

Public Relations Plan 2017

Downtown Ithaca Alliance



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Executive Summary

This deliverable was designed to present Students Consulting for Nonprofit Organizations' (SCNO) analysis on the consumption habits of the student population in Ithaca and comparable towns. The data gathered was used to inform SCNO's recommendations for increasing student engagement in the economic ecosystem of Downtown Ithaca. Before contacting the Downtown Ithaca Alliance, our team conducted a SWOT analysis of the organization based on its website, social media presence, and mobile app. Our team then took a two-tiered approach to address the specific objectives outlined in our Engagement Agreement: creating, distributing, and analyzing a survey of student participation in Downtown Ithaca and researching the relationship between similar college towns and their respective student population. The deliverable will delve into our methodology, findings, and recommendations so that the document can serve as a template for future research into the student population of Ithaca.



SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Festivals, well attended and publicized• Wide network of businesses in Ithaca• Website and App navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name recognition• Cohesion between website and app• No calendar• Blogging format outdated
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engaging online presence• Guerrilla marketing and alternative forms of promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing rent prices in the commons• Increasing tuition rates (less disposable income)• Advent of online shopping



Goals and Objectives

1. Inquire on what kind of retail businesses (specific names or types of stores) students want to see in the downtown area. Make sure to tailor suggestions to the appropriate size/demographic, and be descriptive in the reasons for each choice.
2. Explore the obstacles that students face when looking to spend their money in the downtown area. Create solutions for these issues and encourage the students to be patrons more often.
3. Research comparable small college towns that are successful in their retail spaces and find why that is. Make sure not to directly contact downtown alliances, but to use other resources (i.e. college students, friends, family).
4. Generate ideas for how to raise visibility of the areas near and adjacent to the Commons.



Market Research



Design and Implementation

Our team surveyed local Ithaca College students about their experiences in the Downtown area. The survey was uploaded onto SurveyMonkey, a free online platform, and disseminated via several channels: posted in Facebook groups of Ithaca College-affiliated organizations, over the school's online newsletter Intercom, and in person over a period of six hours at a table in Campus Center. Ninety students responded to the survey. The following is a copy of the survey:

1. What is your preferred gender?

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Other

This question was used to verify that the responders reflected the demographic distribution of Ithaca students.

2. What year are you?

- a) Freshman
- b) Sophomore
- c) Junior
- d) Senior

This question was used to verify that the responders reflected the demographic distribution of Ithaca students. This question also primes issues like transportation as first year students aren't allowed parking permits on campus.



3. How often do you go downtown?

- a) More than once a week
- b) Once a week
- c) Once a month
- d) Once a semester
- e) Never

We asked this question to gauge student participation in Downtown Ithaca. The frequency with which students are traveling to the Commons can indicate whether local transportation options are sufficient.

4. How do you get downtown?

- a) TCAT
- b) Car
- c) Carpool/Uber
- d) Walk/Bike
- e) Other (please specify)

We asked this question to determine how students get from campus to the Commons and adjacent areas.

5. Why do you go downtown?

- a) To shop
- b) Festivals
- c) Restaurants
- d) Bars
- e) Window Shopping
- f) Other (please specify)

This question was used to determine what attracts college students to the Downtown area. It also provides insight into what new businesses would be successful in the downtown area.



6. When you go downtown, how much money do you spend on average?

- a) \$0
- b) Less than \$10
- c) Less than \$25
- d) Less than \$50
- e) More than \$50

This question was used to determine how much students contribute to local commerce

7. What new businesses would you like to see on the commons and why?

(This question was open ended)

We asked this question to source recommendations for new businesses directly from students. We also looked for similarities in student responses to determine businesses/industries in demand.

8. What businesses do you patron?

- a) Formal Restaurants
- b) Bars
- c) Boutiques
- d) Retail Stores
- e) Fast Food
- f) Other (please specify)

This question was used as a model to determine what industries are popular amongst college students.



