenery and lighting to the walkways and roadways, add bike paths to the roadways, correct and improve driving lanes, institute traffic calming strategies and improved parking management, add a pocket park in a currently vacant lot, create an entertainment district for community events and festivities, improve housing quality, incentivize development, and help implement better retail strategies (Facility Design & Development, Ltd. et al., 2016). See Figures 1 through 3 for spatial references. A revitalization project would drastically improve town appeal and create an atmosphere that fosters involvement and patronage. The only aspect missing from this assessment and proposal is student input. Our survey gives students a voice in these matters and attempts to bridge the gap existing between the town and the university.

METHODOLOGY

The Qualtrics survey consisted of 21-questions, was first pilot tested, revised, and finally administered online by the Bloomsburg University Department of Planning and Assessment in April of the 2016 spring semester. A random sample of 947 undergraduate students drew from all four classes (e.g., Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, Seniors) weighted by the percentage of students enrolled in each college (e.g., Business, Education, Liberal Arts, Science and Technology) during the Spring 2016 semester. The university administered the initial survey on April 16, and a follow-up survey reminder was sent on May 16, 2016. In total, 111 students opened and responded to the survey. The design’s intent was to define the student market, deduce what businesses students prefer to patronize,



Figure 1. 2-D Outlay of Downtown Bloomsburg's Potential ⁵.

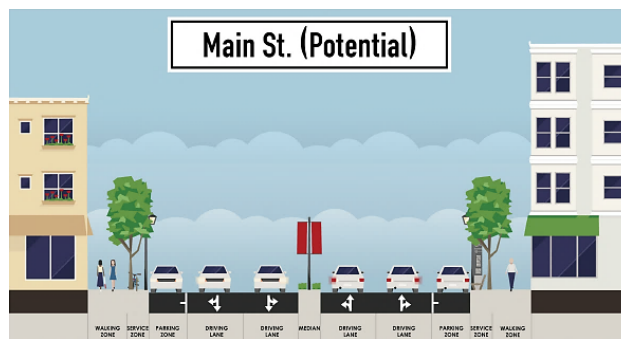


Figure 2. Main Street Traffic Potential ⁵.

discover general feelings about the town itself, and ultimately find opportunities the town of Bloomsburg could implement to increase economic growth. To determine market demand, the survey utilized a “bottle-neck” questioning technique to provoke thought about what products were not available for purchase in downtown, and to shape that response into a conclusion about what businesses can supply the desired products. Likert scale ratings determined a weighted average for each market component. Survey results were then coded, tabulated, and analyzed. Tables 1 and 2 present the data, with the results presented by all four classes of students (freshman through seniors) in aggregate. Also presented are the results of the Likert scale questions, embodying how students perceive town characteristics, amenities, and qualities.



Figure 3. Potential Street Greenery Additions ⁵.

Table 1. Key Aggregate Survey Data Results

	1	2	3	4	5	6
University Residence	In Town 45%	Upper-Campus 22%	Lower-Campus 21%	Commute 7%	Lion's Gate 3%	Other 2%
Downtown Visitation Percentage	Daily 38%	2-3/Week 20%	1/Week & 2-3/Month 17%	1/Month 5%	Several/Year 3%	
Products Not Available	Health Foods	Fresh Groceries	Clothes	Shoes	Sporting Goods	Entertainment
Products Students Would Purchase	Fresh Groceries	Clothes	Health Foods	Entertainment	Shoes	Sporting Goods & School Supplies
Patronage Consistency	2-3/Month 34%	1/Month 20%	1/Week 16%	Several/Year 14%	2-3/Week 11%	Never 5%
Most Effective Promotion Technique	Word-of-Mouth	Posters	Univ Promotions	Social Media	Radio	Newspaper
Traverse Method	Walking 76%	Driving 23%	Bicycling 1%			
	Yes	No				
Shop In-Store Over Online	96%	4%				
Open Convenient Times	86%	14%				

SURVEY RESULTS

Market Profile

In looking at the profile of a market, a key factor to identify is accessibility - the level of effort needed by a business to penetrate a market. If a market is as accessible, the barriers inhibiting businesses to reach the customers or patrons are few. On the other hand, if a market is inaccessible, there are many barriers impeding business interactions with patrons. The location of the business in relation to its customers, the income of its customers, the hours of operation, the level of difficulty associated with customers physically entering the establishment, and the presence of online marketplaces all represent barriers that affect the accessibility of a market.

