IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF
DOWNTOWN BLOOMSBURG

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American downtowns were once the place to see and be seen, but the introduction of the shopping mall in the late 1950s challenged this notion and gave the American consumer a different place to spend their time and money. The prevalence of shopping malls has slowly been declining across the country since the beginning of this century, leaving room in the American retail landscape for downtowns to reclaim their status as community and retail centers. Towns across the U.S. are turning to national and local organizations to assist them in revitalizing their downtown districts. Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. (DBI), a non-profit organization located in the small town of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, has been working since 2006 to revitalize its town’s downtown and main street area. The unique findings presented here were derived from a four month long ethnographic study of downtown Bloomsburg merchants and shoppers and are meant to be used by DBI as a supplemental guide for further revitalization of the town.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Brief History of Shopping

Shopping and consumption patterns around the world are continually changing. Retailers, merchandisers, and commercial property owners are constantly trying to stay ahead of the game to bring the next big thing to consumers. The 18th century saw the first surge of a consumer and consumption driven society; the wealthy were able to display their riches in a public forum (Stobart 2010). The first department stores arrived in city downtowns in the late 1800s to early 1900s. These giants of mass consumption revolutionized the way people shopped downtown; the next change in retailing came with the birth of the first suburban shopping malls in the 1950s. This took business away from downtown districts as the United States saw a decentralization of the city after World War II (Farrell 2003). Shopping malls reigned in the retail world until their slow decline began at the turn of this century (Stobart 2010). Now, struggling downtowns are making a comeback, finding new ways to attract visitors and become the destinations they once were.

The research presented here showcases the findings from a four month long ethnographic study of downtown Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, a small downtown full of potential. Through in-depth interviews, customer surveys, and participant-observation, evidence was found that placed downtown Bloomsburg’s story within the larger downtown revitalization context. By addressing Bloomsburg’s journey and using findings from the literature on downtown revitalization, this study contributed to plans by downtown Bloomsburg to once again become a flourishing retail and community center.
1.2 Early Bloomsburg History

Bloom Township was first settled in the late 1770s by James McClure who had previously lived in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, south of the town of Bloomsburg (Baillie 2002b, Battle 1887). Before the arrival of McClure and the settlers who followed him, this area of Pennsylvania (typically known as the Susquehanna River Valley) was inhabited only by Native Americans; many of the place names around the area are now the only remnants of the region's Native American heritage (Wymer 2002). The area was peacefully settled, especially along the protected Susquehanna River that runs along the southern edge of the town. Roads and a river canal encouraged the further settlement of the area.

After the Revolutionary War, new settlers as well as some old families came back to the area; the land was divided into thirteen “plantations” and, while changing hands quite frequently, served as productive farms into the 19th century until new industries moved into the region (Baillie 2002b). The founding date of the actual town of Bloomsburg is 1802; this is the year that the first town lots were surveyed and first town streets were laid. Brothers Ludwig and John Adam Eyer (of German descent) are credited with being the original proprietors of the town. An already established “Great Road” served as the foundation for the new village and is today downtown Bloomsburg’s Main Street (Baillie 2002b). Growth of the village was slow but picked up between 1807 and 1811; and by 1812 more than two-thirds of the original 96 lots were occupied. These newly sold sites were not only residential but some served as sites of the villages very first stores (Baillie 2002b). By 1814 Bloomsburg was home to about 200 villagers and boasted a hotel, three taverns, two churches, one store, and various shops in the central village. Residents held various titles and the village was well on its way to becoming the center of commerce and transportation for the Fishing Creek watershed (Baillie 2002b).
In 1813, Columbia County was created from a portion of the larger Northumberland County. As a result, Bloomsburg campaigned to become the newly formed county’s seat because of its central location. Bloomsburg lost out to neighboring Danville, but with the determination of one of the town’s original residents, Daniel Snyder, the town became the Columbia County seat in 1845 (Baillie 2002a). Bloom Township officially became the Town of Bloomsburg in 1870. The town has long had the special distinction of being “Pennsylvania’s Only Incorporated Town” – a town in the true sense of the word, even though municipalities of similar makeup are generally deemed boroughs (Baillie 2002b).