Findings

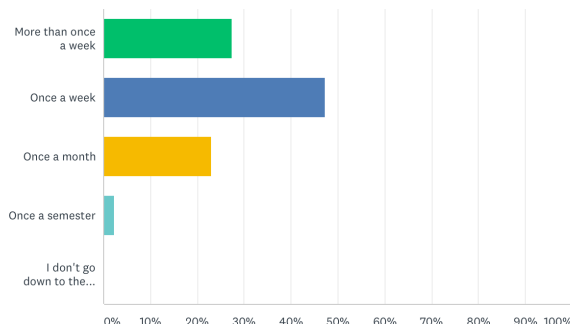


Results

Out of the ninety students we surveyed, 82% were female but, we had a lot of variety in the age groups with 40% were first year students, 11% were sophomores, 18% were juniors, and 29% were seniors. We have provided some charts as a way of showing the results in a visual format:

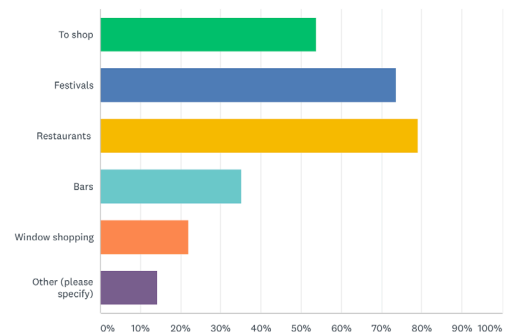
How often do you go downtown? (The area including and surrounding the Commons)

Answered: 91 Skipped: 0



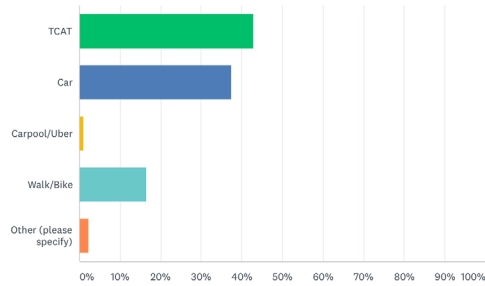
Why do you go downtown?

Answered: 91 Skipped: 0



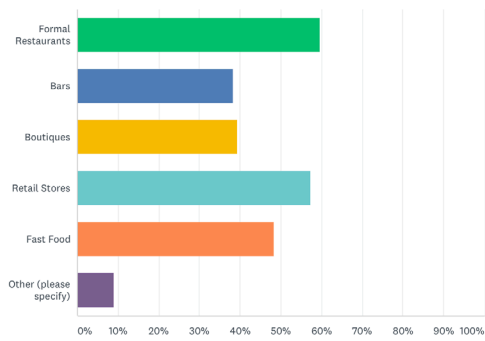
How do you get downtown?

Answered: 91 Skipped: 0



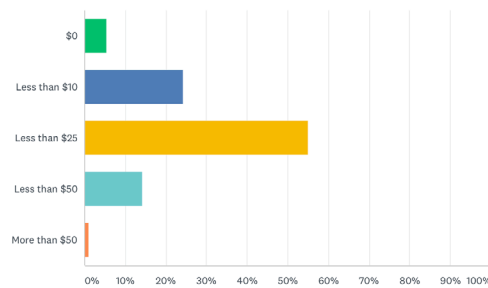
What businesses do you patron?

Answered: 89 Skipped: 2



When you go downtown, how much money do you spend on average?

Answered: 91 Skipped: 0



Analysis

Our team gained some unexpected insights from the survey. While there is some demand for college-tailored stores on the Commons, the one factor preventing students from shopping Downtown is a lack of awareness. First, our team ruled out our two assumptions: that students might not have ready access to the Commons and that they didn't have the disposable income to patron stores in the Downtown area. Since 74.27% of students claim to visit the Commons at least once a week if not more, we deduced that access was an unlikely obstacle. There is only a marginal difference between the number of students who take public transportation versus those who drive; carpooling apps like Uber or Lyft aren't frequently used, supporting the notion that students have unfettered access to effective public transportation.

When visiting Downtown Ithaca, students claim to spend between \$10-\$25 each visit, suggesting they have enough disposable income to participate in local commerce. The most illuminating portion of the survey was the open response section where we asked students what businesses they would like to see in Ithaca.

Many responses mirrored businesses already present in the Downtown area or in the shopping centers around Ithaca. This indicates a lack of awareness rather than resources. Some of those listed include thrift shops, cafes, bars, and boutiques. There were a few stores requested by students that aren't on the Commons:

1. Uniqlo/Garage- Both are retail clothing stores with a similar grunge-aesthetic. Their clothing is priced in the \$15-\$40 price range, a little higher than what the average student spends on the Commons and slightly lower than products at Urban Outfitters. While some students mentioned these by name, many others claimed to want less expensive retail clothing stores in general.
2. Bubble Tea- although several restaurants serve Bubble Tea, a number of students specifically requested this.
3. Food Trucks- some students requested bringing food trucks to the Commons, similar to the ones in Collegetown.