There were approximately 8400 undergraduate students enrolled at Bloomsburg University during the Spring semester of 2016. College students are often stereotyped as having very little disposable income. Presumptively, many students must pay their own way through college or take out loans in order to attend the university. Beyond that, many students who live off campus must pay rent for their apartment as well as utilities, if they are not included. Often, parents or relatives help with these payments; however, many students resort to employment within the town or the university as a way to accumulate income. This survey did not assess levels of income. Nevertheless, the responses received conclude that students would patronize businesses that tend to their demands. The reason business turnover is such a problem in Bloomsburg is because the existing businesses, and those that predated them, could not satisfy those demands.

The first question in the survey assessed the class standing of the students. This question aims to generate an idea of the diversity within the market. Many freshmen come into college having no understanding of life as a college student. They only presume what necessities they will need and how often they will need them. Whereas a senior student has an accurate perception of what he or she will need and most likely has an understood budget created in his or her mind. Out of the 111 students who completed this question, 24 were freshmen, 32 were sophomores, 37 were juniors, and 18 were seniors.

Table 2. Likert Scale Data Results

Characteristic Ratings	Weighted Average Score	1. Poor	2. Fair	3. Good	4. Very Good	5. Excellent	Indifferent
Overall Quality of Bloomsburg	2.95	2%	33%	35%	26%	4%	0%
Arts/Cultural Events	2.73	11%	28%	37%	10%	8%	6%
Parking	1.63	52%	33%	12%	1%	0%	1%
Crime Prevention	3.14	6%	16%	42%	27%	7%	1%
Performance of Gov't	2.71	8%	23%	36%	10%	3%	21%
Availability of Jobs	2.27	21%	25%	30%	5%	1%	19%
Variety of Businesses	2.41	19%	40%	25%	14%	2%	1%
Restaurant Experience	3.20	7%	23%	27%	26%	16%	0%
Physical Appearance	2.98	10%	28%	29%	23%	11%	0%
Sidewalk Quality	2.81	16%	23%	32%	20%	9%	0%
Cleanliness	2.91	12%	23%	35%	20%	10%	0%

Quality Assessments	Weighted Average Score	1. Strongly Disagree	2. Disagree	3. Agree	4. Strongly Agree	Indifferent
BU is an Asset to Town	3.36	0%	5%	48%	37%	10%
Easy to Traverse by Walking	3.35	0%	5%	49%	36%	10%
Easy to Traverse by Bike	2.72	5%	22%	20%	15%	38%
Easy to Traverse by Car	2.92	4%	17%	52%	10%	10%
I Feel Safe	3.08	4%	7%	56%	22%	11%
Different Backgrounds feel Welcome	2.75	4%	18%	36%	9%	34%
Appealing Housing Options	2.46	11%	23%	32%	6%	27%
Variety of Dining?	2.68	10%	22%	37%	15%	16%
Variety of Entertainment?	2.08	15%	48%	16%	2%	19%
Variety of Retail?	1.90	30%	40%	19%	1%	11%

The second question defines the residences of the surveyed students. Forty-five percent of the students surveyed live in town and 43% of the students live on campus (22% on upper-campus and 21% on lower-campus). This correlates well with the greater population of Bloomsburg University. Most students who attend Bloomsburg University either reside in the town of Bloomsburg or live on the campus of the University and are well within walking distance of the town. Therefore, many students are able to patronize the town and its businesses at any time, eliminating one barrier for accessing the market.