The first major industry of Bloom Township grew out of the discovery of iron ore. The first iron furnace was built in town in 1853. Out of these iron furnaces grew other industries that would support iron mining operations, namely a mine-car manufacturing plant (Battle 1887). But these resources were limited and other forms of manufacturing were eyed as becoming the town’s newest major industry. The North Branch Canal opened on the Susquehanna River just a few blocks from the perimeter of town in 1837; this canal helped to develop Bloomsburg’s industries until it closed around 1900 (Baillie 2002a, Battle 1887). The canal closure was followed by the introduction of the area’s first railways that connected Bloomsburg to all of the Eastern seaboard cities as well as the interior of Pennsylvania (Baillie 2002a). After the iron ore stores were depleted, a Board of Trade was developed in 1885 to recruit new industries to settle in the town. This board successfully attracted three silk mills and a carpet mill, which would later become the famous Magee Carpet Company (and is still operating as Autoneum) (Baillie 2002a, Town of Bloomsburg Pennsylvania 2013). Other industries started in the town included a brick plant, an elevator manufacturer, a school furniture factory, and a later in the century, a
fountain pen company. Baillie (2002a) says by the mid-1920s Bloomsburg was home to about 25 different industries which employed over 3,000 workers.

Much of the town’s success in the late 1800s and early 1900s is due in part because of the success of the Magee Carpet Company and the Magee Family. The Magee Carpet Company became the town’s major employer and during the 1920s was responsible for employing more than one-third of all those employed in Bloomsburg (Baillie 2002a). James A. Magee’s carpet business originated in the Philadelphia area in 1886 but was relocated to Bloomsburg in 1890. In Bloomsburg, the Magee family became powerful and is one of the most well-known families of the area to this day.

The most famous Magee is not the carpet company’s founder James, but rather his son, Harry, who lead the company into becoming one of the greatest institutions in the town of Bloomsburg. Harry inherited the company and his father’s wealth and built his empire from there. He had ventures in farming, opened at least one bar in town, and was proprietor of the Hotel Magee. To this day Harry L. Magee’s mark can be felt all over town; from the local radio station, WHLM (created out of his initials), to the popular Harry’s Bar and Grille downtown, the Magee legacy lives on (Parker 2004). Even now, Harry’s grandchildren and great-grandchildren are heavily invested in the town and its success. Although they no longer run the carpet company and the Magee name is not showcased on businesses or buildings throughout town as it once was, the Magee family is still a very important part of the Bloomsburg community.

1.3 Town Demographics

Bloomsburg is the Columbia County seat and is the largest community in Columbia County. The 2010 United States Census puts the town of Bloomsburg’s population at just over
14 thousand; Columbia County’s overall population in 2010 was 67,300. Bloomsburg town proper is composed of 4.3 square miles with about 3,400 people per square mile. Of the 14 thousand residents of the town, 89.6 percent are white, with 6.2 percent Black or African American, and 3.4 percent Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Main Street in downtown Bloomsburg is State Route 11 and as such sees an average of 17,500 vehicles daily. Adding to the easy accessibility of the town, entrances and exits for Interstate 80 are just two miles away from the downtown (personal interview with downtown director, June 2013). Philadelphia and New York City are less than a day’s drive from the downtown and the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area is only 50 miles away.

