

# **The Binghamton Blowout Block Party**

*Connecting BU Students with the City of Binghamton*

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## **Abstract**

The City of Binghamton is at a crossroads of opportunity and success. One key to thriving relies on a vital entity not present in Binghamton, but rather a few miles away from its borders; the students at Binghamton University. Should Binghamton unlock this vast and rich resource, the City is sure to thrive and become one of the finest, not only in the State of New York, but the United States of America. Currently students are not quite acclimated to what the City has to offer, and the City is slowly working at bringing students into the area. Therefore, it is essential to bring together the two entities in a manner that will both spark interest from the students and show a welcoming and fun side of the City. This can be accomplished through a large fair held in the beginning of every school year. B<sup>3</sup>P, called the Binghamton Blowout Block Party (B<sup>3</sup>P) would not only bring students into the City of Binghamton within the first few weeks of the new school year, but it will also introduce students to all the businesses and amenities the City has to offer. This introduction will lead to students having a far greater positive outlook on the City, and will have a tremendous impact on the Binghamton economy.

## **Background**

Connecting the students with their local City is extremely important to both parties. For the City, students provide a constant stream of income, talent, diversity, and youth. These students bring money into the City, spending it on amenities, housing, food and more. In this way, they help local businesses thrive. Additionally, during the school year students help provide them with a cheap workforce, full of talent and diversity, allowing for fresh ideas to spring forth. For the students, having a positive relationship with the City is essential because they want to have a life outside of campus to explore. Students do not want to be confined to just their local campus. They want to find work and entertainment in their local City. Furthermore, when the students feel comfortable and willing to go into their local City and enjoy all the things the City has to offer, they spend far more money on those enjoyments. More importantly for the City however, is if the students love the City they are in, and wish to spend more time there, then they will be more inclined to stay in that City after they graduate from school<sup>i</sup>. Thus, the absolute greatest reason for the City to attract the students immediately, is the real possibility of retaining students after they arrive.

Binghamton, as mentioned before, is at a point of growth and renaissance. The City of Binghamton has recognized this juncture and begun to take steps to help the progress<sup>ii</sup>. Part of this progress requires the inclusion of the university populace. Research was done in order to find the best possible way to attract students. It became clear that a large scale fair was needed at the beginning of every school year to integrate the freshmen students into the City of Binghamton.

## **Research**

The first step in figuring out how to attract students to the City of Binghamton was to find out what efforts the City had already made, and why students were not being brought into Binghamton. After speaking with local business and political leaders in the City, it was clear that no major effort had thus far been made to reach out to the students<sup>iii</sup>. While Binghamton has plenty of amenities such as a large cultural and arts scene, small cafes, sporting events and more,

the students were unfamiliar with them. The City had taken small, and relatively ineffective steps to advertising their amenities to the students. Efforts like the Hot Lunch Tours have made headway at getting students into the City and familiarizing them with local eateries, but they still have a lot of work to do. Furthermore, Binghamton holds many fairs that attract large crowds, but they are at times when students are home for the summer. These fairs are excellent for community members because they draw large crowds into the downtown area to see a number of different amenities, some of which they wouldn't have seen otherwise<sup>iv</sup>.

On the student side, students would arrive at Binghamton their freshman year and speak to the upperclassmen, who were never thoroughly introduced to the community, and gain the same sheltered perspective as the upperclassmen. It wouldn't be until later in the college students' life, normally when they move off campus, that they would gain an understanding of the City and what it has to offer. Furthermore, historically, most of the student organizations on campus have been too involved with on campus activities, and have not tried to help solve the problem of integration<sup>v</sup>. Similarly, Binghamton had no idea of what organizations existed on campus to whom they could reach out to for advice and help.