The next question in the survey assessed how frequently students visit the downtown area. The relevancy of this question is to discover how regularly students pass by the storefronts of these businesses, often located adjacent to the street's sidewalks. Ultimately, this eliminates another barrier for accessing the student market - the difficulty of physically entering the establishment. A total of 81 students completed this question and the remainder of the survey, of them 19 were freshmen, 20 were sophomores, 28 were juniors, and 14 were seniors. Three-quarters of the students surveyed visit the downtown sector of Bloomsburg at least once a week. This results in a large amount of foot and car traffic passing by business storefronts. Much of this may occur on weekends; however, students who live in town pass by many of the storefronts on a daily basis on their way to classes. Time in between classes, on the weekends, or before and after the school day could be opportune times for businesses to attract students. The key to attracting them is to offer goods and products that catch their attention or to provide services that they need or desire. Effective marketing and creating a pleasant atmosphere are also essential to patron attraction.

Later, the survey asked students how they traverse through downtown. Distinguishing the way students travel through town is incredibly important to the way businesses promote as well as the location they choose. The data suggests that over three-quarters of the students surveyed walk throughout downtown. The downtown area of Bloomsburg does not span a very large area, and it is within walking distance of most anywhere on campus. This is extremely beneficial to businesses. Students who traverse by foot are more likely to stop and patronize a business. Also, promotions set outside of storefronts in frequently used walking paths are likely to be seen by this population of

students. Under one-quarter of the students surveyed stated that they travel by car. This emphasizes the importance of the location in which a business establishes itself. A location without parking could cut patronage by a quarter. Eye-catching colors and signage should also be utilized to attract those passing by in vehicles.

Also assessed was the assurance that students would patronize the brick-and-mortar business instead of shopping online. In today's world, where the internet has become one of the most patronized businesses around, more and more people conform to the convenience of shopping online. This conformance is continually growing within the population attending Bloomsburg University. This makes it very difficult for brick-and-mortar stores to compete and embodies one of the most difficult barriers for businesses to overcome. However, online shopping contains a few major flaws. Patrons cannot try on, admire, or assess the material of clothing, shoes, and other products online. Furthermore, fresh groceries often are not available for purchase online. Shoes most likely would not fit this mold as many patrons know their shoe size and the materials are often standard. On the other hand, clothing styles vary depending on the designer and fabricator. Entertainment options are available online, although quality entertainment spent with friends often entails going beyond a screen. Providing areas where students can gather, relax, and enjoy each other's company can meet this need. Groceries may be the one category of business that avoids this conundrum based on its perishable qualities. In addition, students, especially those who live off-campus, may enjoy and sometimes require preparation of their own meals. Overall, offering a business sector that avoids online competition can eliminate this barrier to market accessibility. Astonishingly, 96% of students surveyed suggested they would shop in-store over shopping online.

Once we discovered that the student market is accessible and that students would prefer to patronize brick-and-mortar stores instead of shopping online, the next factor assessed was how often the market is accessible. This question was not based on each individual category of business nor all the categories as a whole, but hinged on each student's personal preference in comparison to the business they would choose. In other words, their suggested patronage levels are based on a business that satisfies or delights³ the student. In an ideal setup, where the student desires to patronize the business, 34% of the students surveyed suggested they would patronize the businesses two to three times a month. Thirty-six percent of the students suggested they would patronize the business either once a month or once a week (20% and 16% respectively). Eleven percent said they would patronize businesses two to three times a week. That results in 81% of the students suggesting they would patronize the business once a month or more. Despite perceptions of students having low disposable incomes, we find students would patronize businesses.

The last factor in the market profile is how to effectively connect with this market. The data gathered indicates that many students hear about promotions or events from other students (cited 54 times). Surveyed students suggested they rarely listen to the local radio stations or read the local paper. On the contrary, they habitually talk with their friends, peers, and others on and off campus. Posters throughout the town and University promotions were also suggested as popular avenues of acquiring information (cited 41 and 39 times, respectively). This is how conversations begin. The fourth most popularly received method of outreach is social media with 38 responses. By encouraging students to connect with businesses online, promotions can be sent directly to students' devices. Additionally, the promotional material must be aesthetically attractive to the students. Many students quickly pass by advertisements, or have a multitude of things on their mind; therefore, they need to forget things quickly. This must be resolved in order for it to be effective.

