

## A 2020 vision for the economy

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BU student coalition aims to improve region's development efforts

Efforts to improve the Greater Binghamton economy have lacked major contributions from a group that has one of the greatest stakes in seeing the initiatives succeed, supporters of a new coalition say.

A small group of Binghamton University students has formed Catalysts for Intellectual Capital 2020 to increase their peers' involvement in local economic development efforts, an effort they say will help generate job opportunities for graduates, attract and retain young people and improve relations between the university and community. Binghamton University Liberty Partnership Program director and faculty member Diane Crews oversees the group.

"There's a huge gap in the whole economic development process by not having students involved," said Binghamton University senior Jason Kaye, a founder and co-director of the group. "Students are capable of so much more."

CIC 2020 started earlier this year as a result of a Binghamton University course taught by Crews in fall 2003 that examined leadership and organizational change, including local implementation of the BC Plan. Various community leaders had visited the class and challenged students to participate in efforts to revitalize Greater Binghamton.

Texas consulting firm AngelouEconomics released the BC Plan in August 2002, making specific recommendations for improving the economy and quality of life in Greater Binghamton.

Using the BC Plan as its guide, the 2-year-old Greater Binghamton Coalition has worked to promote economic development in the region.

"There are other groups out there for economic development, but we're really the only student group," said Kaye, a 21-year-old political science major from Merrick.

Students offer a unique energy, creativity and perspective, but their assets are not being tapped as much as they could be, Kaye said.

"These are young people who are here from somewhere else, see the quality of life here and want to be here," Crews said. "And they're not alone. There's a lot of young people who come here and think this place is awesome. Not only do they not want to leave, but they want to stay and help build Greater Binghamton. It is a badly needed rush of optimism."

The 18-to-34-year-old population in Broome and Tioga counties declined by nearly a third from 1990 to 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Attracting and retaining young professionals and job-producing industry will be one of the key steps to revitalizing Greater Binghamton, economic development leaders have said.

Many college students want to stay in Greater Binghamton after graduation but worry the local job market will not provide attractive employment opportunities, said Binghamton University senior Jonah Kimmelstiel, a founder and co-director of CIC 2020. He is a 21-year-old political science major from White Plains.

"We all have to work together to put this vision of the Southern Tier into reality," Kaye said.

The CIC 2020 hopes to act as a liaison between the student community and economic development organizations, collaborating with community leaders to help revitalize Greater Binghamton. The group also hopes to form a center for intellectual capital at Binghamton University to support student involvement in economic development, foster business and job creation locally, and improve the exchange of knowledge between the university and community.

"What's different about their efforts is that they're coming from the standpoint of the students," said Robert Augenstern, Southern Tier East Regional Planning Development Board director. "Most of the previous efforts have been coming from organizations that are more on the business side ... Clearly, the two parts have to come together, but we hadn't seen before the level of interest on the part of the students."

Greater Binghamton Coalition Director Patrick Doyle said the coalition already has sought some input from students. Efforts this year have included an internship seminar for college students, and a survey and community forum asking young people what it would take for them to remain in Greater Binghamton or come back if they've already left.

"It's clear to me that doing a better job of working with students is a major part of what we need to do in the community," Doyle said. "We've made some significant progress on that front, but there's still a lot to do. The group has some ideas that are worth taking a serious look at and seeing what we can do to integrate them into the broader regional effort."

Kaye and Kimmelstiel said CIC 2020 faces challenges, including:

- \* Time. In most cases, the student members live in Greater Binghamton only for a short period. The group has recruited some new members as a few graduated Binghamton University and left the area for graduate school or job opportunities elsewhere. Some members have said they plan to stay involved in CIC 2020's efforts after graduation.

- \* Financial constraints. Securing grants and other funds will help the group achieve its goals. CIC 2020 is pursuing, through Binghamton University, a federal economic development grant worth up to \$1.5 million over three years, including cost-share benefits. The group will find out whether it receives the grant in May 2005.

- \* Lack of networking and communication between the various economic development groups in the region, making it hard for the organizations to coordinate efforts and work together.

CIC 2020 leaders say they're confident their group will be able to promote positive economic change locally.

"If we're here for four years, why can't we make our mark and make it a place we want to come back to?" Kaye said.

#### ON THE INTERNET

\* Catalysts for Intellectual Capital 2020: [www.cic2020.org](http://www.cic2020.org)

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