

A Short Film Documenting Downtown Binghamton

When students are accepted into Binghamton University, they are introduced into a world of discovery and stimulation. As freshmen, students reside on campus and are offered resources to develop as an intellectuals and flourishing young adults. However, there are downfalls with this isolated campus environment. Students become naive to their Binghamton surroundings and do not take advantage of what the City has to offer. They are also influenced by other students' stigma about the area and choose not to travel to Downtown Binghamton. To draw students into the City of Binghamton, I have created a short film to be shown at orientation highlighting various amenities throughout the downtown location.

Incoming freshmen are required to attend certain activities during a three-day summer introduction to the University entitled "Beginnings." Although not all of the students attend each scheduled activity, a majority of them do go to all orientation events. Students tour the campus, meet other students in their major and learn the basics of Binghamton University. Freshmen watch various videos about rape and domestic violence as well as Facebook and Myspace censorship. If a five-minute film were to be thrown into the mix highlighting parts of Downtown Binghamton, students would immediately develop a positive impression of the area. Even if their impression were not necessarily positive, at least the freshmen would acknowledge the fact that there are several available amenities in the community. Barriers prevent students from finding amenities in the City of Binghamton. Students are wrapped up in the University and tend to isolate themselves to the college campus. It seems as though the only way to get freshman downtown is to physically place them on a bus and then, once the destination has been reached, kick them off. Instead of using such harsh measures, why not positively shape the students' perceptions of Binghamton from the moment they step foot on campus?

Orientation is a time to mold the students' first impressions of Binghamton. It is important to instill a positive stigma about the City during the first lengthy visit to the University. Consequently, students will be more inclined to get involved in the community and contribute to the City of Binghamton. To mold the freshmen views of Binghamton, students must be presented a stimulating and memorable media-based introduction to the City. A video shown at orientation informing the students of different Binghamton sites and hotspots will be beneficial to both the students and the community. Students will get an overview of their new home for at least the next four years and will be more inclined to visit the locations highlighted in the presentation.

Providing Students with a Good First Impression

Binghamton University students are secluded to the campus setting and rarely explore their surrounding environment. There are challenges when trying to physically get downtown; students refuse to use the bus system and freshmen are not allowed to bring cars to campus. Some students are so immersed in what the University has to offer, that they do not think to

travel into the city. Obstacles deter students from making the trip to downtown Binghamton and hinder community integration.

Students attending Binghamton University from locations other than Greater Binghamton are primarily naïve to Upstate New York. They are used to a more developed, urban setting and a level of comfort that goes along with the place in which they grew up. As with any freshmen, students question their new residence and resist change. If students hear negative commentary about Binghamton, they will most likely go along with that negativity and, from there, construct their own pessimistic view of the City. It is up outside sources to exude Binghamton's assets to the students and fight any cynical stigma that is present. Outside sources might include inhabitants of Binghamton, companies that have a large influence on the community and peers.

Altering such a rooted social stigma is complicated and can be compared to the bias or prejudice of a focus group of people. Prejudice might erupt from an adverse first impression of the group, or, in this context, the city. Those who demonstrate bias tend to, "run in packs" which manifests from tweaking the natural development of one's perception. It is important to instill in students that a few bad apples do not write the script for an entire construct (Fiske, 117). Just because a student might witness a building that does not live up to his or her standards of proper college town architecture doesn't mean that a new, innovative building isn't being built around the corner. Strides must be taken to deter the stereotyping of Binghamton within the student realm.

First impressions play a large role in influencing the perception of an encountered stimulus. Impression formation happens in various cognitive ways, categorizing a person or place under specific labels. People tend to "judge and sort" new experiences and compare them to their individualized prototypes (Berrenberg, 169). Also, if they are aware of one quality that the stimulus has, they immediately assume other corresponding qualities. If a man is described as being tall, people might assume that he is dark and handsome as well (Berrenberg, 169). One influential stimulus in the City of Binghamton might have ignited an array of student assumptions and formed a negative impression of the area. To ensure that students get the right idea about Binghamton, strong positive first impressions must be shaped.

What makes people strive to socially interact and be involved in their surroundings? Some sort of internal motivation needs to be present in order to seek out opportunities. If people exhibit self-monitoring, it is more likely that they will integrate with the immediate environment (Guarino, et al, 755). In college, high self-monitors are able to use self-monitoring abilities to "adjust their behavior and promote social interactions." Conversely, "low self-monitors are less concerned about the impressions they make and are less responsive to the surrounding environment" (Guarino, et al, 755). Considering this research, it is imperative that Binghamton University promotes self-monitoring. In addition, the University must tend to low self-monitors through innovative programs and advocacy for integration.

In Cities and the Creative Class, Richard Florida discusses economic growth and what it takes for an area to prosper. Economic development is based on the inhabitants of the location and their collective skills and goals. The creativity thesis truly emulates the idea of how citizens are needed to drive an economy, stating that "the role of culture is much more expansive, that

human beings have limitless potential, and that the key to economic growth is to enable and unleash that potential” (Florida, 5). Students’ integration into Binghamton is essential to ensure the city’s financial well-being. If this “role of culture” is exercised and the students use their limitless potential by searching for opportunities in the city, Binghamton will gradually develop and gain the resources to become a booming college town.

Media Influences Students

Media education has been known to manipulate students’ tendencies and influence their behavior. Documentaries, feature films, and docudramas are important tools that can be used to introduce a specific topic to students and secure lasting effects. Educators have used media based lessons to teach history classes and shape the students’ understanding of history (Woelders, 146). Using film in the middle school setting is beneficial to students, creating motivation to do more research about the subject. Films also, “authentically demonstrate” the matter at hand and teach how to critique other media images (Woelders, 146). This study indicates that presenting information about a certain topic through film will actually increase the student’s inquiry and stimulation.