Market Demand

Now that the market is defined and shown to be accessible, the next step is to find what the student market demands or desires. In today's economy, market demand dictates the flow of production from firms.⁴ Demand can be established through the absence of previously available products. When a patron is in an environment where a product is available, then relocates to an environment where that product is not available, an absence demand occurs. This correlates with the lives of many college students. The college students of Bloomsburg University reside in a small town that may lack the amenities supplied in their previous residences. Utility will be maximized and demand will be fully satisfied once the void has been completely filled to its previous stature. The design of this market research aimed to identify these absences and provide potential opportunities for businesses to satisfy the associated demands.

Student survey results indicate that the top two categories in demand that are currently absent from the downtown area were Health Foods, being chosen 49 times, and Fresh Groceries, being chosen 47 times. The nearest grocery stores lie outside the downtown area, nearing the border of the town itself. Many students only patronize the grocery stores if they have a vehicle or when the weather permits walking. Other dining options exist, such as purchasing processed or inferior options at the local dollar store, patronizing the local restaurants, or utilizing a meal plan to eat on campus. However, those options may also not be feasible, sustainable, or desirable for students. The resultant findings revolve around the perceptions surrounding these alternative options. A health products retailer is also located at the edge of town. However, many students have stated their high prices prove to be a deterrent. Having

a small, economical grocer or farmers market combined with an affordable health food supplier close by in downtown may prove fruitful for those students who wish to prepare their own meals and wish to lead a healthy dietary lifestyle.

The third, fourth, and fifth categories of unavailable products are clothing, at 44, shoes, 43, and sporting goods, 39, respectively. There are a couple of clothing boutiques within the downtown sector and department stores in the surrounding areas. Unfortunately, they too suffer the same difficulties. The locations in downtown often offer unattractive products or inferior choices and consequently lack loyal customer bases. Those established outside the downtown sector are too far to walk. A business combining affordable and attractive clothing, shoes, and sporting apparel, that can establish a returning customer base, could take advantage of these deficiencies.

The last significant lacking category is that of entertainment, at 38. Students often desire options for stress relief mind from the semester. Providing an option for them to do so would prove to be beneficial for them as well as a profitable business venture.

The last question in this section then asked which categories of business students would physically patronize. Unsurprisingly, it follows the same pattern. The top choice is Fresh Groceries, being chosen 55 times, followed by Clothing, 48 times, Health Foods, 45 times, Entertainment, 37 times, Shoes, 35 times, and Sporting Goods, 22 times. Again, these can be combined into distinct businesses that convert students from passers-by to patrons.

The main strip of downtown Bloomsburg has many storefronts available; however, capacity and previous layouts or store outfitting create major limitations. Many existing storefronts cannot support large grocery markets, the desired entertainment options, or the large capacity needed by some franchise layouts and products. Additionally, the objective of this project is not to bring in a chain or franchise business, but to highlight opportunities for small businesses to take advantage of a large student market currently untapped. Student suggestions can serve as guides pertaining to which layouts or products are preferred. Analyzing the positive aspects of these corporations could assist future businesses in maximizing their attractiveness.

Entertainment options would be the most difficult to integrate. The options suggested plainly would not fit in the capacity of the town. Other options would have to be developed; perhaps an area where students can see live performances by local bands and musicians. Another possibility could be a business that specializes in activities and programs students could enjoy. Further surveying or research to distinguish would be necessary.

We have previously concluded that the student market is accessible and that the most viable business opportunity would be an affordable fresh food grocer/health food supplier. The next step is to find other areas of the town that require improvement to increase economic opportunities.