1.4 Bloomsburg University

Closely tied to the history and the economy of the town of Bloomsburg is Bloomsburg University. Bloomsburg University began as the Bloomsburg Literary Institute in 1867. In 1869 the school became Bloomsburg Literary Institute and State Normal School; in 1916 it was purchased by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and became Bloomsburg State Normal School. The focus of the school changed again in 1927 when it became Bloomsburg State Teachers College. The school operated under this name for some time and became very well known for the educators it produced. In 1960, the school became authorized to offer a number of different bachelor’s degrees and the name was again changed to Bloomsburg State College. Finally in 1983, it officially became Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania – one of 14 members of Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education (Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania 2014).
Since its establishment, Bloomsburg University has provided employment for over 1,000 residents around the area (at this time education is the largest industry in the town), and quality education for many more. In 2010, 10,091 students were enrolled; this number grows every year (Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania 2014). The Bloomsburg University campus adjoins the downtown and many university students live, work, and play in Bloomsburg’s downtown. Figure 1 shows the close proximity of downtown Bloomsburg (Main Street) and the Bloomsburg University Campus. Bloomsburg University and its students positively contribute to the town in many ways, but the town and the university are so interconnected that it is sometimes difficult to determine if Bloomsburg is a college town, or just a town with a college. It has become apparent that the prominence of the university sometimes shrouds other great aspects of the town, particularly the historic and diverse downtown district. While Bloomsburg’s “town-gown” relationship with the university does not result in violent uprisings as was the case between Oxford University and the town of Oxford in the St. Scholastica Day Riot of 1355, Bloomsburg University and the town have had some issues (Hundscheid 2010). One of the most notable

FIGURE 1. Map view of downtown Bloomsburg and Bloomsburg University campus
issues in recent years is over an event known as Block Party which takes place around town at student rented apartments and houses. Essentially, Block Party is an all-day drinking party taking place once a year in downtown Bloomsburg, usually on the last Saturday in April. Residents of the town had endured the party for many years until 2008 when the town’s Renaissance Jamboree and the university’s (although it is in no way sponsored by the university) Block Party were somehow scheduled for the same day. Town residents’ concerns over public drinking and large groups of students interrupting the family-friendly Renaissance Jamboree spurred town officials to enforce stricter regulations on those student apartments hosting parties that day. Most notably, student groups expecting more than 150 party attendants now have to gain a permit from the town and provide certain security precautions including a fence around the property and security personnel (Deklinski 2010). Despite these ordinances, Block Party still gets out of hand; Bloomsburg police used a tactical vehicle in 2013 to disperse crowds that had gathered in the street. The vehicle was damaged by party-goers throwing beer bottles and rocks (Krize 2013).

1.5 Downtown History

Bloomsburg’s downtown developed like many small American downtowns; before the invention of superstores and regional shopping malls, downtowns were the place to shop. Residents could get anything they needed within a few blocks; restaurants, retail stores, and entertainment venues lined the main streets of every American town (Isenberg 2004, Robertson 1997). Even small, more rural towns had a main street where people could go for their everyday necessities (Kures and Ryan 2012, Pryor and Grossbart 2005, Sneed et al. 2011). The height of downtown retailing occurred during the 1920s; during this time downtown department stores
abounded and became a sort of public spectacle, where people could see and be seen (Robertson 1997). While downtown retailing thrived in the 1920s and 1930s, the 1950s introduced a new challenge; the first indoor suburban shopping malls (Farrell 2003, Robertson 1997).

The first shopping malls opened in the United States in the late 1950s and hit their stride in the 1980s and 1990s (Farrell 2003). These new suburban shopping centers revolutionized the way people perceived shopping and the enclosed, air-conditioned nature of the space allowed malls to become a real escape for visitors (Csaba and Askegaard 1999). The architect of the first American malls, Victor Gruen, saw these indoor shopping centers replacing traditional outdoor urban spaces; his design sought to replace the traditional town square and downtown as a community’s gathering space (Lowe 2000). From the 1970s to the 1990s a new mall would open in the United States every couple of days; towns were afraid for their downtowns, afraid that one of these new shopping centers would take away valuable customers (Underhill 2004).