There are different ways to get the University's students and the City together. Currently, the most popular method would be to take small steps by having individual city groups reach out to their respective campus groups. This method however is slow and only targets certain groups, ostracizing the rest of campus. The best method therefore, is a massive yet organized collaboration. Looking to see whether massive collaborations are successful, one only has to look at the first weekend in Binghamton the University holds its University Fair. At the University Fair, all student groups, clubs, and organizations come out and table what they have to offer. Meanwhile, the University provides free food, free give aways and a few carnival rides<sup>vi</sup>. B<sup>3</sup>P normally attracts most of the freshmen crowd who are eager to do something new and see what is around. The City of Binghamton should follow the example of the University and host its own fair.

### *Organizing the B<sup>3</sup>P:*

The B<sup>3</sup>P, in order to be successful, must be planned, executed, and attended by both the Binghamton community as well as the student leaders of Binghamton. The B<sup>3</sup>P Committee (FC) should consist of key members within the University and City. The integration of both entities is essential because it provides key experience to draw upon when trying to target both the community and students at Binghamton. The Catalysts for Intellectual Capital 2020 (CIC 2020) is in a prime position to lead the fair seeing as they have connections both on and off campus. In the City of Binghamton, there is an organization called the Downtown Binghamton Business Association (DBBA), which runs the very popular and successful July Fest, among other City events. The DBBA would therefore be an excellent resource due to their vast experience in running fairs geared towards the City. On the student side, the Student Association has a special group, called the Student Association Programming Board (SAPB), which runs all the small and large scale campus events<sup>vii</sup>. Their experience in providing entertainment and fairs for students will prove invaluable for the organization of the B<sup>3</sup>P.

### *Entertainment and Food:*

In order to attract students the Fair should also include different amenities such as free live music performed by local and student bands<sup>viii</sup>. It is important to include both local and student bands because it gives both groups a sense of belonging as well as brings out the bands personal fans. There also should be free food distributed by local businesses. To serve as an attraction for students and help local businesses advertise their products to students. Finally, there has to be some carnival games or rides, whether it be inflatable's or actual rides, to provide a secondary source of entertainment. These three offerings will provide a huge attraction for students and give them a reason to come into the City. With the FC formed, the actual B<sup>3</sup>P must be perfectly planned to maximize success. The long term goal for the B<sup>3</sup>P is to expand and provide more options and amenities to not only attract the students to the fair, but to have spin off businesses and programs run outside of the B<sup>3</sup>P. However, the short-term immediate fair will be discussed first. Due to the freshness of B<sup>3</sup>P, it is important to start small and gradually build. The basic building blocks for the fair should consist of a food, tabling, music and entertainment portion.

The music and entertainment portion is essential, because it will be one of the key methods of getting students to attend the fair. The entertainment should be a mix of local and student performers. The University fortunately has many options for entertainment ranging from music groups to comedy groups<sup>ix</sup>. All forms of on campus entertainment should be utilized to introduce to the community the wide range of culture that the University has. Accordingly, the FC should enlist student bands, concert bands, a-cappella groups, and the comedy groups to perform during the fair. Getting local entertainment groups as well is crucial as it will introduce to the students the local range of talent. Furthermore, it will drive attendance higher as the local entertainment groups bring followers and fans. The musical aspect will be a key contributor to the success of the Fair.

The food segment is equally important to the success of the fair. The FC needs to contact all local restaurant owners and work out deals with them for the fair. There are a variety of options available, some of which include: giving away free food, giving away coupons, or providing discounted meals. Students love free or discounted food, especially restaurant food, and will therefore travel to the City to relax amongst the music, while eating the free or discounted food.

The importance of the food aspect of the Fair is two-fold. The first reason for its importance is that it will be a main driving force towards getting students to attend the Fair. The second reason is that it will introduce students to the local eateries and to the various food options available. One of the main problems with students living on campus is that they never get to go out and experience all the different restaurants. Without cars freshman year they don't ride around the City looking for interesting places to eat. Furthermore, there aren't any guides given to students to inform them of the different restaurants and what they have to offer. Thus by having restaurants participate in B<sup>3</sup>P, they are making a long term investment in the student body. Food is a necessary, efficient, and highly profitable piece of the Fair.