Other Market Opportunities

This section identifies opportunities to increase appeal and establish downtown Bloomsburg as a destination for visitors, students, and townspeople by assessing how students felt about specific town characteristics and qualities. The first set of questions requested students to respond with how they perceive town characteristics. The Likert scale ranged from one to five with one being poor, two being fair, three being good, four being very good, and five being excellent. There was also an indifferent choice, which did not carry a numerical weight. Calculated weighted averages of the ratings create scores which could reflect how the sampled students regard these characteristics. Likewise, the second set of questions discern how students perceive qualities of the town scaled from one to four with one being strongly disagree, two being disagree, three being agree, and four being strongly agree. Table 2 shows a broken-down table of this data. Concomitantly, the town of Bloomsburg's revitalization project also analyzed and addressed some of these improvements. This research brings the voices of students to that stage, reinforcing their suggestions and offering possible new avenues of thought.

Surveyed students rated the overall quality of the town 2.95 out of five. This translates to the town leaving a good impression on the students. They may feel the town to have many good qualities or that the town is a quaint place in which to reside. There are things that still require improvements. Yet in general, it can be assessed that students enjoy being in the town itself.

The sample of students rated the availability and quality of Arts and Cultural Events 2.73. Events such as the Renaissance Jamboree, the Greenly Center art gallery, campus events, and others provide opportunities for students to indulge in cultural and artful experiences. This area of interest requires improvement to enhance the dynamic of the town and create an incentive for visitors to flock to Bloomsburg. The revitalization project's proposed entertainment district could be a perfect venue for these events.

Parking in the town of Bloomsburg has been a point of debate multiple times throughout the town and the university. Surveyed students deem parking to be rated 1.63. Fortunately, most places in town are within walking distance from the campus and most housing options. Moreover, earlier we noted that most students walk to traverse through the town. Nevertheless, the availability of parking is always an issue with students and townspeople.

Students believe crime prevention to be rated 3.14. Bloomsburg's police force does very well handling situations throughout the town. Improvements must come from within the police force itself. New ways of deterrence, sharp vigilance, and innovative methods of crime prevention should be reviewed on a regular basis.

Students had difficulty reporting on the performance of the town government. Much of what they see comes from the efficiency of the town itself. They consider it to be rated 2.71 out of five, but 21% of the responses were indifferent. This is worth noting. Students should be aware of how well the town is doing. Being involved creates an interest within the student towards the town. Students should be invited and encouraged to attend town meetings where they can provide their input and be recognized for their service to the community. These connections need to come from the town itself. They should constantly be striving to improve upon the current standing of the town and their relationship with the University. Examples from universities all over the country prove that student input significantly bridges the gap between a university and their host community.

The rating for the availability of jobs in the town of Bloomsburg was 2.27. Many students do apply and work for the businesses within the town. However, the labor demand is satisfied so quickly that few students have the opportunity to obtain them. The University often offsets this struggle by offering on-campus jobs; however, this is not extremely advantageous for the town. Concurrently, there is always employment competition between the students and the townspeople, causing added stress on the town—stress that can be eased by adding more employers into the mix. An effort encouraging employers to hire students could also prove to be an attractive advantage for both parties. Offering jobs and internships may entice students to stay in town upon graduation and help improve the businesses that exist. However, labor market competition would increase. This would have to be modeled and tested.

Correlating with the availability of jobs are the variety of businesses in the downtown sector. Students surveyed feel that the variety rates 2.41 out of five. This represents one of the main reasons this survey exists. From an aggregate view, a variety exists. Businesses vary from services such as tattoo parlors and hair/nail salons, to retail in the form of a record store, a vaporizer store, convenience stores, a thrift store, and more, to a repertoire of delicious restaurants. However, in order to be an area where people flock to shop, there must be multiple businesses patrons can frequent that provide for their wants and needs. A larger variety and more appropriate businesses can transform the downtown sector into a destination for people to visit. People will then move on to patronize and visit the events, parks, and other attractions in the surrounding area, including the University. The result would be more students, more visitors, and growth in patrons.