Comparable College Towns



Process

We sought to determine how college towns successfully engage their student populations by analyzing those with similar qualities and characteristics. First, we set the radius of our search for the Northeast region and refined that further to schools/towns in a suburban/rural setting, those with populations between 25,000-45,000. Ithaca's population increases by about 2/3 when Ithaca College and Cornell students arrive, so we also looked into towns with adjoining colleges of at least 10,000 students.

After identifying target towns, we contacted students who attend those universities, researched articles written by students, scrolled through the town's social media pages, and searched government and business/cultural alliance websites/resources (including their published 5-10 year plans). We then distilled this information and tailored it to address the obstacles identified by our survey.



Amherst, MA

Population: 37,819

Colleges (Population): University of Massachusetts Amherst (College of Nursing, College of Computer and Information Sciences), Amherst College, Hampshire College (31,894 Students)

Resources:

University Town of Amherst Collaborative- “is made up of Amherst residents, UMass Amherst town and university officials, and UMass Amherst students. UTAC is an advisory council to the town manager and chancellor which provides leadership and ideas, while building support for future joint endeavors. These include, but are not limited to, identifying sites for undergraduate mixed-use development, jointly pursuing public-private partnerships, and helping to create an anchor strategy for the university that embraces the town and fosters economic success.” The collaborative is broken into four committees: Executive Committee, Housing, Economic Development, and Culture, Arts, & Living.

Additionally, UMass Amherst has a Shop Local campaign featured on its website under “Dining Services”. On their site, they feature local businesses, provide literature on the benefits of supporting the community, and participate in an incentive program through Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture called, “Local Hero Campaign”.



Saratoga Springs, NY

Population: 27,763

Colleges (Population): Skidmore College, SUNY Empire State College (20,956)

Resources:

The Synergy of Saratoga and Skidmore- An initiative designed by the college that encourages members of the town to participate in campus activities. They market cultural activities through their music, theater, and art departments heavily.

Downtown Business Alliance- members of the alliance contribute to the staging of two festivals a year and promotional opportunities. While they have an aesthetically appealing website and a social media presence, there are few if any incentives or initiatives geared towards the student population.



Burlington, VT

Population: 42,260

Colleges (Population): University of Vermont, Champlain College, Burlington College (14,128 Students)

Resources:

Office of Community and Student Relations- Students, neighbors, landlords, city officials, and UVM/Champlain College staff and administrators meet monthly to discuss opportunities for developing the community. Additionally, they provide off campus living workshops to students, addressing a wide range of topics on how to be a respectful member of the Burlington community.

Public WiFi- Sponsored by L.L. Bean, the town of Burlington provides public access to WiFi, a feature which facilitates student participation in the local community at no cost to small businesses.

Top 10 Tech Hub- Burlington has invested in incubators and entrepreneurial resources that both nurture student endeavors and connect students with internship opportunities at local businesses/startups.

Burlington Community Arts- They support public creative endeavors across a wide range of artistic mediums in the Burlington community. To encourage students to patron local artisans and participate in the arts scene, they offer a significant membership discount; individual memberships begin at \$40, however students only pay \$25. Membership benefits include free admission to all performances and an additional 10% at select local stores.



State College, PA

Population: 41,992

Colleges (Population): Pennsylvania State University Park (46,006 Students)

Resources:

Small Business Development Center- Of their many services, SBDC integrates the Penn State campus into the local community by brokering capstone projects that help small businesses. SBDC guides the development and implementation of capstones that fulfill a student's graduation requirement while providing a much needed service.

Shop Local Campaign- They often feature short content of shop owners talking about their businesses on social media. Additionally, they encourage students to write Op-Eds about local businesses on their website.



Recommendations

After investigating how comparable college towns engage with their student population, we have prioritized three recommendations that seem to directly address the problem and can be effectively implemented based on the resources at the Downtown Ithaca Alliance's disposal.

Shop Local Campaign

Why: Campaigns conveying a succinct, unified call to action that can expand brand awareness for both the local businesses and the Downtown Ithaca Alliance.