Using a form of art as a teaching material adds a dimension to teaching that motivates the student. It is imperative that instructors use instruments that both excite and inform the students. This motivation can be manipulated through film and entertainment in the classroom so that students have an internal desire to succeed (Rieck and Dugger-Wadsworth, 165). Playing a DVD of a Broadway musical in the classroom can engage students and teaches them life lessons, such as the dangers of prejudice. For example, witnessing a character from the musical “South Pacific” sing a song entitled, “You Have to Be Carefully Taught” is a powerful stimuli that encourages students to be accepting of others (Rieck and Dugger-Wadsworth, 166). Selecting clips from different musicals and presenting them in the classroom has an impact on the students’ ways of processing and retaining the information through their own enthusiasm and drive.

The Movie Making Process

Considering the aforementioned research and observations, I have decided to ask different people, both students and members of the community, places worthy of appearing in the orientation video. My mentor, Caroline Quidort, Senior Planning at City Hall, provided several suggestions such as the river trail, the Roberson Museum and the Night Eagle Café. Sue Kirkland, a colloquium invitee, emphasized architecturally significant places, such as the Security Mutual Building and the Kilmer Building. Classmates recommended other locations, such as Grande’s and The Lost Dog, two notorious restaurants in the area. After compiling a large list of locations to film, I searched for technology resources on campus that would let me borrow video equipment. Binghamton University’s Audio Visual Department allowed me to rent a camera for a week, along with other pieces needed for film production.

After analyzing the reasons preventing students from getting involved in the Binghamton community, I came to an over-arching conclusion suitable for continuing research. Using very non-traditional ways of experimentation, I had conversations with students and asked them their

perceptions of Binghamton. Certain aspects of the university are emphasized in the first few moments of college: the partying scene; impressions of different majors; and where to live on campus. Binghamton, as a community, is mentioned through word of mouth. Usually, perceptions about the surrounding area have been formed and carried out through generations of students. If the students have a preconceived notion of the inhabitants living in the university town, most likely those notions will travel from person to person. I found that most students had a deeply ingrained stigma of the City, including mostly negative opinions. Concerns included safety, the prevalence of drugs, aesthetically unpleasing areas and other various apprehensions. Last year, as a new coming freshman to Binghamton University, I too shared these views. It wasn't until this year when my department's building was moved downtown and I joined The Catalysts for Intellectual Capital Leadership Institute (CIC-LI) that I began to experience what Binghamton truly had to offer.

When I obtained the proper equipment, I felt comfortable diving into the creative aspect of the video. I searched for background music, dabbled with the computer editing program on a MAC computer and brain stormed the cinematography in order to generate an engaging and worthwhile product. Certain visual effects were used, including transition markers and color scheme alterations. Another member of the CIC LI has direct contact with the person in charge of our school mascot's costume, so I intended to fully take advantage of that resource in the video. A group member dressed up as Baxter the Bearcat, Binghamton University's mascot, accompanied me in Downtown Binghamton, dancing to the music and pointing out noteworthy amenities. An attractive visual, Baxter the Bearcat will symbolize Binghamton University's presence in the City.

I started shooting the video the week of April 7th and continued to shoot until the week of May 5th. With help from my teammates, I traveled to various locations and took snap shots of the exteriors and some of the interiors. Considering the trees were still bare and many landscapes look weathered because of winter, I choose to focus on buildings rather than the natural environment. There were several factors I took into account when filming the video: daylight, weather and sound. Other editing factors include the amount of time given to each image and the overall look of the video. Through discussion with group members and my own opinion about informational films, I decided to comprise the video of snapshots as opposed to lengthy recordings of the different locations. The song, "All These Things That I've Done" by the alternative-punk band The Killers, accompanies the snapshots. I tried to match up the images with the beat of the song, but, unfortunately, I have little experience with film editing. The Audio Visual department at Binghamton University provided some filming guidance and helped me out with editing questions.

Discussion

Filming parts of Downtown Binghamton and showing the video at orientation is a project tended to amplify the students' knowledge of the City. In doing so, students will want to become involved in different organizations, volunteer groups or internships throughout Binghamton. Increased involvement in Downtown will also increase the students' motivation to contribute to the academic community. Students might be inclined to research Binghamton itself or research a subject that has to do with activities in the area. The film will hopefully bring students to

Downtown Binghamton for knowledge building and self-discovery. Students will then report back about their findings and encourage others to explore the downtown area. After appreciating what the City has to offer, students might wish to stay in the area after graduation and find a suitable career.

When students attend college, they are immediately taking on a role that requires focus, dedication and hard work. Developmentally, college is a time that molds the interior workings of young adults and greatly influences their course in life. Combining this enthusiasm with a natural willingness to explore what the world has to offer ignites a fire that searches for the opportunity to achieve. The City of Binghamton presents many chances to excel. However, students are not taking advantage of these resources and, therefore, are not reaching their full potential to succeed. Binghamton is a vast resource for experience in overcoming hardship and demise. If students become aware of the condition in Binghamton, they might acknowledge its downfalls. From those realizations, students can integrate themselves into the City and contribute to its economic and social well-being.

In order to revitalize the City of Binghamton, the University should be used as a resource and utilized to its fullest potential. If students are expanded into the community, Downtown Binghamton will prosper. To successfully integrate students into Binghamton, effort must be put forth from both the University and the City. College students are resources of intellectualization and modernization, two imperative factors that are needed when trying to revive a city that has experienced hardship. A time of great discovery, college years give young adults a chance to develop into innovative individuals capable of achieving great feats. This “creative class” as described by Florida uses their out-of-the-box psyche to combat hardships. To spark the development of Binghamton, students’ minds need to be wrung out of all innovative ideas and expanded into the city.

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