The restaurant experience is renowned among students (rating of 3.20). There is a large variety of restaurants with most of them providing great food. Students regularly patronize the restaurants, many times with groups of friends. They also patronize them with their parents whenever parents visit or drop them off. The variety of restaurants ranges from pizza, to sushi, steak, bar food, Greek food, higher end Italian food, and more. Increased promotions, more events, and uplifted atmospheres could strengthen the experience.

The physical appearance of Bloomsburg is the first thing that students, townspeople, and visitors see when they arrive in town. Bloomsburg has a small-town, yet urban feel. Many students come to Bloomsburg because of the feel of the town. Surveyed students rated physical appearance at 2.98. The upcoming revitalization project should increase that appreciation and make the town even more enjoyable for students to hang out in and live in. The quality of sidewalks goes along with the appearance of the town. Students rated the quality of Bloomsburg's sidewalks 2.81. The sidewalks in most areas are average. Some areas have sidewalks that are very narrow, causing clustering of people at times of heavy traffic flow. Other areas of improvement, such as fixing portions that elevated by roots or have broken pieces, represent simple cosmetic work for the town.

The last characteristic that rated in this manner was the cleanliness of Bloomsburg. Students surveyed rated Bloomsburg's cleanliness 2.91. A quick surveillance shows that the streets are clean, the sidewalks are free of rubble, and the store facades maintained. However, alleyways, storm drains, and bushed areas often have trash thrown into them or have a buildup of debris. This can be improved upon by simply cleaning more extensively, enforcing littering laws, or by covering or placing barriers in those areas.

This section begins the second set of Likert scale questions. The survey asked students if they believe Bloomsburg University is an asset to the town of Bloomsburg itself. Most students either agreed or strongly agreed, giving a rating of 3.36, suggesting most students acknowledge the benefit the University brings to the town. It is a major contributor to the town's population and patronage. Much of the town's businesses and restaurants thrive because of the students. For these reasons, the students should be recognized and accepted as a major influence on decisions.

Eighty-five percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that downtown Bloomsburg is easy to traverse by walking. This corresponds almost directly with findings from earlier in the survey. Thirty-eight percent of the students surveyed felt indifferent when asked if downtown was easy to traverse by bicycle. Twenty-seven percent of other students surveyed disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. This translates to very few students

biking through the town. The revitalization project plans to change this by adding bicycle lanes and racks to the town's roadways and walkways. Finally, 52% of the students agreed that the downtown area is easy to traverse by car. This does not necessarily mean that it is easy to get to each destination in the downtown area, but it does mean that the roadways are adequate for students to drive their cars through town.

Fifty-six percent of the students surveyed agreed and 22% strongly agreed that they feel safe in the downtown area of Bloomsburg. This directly correlates to an earlier question about crime prevention. Students believe law enforcement readily protects them and keeps their safety in mind. Only 7% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed.

This next question may have been difficult for students to answer, proven by 34% of responses being indifferent. However, 36% of students agreed with the statement that different backgrounds feel welcome in the downtown area. This could stem from a mutual respect students have for each other, related to how students feel safe. Either way, it is great for enticing people to visit the town. On the contrary, 18% of the students surveyed disagreed with the statement and 4% strongly disagreed, possibly arising from assumed or real prejudices. Students have expressed concerns about a bigoted atmosphere being present within the town. Everyone should feel welcome and not alienated. This will benefit everyone involved and will increase visitation.

Thirty-two percent of the students surveyed believe there are appealing housing options within the town of Bloomsburg. Many students enjoy the apartments they live in and often invite their friends to hang out with them. Around 27% of the students surveyed felt indifferent about this statement. That may be because they have not yet been able to move off-campus nor have they looked into the housing options available. Twenty-three percent of students disagreed with the statement. Some housing options are run down and very old. Some students may not be satisfied with those apartments, houses, or property owners, thus resulting in their responses. The town could reassess the standards to which it holds its student housing, increasing the quality of students' living situations.

