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BANKING ON BROOME COUNTY'S YOUTH

BU group aims to retain grads

Asks area businesses to hire at least one from school each year

By [My-Ly Nguyen](#)
Press & Sun-Bulletin

A student-led group at Binghamton University is issuing an important plea to each area employer: hire at least one graduate from the school a year to help the organization reach its goal of retaining young professionals and revitalizing the local economy.

"Some people say the jobs are there. It's just a matter of matching them to those opportunities," said Jason Bronowitz, a director and graduate intern of Catalysts for Intellectual Capital 2020, the economic development think tank on campus that aims to retain 20 percent of BU graduates by 2020. The current retention rate is 3 percent, or 66 students, the group said.

To boost that figure, CIC 2020 has launched several initiatives to "bridge the gap" between the university and surrounding community and educate students about employment and social opportunities in the region.

Efforts center on leadership, innovation and culture:

* A leadership institute, launched last spring and modeled after the Broome Leadership Institute, matches "the cream of the crop from the university" with community mentors to spark dialogue about living and working in the region.

A select group of about 30 undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of majors will be accepted annually into the four-credit, 10-week course.

Visits to organizations such as Lockheed Martin Systems Integration -- Owego, Universal Instruments, Lourdes Hospital and Roberson Museum are part of the course.

* A business plan competition and other efforts fostering entrepreneurship in the Southern Tier are planned to link education and innovation, and engage students outside the classroom.

* A guidebook of local attractions and interactive online directory, including a map with bus routes, is being produced to encourage students to explore life off campus.

* A "one-stop" database of local internship and employment opportunities is being created to connect students with jobs -- what many say is the biggest factor affecting a student's decision to stay after graduation.



Jason Bronowitz, 21, is a graduate student at Binghamton University who holds the position of director and graduate intern for BU's student-led organization, Catalysts for Intellectual Capital 2020. Bronowitz is pictured in front of a model of downtown Binghamton.

REBECCA TOWNS / Press & Sun-Bulletin



Josh Kay, 21, a junior at Binghamton University and an associate director for Catalysts for Intellectual Capital 2020, presents a slideshow about the student-led organization for members of Southern Tier Opportunity Coalition on Monday evening at Traditions at the Glen in the Town of Union.

REBECCA TOWNS / Press & Sun-Bulletin

ON THE WEB

To learn more about Catalysts for

SPREADING THE WORD

Intellectual Capital 2020, go to:

Already, CIC 2020 has made a positive impression on David Gdovin, who first heard about the group last year.

www.cic2020.org

The group offers a different perspective, said Gdovin, president and a founding partner of Diamond Visionics in Vestal.

"I was very pleased to see the energy, enthusiasm and youthfulness of a group wanting to help a lot of the community leaders in their quest to create jobs and make this a great place to raise a family," Gdovin said.

But a challenge for CIC 2020 will be getting the word out to the community, he said.

CIC 2020 started about two years ago as a result of a fall 2003 BU course that examined leadership and organizational change, including implementation of the BC Plan, a guide for improving the economy and quality of life in the Binghamton area.

Various community leaders visited the class and challenged students to participate in efforts to revitalize the region. As a result, CIC 2020 was born.

The organization is made up of about 15 directors, associate directors and assistant directors. Additional students are involved in the group's efforts and programs. BU Liberty Partnership Program Director Diane Crews is CIC 2020's faculty adviser.

"This is a group that's saying, 'We want to stay here,' " Gdovin said. "They're doing their part to demonstrate that there is local talent -- smart, world-class talent -- that wants to stay, so hire us."

FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

Ten-year-old Diamond Visionics has seen the value of tapping into talent at the university for its work force.

"It was a commitment from day one," Gdovin said. "We located here on Plaza Drive on the perimeter of the university to specifically take advantage of what the university has to offer."

Today, 40 percent of the company's approximately 25-person work force is made up of BU grads, including Gdovin himself. Some employees started off at the company as interns, Gdovin said.

A positive internship experience with the City of Binghamton helped lead Philip Grommet, formerly of Teaneck, N.J., back to the area after graduation from Binghamton University in May.

"I really liked my experience as an intern. I really liked the work that they were doing," said Grommet, 22. "I started to believe that the city could be revitalized."

Now, Grommet's an economic development specialist and financial analyst for the city.

"What I pay for rent a year here is what I pay a month where I'm from in N.J.," he said. "The housing is so affordable."


Grommet also cited a "strong university" and the region's proximity to several metropolitan areas as other factors that help make Binghamton an appealing place to live and work.

"The vast majority of the kids leave the area and often the state, so that's money that we're spending that's not economically benefiting us long term," said John Hayek, executive director of Southern Tier Opportunity Coalition. "The work (CIC 2020 is) doing is really outstanding and badly needed in the community. They've put together a well thought strategy for how to approach the brain drain challenge that we have."

STOC, an academic and private sector partnership formed in 2002 to drive economic growth in the region, has met with CIC 2020 to determine how the organizations can work together to achieve similar goals.

"It's a very difficult challenge to get an organization like this going and not only perpetuate it but grow it. ... Every year membership churns out" as the students graduate, Hayek said. "Let's grow these minds. ... Let's keep them in the community."

STORYCHAT 

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