**FIGURE 2. View of Main Street Bloomsburg**

1.5.1 Downtown Bloomsburg History

Bloomsburg’s Main Street truly developed around the turn of the 20th century. Many of the town’s buildings still standing today were erected in this time period and lend Bloomsburg its
signature “look” (see Figure 2) (Baillie 2002a). Throughout the 1900s the town of Bloomsburg grew and in the 1980s some of the town’s oldest and most recognizable buildings became part of a Historic Preservation District (Baillie 2002a). But downtown Bloomsburg was soon affected by the same phenomena experienced by small towns throughout the country – the introduction of suburban shopping plazas and malls. Downtown Bloomsburg suffered as a result of the region’s very own shopping mall, the Columbia Mall, which opened in 1988. According to former Bloomsburg mayor, Dan Knorr, this shopping mall’s introduction changed the economic landscape of Bloomsburg. The major department stores located in the downtown relocated to the larger, more accessible location to become the anchors of the new mall. Their customers followed and the downtown suffered (from personal interview, April 2010). Then, at the turn of the century, shopping malls across the country began to struggle as a result of even newer, more convenient methods of shopping; the Columbia Mall was no exception (Underhill 2004).

**FIGURE 3.** Satellite image of Bloomsburg and surrounding area

Adding to the demise of the Columbia Mall was the introduction of a Wal-Mart Supercenter less than a mile away (Hicks et al. 2012, Tinsley 1976). Figure 3 provides a map view of the
Bloomsburg area including the downtown area, outlined in black, the Bloomsburg University campus outlined in red, and the Columbia Mall and Walmart circled in yellow. But in recent years, American downtowns have seen a resurgence of visitors (Pryor and Grossbart 2005, Robertson 1997). Due in part to the work of dedicated residents and volunteers, Bloomsburg is slowly becoming a part of this trend; the economic crash of 2008 seemed to have little effect on the businesses of Bloomsburg’s downtown at the time. More recently, though, Bloomsburg has begun to feel the pressure of sustaining itself and its retail businesses. Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. (DBI) has a lot of work to do to bring downtown Bloomsburg back to its former glory. This study of downtown merchants and customers is meant to be used by DBI as a guide for revitalization.
2.1 Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc.

Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. (DBI) was founded in 2006 to promote the revitalization of Bloomsburg’s downtown. DBI is a non-profit organization housed within the Columbia-Montour Chamber of Commerce. With the exception of one paid downtown manager, the non-profit is held together by a volunteer board of directors dedicated to the town of Bloomsburg. Many on the board are themselves business owners in the downtown and have a true interest in the success and revitalization of the downtown area.

Board members head four different committees which help to divide the management of the downtown. These four committees come from the National Trust for Historic Preservation (the Trust) and the newly launched National Main Street Center’s trademarked Main Street Four Point Approach (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2014). This four point approach divides main street management into four distinct categories: organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring. The organization committee manages volunteers and oversees the other committees so that the main street program can run smoothly; the promotion committee is the most involved with creating a better public image for the downtown, which includes organizing special events and running advertising campaigns; the design committee deals with the downtown’s outward appearance and makes everything inviting and aesthetically pleasing; finally, the economic restructuring committee focuses on attracting new business to the downtown and maintaining a successful business mix (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2014).
All DBI Board members belong to one or more of these four committees dedicated to the revitalization of the downtown. The level of activity for each committee varies based on available funds and availability of volunteers. DBI’s promotion committee is by far the most active. Limited funding means picking and choosing the most important issues to invest in; it was determined that promoting the downtown in a positive light and focusing on special events was a crucial first step to creating a real buzz around downtown Bloomsburg. Ideally, all four committees would be equally active and funded, but doing so would take more time, money, and man power than DBI has to offer.