How: There are two steps in creating a successful campaign. First, an organization needs to draw attention to its resources. Ithaca College is overflowing with flyers and advertisements that have an abundance of information on them, so smaller paraphernalia with minimal text can filter across campus more effectively. A good example is the ubiquitous CTB laptop stickers, bumper stickers, pins, etc. Each should also have a link to the Downtown Ithaca Alliance website and social media where people can discover more about the campaign.

Using online mediums to provide information and resources to consumers is the second component of a successful Shop Local campaign. Social media was designed to tell stories, so posting an expose on one local business/owner each week can generate an emotional investment in the store's success. This is especially important as small businesses face growing competition against online markets and large retailers.

By establishing contact with campus organizations like The Ithacan (advised by Michael Serino), journalism majors could write these Op-Eds for DIA's social media pages. Companies/agencies that utilize public advocacy rather than digital advertising have more clout amongst millennials. DIA might want to suggest that shop owners offer discounts to people who show that they have shared the post at the time of their purchase.



Recommendations

Advisory Council

Why: A council can serve to provide direct feedback from students, generate a vested interest amongst students in the town's success, and recruit student advocates who can promote Downtown Ithaca Alliance's mission.

How: We suggest following a similar model to UMass Amherst [see page 18]. Here is a link to their website for a more detailed outline of their organization, <https://www.umass.edu/utac/>

Workshops

Why: Local businesses can provide students with domain knowledge they may not receive in the classroom and, in so doing, create a direct connection with a new market.

How: This generation of students is particularly concerned that they don't have the necessary skills to become a successful adult. The Downtown Ithaca Alliance could facilitate workshops taught by local businesses (banks, restaurants, etc.) to teach students how to budget, do their taxes, cook healthy meals, and so on. The monetary and social value of this direct business to customer interaction is invaluable to small businesses.



Meet The Team



Bianca Summerville & Cassidy O'Malley

Bianca is a freshman at Ithaca College majoring in Integrated Marketing Communications and minoring in Legal Studies. Through Elmira's local branch of the Board of Education, Bianca gathered information from students, faculty, and staff at her high school about various topics. She collated this information into a report, which she presented to the School Board. In her spare time, she can be found preparing her latest arguments for the Ithaca College Mock Trial team.

Cassidy O'Malley is a sophomore Integrated Marketing Communications major in Ithaca College's Roy H. Park School of Communications. She is currently a member of the Ithaca Women's Basketball team. Cassidy has experience starting her own small business in her hometown of Summit, NJ. In her free time Cassidy enjoys running outside and playing basketball.



Stephanie LaBatt & Jessica Voutsinas

Stephanie is a senior at Ithaca College majoring in communication management and design with a minor in anthropology. She is the online communications chair for Colleges Against Cancer and is a member of the Senior Class Cabinet on the special events committee. She has previously provided consulting services to the Latino Civic Association of Tompkins County, Cinemapolis, and the Ithaca ReUse Center. During her spare time, Stephanie can be found perusing social media, binge watching Netflix, or admiring the monkey exhibit at the zoo.

Jessica is a senior in the Ithaca College Honors program pursuing studies in ethnomusicology, classical voice performance, and anthropology. She has been employed in development by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Princeton Symphony Orchestra, Cayuga Chamber Orchestra, and Opera Ithaca. As a sophomore, Jessica founded a music technology company, Trills, an immersive experience from which she acquired significant domain knowledge in the technology, commercial, and entertainment industries. Jessica has also served as a project manager and consultant respectively for the Family Reading Partnership, Community Foundation of Tompkins County, and the Paleontological Research Institute through SCNO. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, and scuba diving when the Finger Lakes are warm enough.



Katie Welch & Natalie Kosir

Katie is a sophomore Integrated Marketing Communications major at Ithaca College's Roy H. Park School of Communications and a minor in Business. She is a member of the varsity lacrosse team at Ithaca College. She has been employed for the past four summers by Dandilyons Ice Cream in Reading, MA where she works as a manager. In her free time she enjoys spending time with family and friends, working out, and relaxing at the beach.

Natalie Kosir is a sophomore Physical Therapy major at Ithaca college. She is a member of the Club Soccer team whom just this year made it to the national level for the first time. She has been involved in the Slovenian Home community and volunteer service for the past four years in Cleveland, Ohio. She has also worked closely with her trainer over the summer creating programs for young athletes. In her free time she enjoys working out, skiing and being a camp counselor over the summers.