The variety of dining options, or restaurants, draws a parallel with the quality of restaurant experiences. Thirty-seven percent of the students surveyed agree that there is a good variety of restaurants within the downtown area. On the other hand, 22% of the students disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed. This could be because, even though there are options, there is not a huge plethora of restaurants. Over time, the food becomes repetitive and loses its satisfaction and appeal. Another reason could be that most of the restaurants hover around the less healthy side of the food pyramid. Few options for healthy or low-fat foods exist in town. This indicates one argument for incorporating a fresh food grocer. Perhaps it could be an opinion to consider when looking into future restaurants.

This last question in the Likert scale questionnaire sums up the largest opportunity for growth found in this study. Forty percent of the students surveyed disagreed when asked whether there is a variety of retail available in downtown Bloomsburg. Another 30% strongly disagreed. There is simply a lack of places for students to shop. Most students do not patronize the available niche shops, and thus, this potential market is unrealized.

CONCLUSION

Many Bloomsburg University students want a better experience downtown. Overall, they believe Bloomsburg is a great place in which to live. However, the students believe that there are a few areas in need of improvement.

Most students live in town or on campus and are within walking distance from the businesses in the downtown area. Furthermore, most of those students walk into town at least once per week. This outlines an extremely large market of patrons that is very accessible.

The businesses that surveyed students declared that they favored were Fresh Groceries, Health Foods, Clothes, Shoes, Sporting Goods, Entertainment, and School Supplies. Expanding upon that, students selected which category of business they would choose to patronize if available. In both questions, Fresh Groceries, Health Foods, and Clothes were the top three categories. Fresh Groceries would likely be the most lucrative option for Bloomsburg given the characteristics of students, the near absence of online competition, the nature of off-campus living, and an overall perspective of the analyzed data.

Another area of business students desired was Entertainment. Students long for places to spend time with friends during their evenings off or over weekends. They desire to go to places where they can enjoy themselves. The proposed entertainment district could become the venue for this need. Student opinions should be considered when determining performances and logistics.

Promotions and events also need to keep students coming back on a consistent basis. The most popular way students hear about what goes on in downtown areas is through word-of-mouth from other students. Such conversations begin when events and promotions are eye-catching or significant to the students. If the events, sales, or promotions entice the students, word will quickly spread.

Other improvements the town can utilize include cosmetic improvements, increasing student contributions, enriching university relations, devising a comprehensive parking plan, strengthening student-housing standards, making the town a welcoming environment, and varying the spectrum of restaurants within the town. These improvements can separate Bloomsburg from other small college-towns and establish the town as a destination.

Ultimately, forming a relationship between the town of Bloomsburg and the University would offer innumerable opportunities for growth and collaboration. The research resources available, the high achieving support of students, the innovative and creative ideas, and the ability to coordinate events and other resources could prove endlessly fruitful. Evident from other universities, a town-gown relationship is paramount for prolonged success.

Information and data reveal the tastes, desires, and potential market demand of Bloomsburg University students. The survey findings highlight potential opportunities that could prove lucrative, as well as certain aspects and characteristics in which the town can improve. Likewise, similar surveys and studies could help to understand the potential opportunities available in other small college-towns across the United States. By implementing the findings of this survey, along with the proposals from the revitalization project, Bloomsburg can boost housing prices, increase tax revenues, increase visitation, enhance the town atmosphere and experience, and make Bloomsburg a destination. The Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Bloomsburg Inc., the town of Bloomsburg itself, and the businesses of the town would greatly benefit from considering these results.

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² See pgs. 17-18 in Ward, Bryce. 2016. Curse of the college town: university towns are nice places to live, but staying after graduation can be a struggle. *Montana Business Quarterly*. 54(2).

³ See p. 86 in Rust, R., & Oliver, R. 2000. Should We Delight the Customer? *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. 28(1).

⁴ See p. 155 in Szozda, N., & Werbinska-Wojciechowska, S. 2011. Influence of the Demand Planning Process on Logistic System Reliability. Case Study. *Total Logistic Management*. (4)

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