The final key aspect to the Fair will be the tabling component. The whole point of the fair is to introduce the students and community to each other. In order to do this, there must be a point or place where the actual introductions occur. Allowing for tables to be set up for local business owners as well as student groups and organizations, will provide the function of introductions. The community can be introduced to campus organizations, clubs, fraternities,

and sororities and see how they help make the campus and community a better place to live. Likewise the local business and volunteer groups in Binghamton can table and show the students how they are making great efforts to improve living conditions, as well as the jobs and volunteer positions that are currently available. These introductions will help improve appearances as well as opinions by both the community and students.

#### *The Costs:*

With every fair comes costs and it is essential to ensure that the costs for each fair are paid for, as well as reserves raised to pay for the following year. In order to pay for the costs, a system of donations and sponsorships must be handled. Sponsorships can be broken down to pay for specific areas and amenities. For instance, one business can pay for all of the stage (for the music portion) costs; one business can pay for a certain block; one business can pay for games, inflatable's or any other sort of entertainment used. Donations can also be accepted in order to raise money. Those that donate can be placed on a special t-shirt, flyers or pamphlets that are given out. All in all, the costs shouldn't be too high, and the amount of sponsorships and donations should more than cover one year's fair, as well as the next. This use of sponsorship is used for July Fest every year, and each year enough money is raised to pay for the following year's festival without any need to get sponsorships<sup>x</sup>.

#### *Location:*

The location of the fair is crucial as it needs to be in a central location and easily accessible. Therefore, the intersection of Court and State Street would be ideal for B<sup>3</sup>P. Depending on the amount of tabling that signs up, the fair could also occupy the new space along the River walk, and branch out onto Court going all the way down to State or the Court house. The stage for entertainment can be either at the intersection on Court and State, or by the Court Street Bridge. Furthermore, Washington Street should be utilized and be a part of the Fair as well as all the galleries present in Downtown Binghamton. The location of the fair will help introduce students to a major part of Downtown Binghamton, and show them the beautiful walkways that were recently redone.

#### *Spin Off Businesses:*

There can also be many additions that can be spun off into their own successful business or entity as the fair gets bigger and better throughout the years. Using the example of Bryant Park in New York City, the City of Binghamton should invest in a large outdoor movie screen and speakers; and, every few weeks during the summer and for a few weeks during the school year, the City should put on movies for free for all to come and watch. The movie can be sponsored out to make a profit and the movie itself would be an extremely fun amenity that would draw large crowds<sup>xi</sup>. Possible locations for such an outdoor movie viewing could be State Street, Rec Park, or the best place of all, along the river itself. If the movie could be put up alongside the Court street bridge, or on the river itself, then all the viewers could sit and view the movie from the riverwalk. This would be a great outdoor experience for all to have. By having the movies play every week, or every few weeks, the City can generate revenue and bring people

into the downtown area which will in turn generate more income as families and students stay in the area after the show and dine in the local nearby restaurants.

Another possible spin off is the option of having Blues on the Bridge occur during the Fair. By having a First Friday for movies and music, the students have more of a reason to come downtown. These programs can all be sponsored out so that the City generates even more revenue. All this can be implemented in the future.

### *Timing:*

In order for the fair to be successful, it has to be held during warm weather immediately after the school year begins. Therefore it should be held the week after the University Fair is held on campus. It should be held on a Friday so that students, community members and businesses can come down and enjoy the festivities. Eventually, as the B<sup>3</sup>P grows, it may want to expand to two days. If possible, it should be held on the same day as First Friday, to maximize attendance. The B<sup>3</sup>P should be held during the hours of 4-9. By having the fair during those hours, it starts at a late enough time to allow students to end their classes and arrive and for businesses to close shop and come to the fair<sup>xii</sup>. Once everyone is at the Fair, they can trickle down into the restaurants downtown that are nearby. The B<sup>3</sup>P is meant to maximize both interaction, fun, and profitability. By ensuring the timing of it is right, these goals can be achieved.

### **Key Players**

#### *The Catalysts for Intellectual Capital 2020 [CIC2020]*

CIC2020 would hold the role of lead coordinator for this event. CIC has extensive knowledge and connections with outside groups, organizations and businesses, as well as student groups and organizations. Their ability to pull together all the pieces, and act as a mediator between the two entities will be crucial. CIC's role will be to organize all the forces coming together to work on B<sup>3</sup>P.

#### *The Downtown Binghamton Business Association [DBBA]*

The DBBA would assist the FC by providing insight into what would draw the community members down to a fair, as well as where the best location to host B<sup>3</sup>P would be. Their experience in dealing with City officials to obtain a license, close off blocks, obtain police officers, garbage disposal and organizing other pieces of the fair would be critical. The most important work that the DBBA can do, however, is communicate with the City. The DBBA can work with local businesses to obtain sponsorships and donations, as well as get local eateries to provide free food. They would also know how to effectively communicate with community members to make them aware of the fair and get them to partake in it.

#### *The Student Association Programming Board [SAPB]*

The SAPB would be able to provide information on what amenities students would want during the fair, and how to obtain them. They would also be able to contact all the Student Greek Life,

clubs, organizations, and groups to table during the event so that they can introduce themselves to the City of Binghamton. The SAPB would be able to hire Binghamton Sound Stage and Lighting (BSSL) in order to provide a stage, sound and lighting equipment, all for a cheap price<sup>xiii</sup>. Advertising to the students would be handled by SAPB, as well as transportation to and from the event. SAPB, with the help of Off Campus Community would help find volunteers for the Fair. SAPB would also be able to locate, contact and recruit student bands to perform at the event.

## **Conclusion**

The City of Binghamton is beginning a period of renaissance. A major key to the success of this renaissance is the inclusion of students into the City. There currently exist plenty of amenities for students, however the City has to begin marketing these amenities to the students. One of the most effective ways to do this is to host a fair at the very beginning of each school year and attract all the students into the City. The fair should include entertainment, food and tabling, providing a chance for the City to meet the students, and the students to meet the City, and hopefully setting the stage for lifelong relationships.

## Bibliography

- <sup>i</sup> <http://www.angeloueconomics.com/gradretention.html>
- <sup>ii</sup> <http://www.cityofbinghamton.com>; Letter from Mayor Ryan, March 30<sup>th</sup> 2008
- <sup>iii</sup> Conversations with Downtown Binghamton Business Association President Ron Sall, April 1<sup>st</sup> 2008; Conversations with Dave Passagno, Co-Planner for July Fest, April 1<sup>st</sup> 2008
- <sup>iv</sup> Conversations with Director of Economic Development for the City Of Binghamton, Merry Harris; November 2007-March 2008
- <sup>v</sup> Conversations with Student Association President David Bass, February 2008-April 2008
- <sup>vi</sup> Conversations with Student Association Vice President of Programming Elect Aaron Butler, March-April 2008
- <sup>vii</sup> Conversations with Student Association Vice President of Programming Elect Aaron Butler, March-April 2008
- <sup>viii</sup> Conversations with Student Association Vice President of Programming Elect Aaron Butler, March-April 2008
- <sup>ix</sup> <http://sa.binghamton.edu/index.php?page=groups>
- <sup>x</sup> DBBA President Ron Sall
- <sup>xi</sup> Conversations with Mr. Jerome from Bryant Park, NY, March 2008.
- <sup>xii</sup> DBBA President Ron Sall
- <sup>xiii</sup> <http://sa.binghamton.edu/resources/documents/Revised%20Handbook%2008-30-07.pdf>.