Assistance and guidance for DBI is provided by Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC) (which follows National Main Street Center’s Four Point Approach). PDC is responsible for helping hundreds of Pennsylvania towns revitalize their downtown districts through grants and other financial means. Their website tells of many success stories, which lends hope that downtown Bloomsburg will one day be featured on the homepage (Pennsylvania Downtown Center 2014). The downtown manager position is funded through a grant provided to DBI through PDC. Unfortunately, their funding is also limited and grants are competitive. Funding is provided to those towns showing the greatest need as well as the greatest potential (Pennsylvania Downtown Center 2014). While progress has been made since DBI’s development, the downtown still has a lot of room for improvement, especially regarding its retail offerings.

Some semblance of a downtown organization has existed in Bloomsburg since the 1980s. Under an older functioning main street organization, Bloomsburg’s downtown enjoyed great success through the 1980s and into the 1990s. Unfortunately, the success of that program has long since vanished (Baillie 2002b). The introduction of the Columbia Mall in 1988 was just the
beginning of downtown Bloomsburg’s troubles. Since the 1990s town officials have attempted to restart a downtown initiative many times; it was not until the formation of DBI in 2006 that a true chance at revitalization was seen. Under the previous and current downtown managers, DBI has flourished and community interest is at an all-time high. This project was designed as a means to aid DBI and the downtown director in discovering the views and attitudes of downtown customers and merchants in regards to the vitality and future of the downtown, especially its retail scene.

2.2 Research Goals

After extensive collaboration with Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc.’s manager, Adrienne Mael, a series of research questions were decided upon which would address the most pressing concerns regarding Bloomsburg’s downtown district. The original research questions included in the project proposal submitted to DBI were as follows:

- How do Bloomsburg University and its students affect the business conducted in the downtown?
- How has the weakened economy affected downtown merchants?
- In the past, what benefits have downtown merchants received from Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc.?
- What do downtown merchants hope to receive from Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. in the future?
- What does the downtown mean to people who do shop there?
- Where else do visitors to the downtown do the majority of their shopping?
- What is or should be downtown Bloomsburg’s “brand”??
Along with these research questions, the major research goals were:

- To determine where downtown Bloomsburg is headed in the face of a down economy and the growing use of online shopping and superstores (Wal-Mart and Target).
- To examine and better understand the relationship between downtown Bloomsburg and Bloomsburg University.
- To offer solutions for a more economically stable downtown.

Deliverables to Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. included an executive summary and a verbal presentation to the non-profit’s board of directors and downtown manager. Included in both the executive summary and verbal presentation were suggestions for the improvement of Bloomsburg’s downtown district; including marketing techniques, retail merchant management, and event management.

Throughout the course of this project, further areas of interest were identified and addressed through merchant and shopper interviews. It quickly became apparent that downtown Bloomsburg merchants and business owners had concerns of their own regarding the town’s future direction and vitality. In addition to the research questions set forth, a number of other issues were addressed during the course of the research. Also throughout the course of data collection, it was found that certain research questions included in the research proposal were not as important as originally thought. This included questions regarding the downtown’s economy and the immediate relationship between DBI and downtown merchants.

Both the original research questions included in the research proposal as well as the added questions stemming from the interview process came about due to a real concern over current issues faced by the town at large.
2.3 Bloomsburg’s Current Issues

2.3.1 Town-Gown Relations

An issue that has plagued Bloomsburg for quite some time is the relationship between Bloomsburg University and the town itself. Traditionally, these relationships are known as *town-gown*, referencing the very beginning of universities when they were largely ecclesiastical institutions and students would wear gowns signifying their area of study (Brockliss 2000). The question most asked about the town-gown relationship in Bloomsburg is whether Bloomsburg is merely a town with a college or a college town? While the distinction between these two classifications may be difficult to see, the literature suggests that there is a difference (Gumprecht 2003, Weill 2009). College towns are known for their university/town partnerships while towns with colleges (or in this case a university) merely play host to the institution of higher learning and there is little to no mutual benefits or gain (Gumprecht 2003, Weill 2009). The relationship between Bloomsburg University and the town of Bloomsburg is murky; it would seem that no one in the town agrees on the type of relationship held between the two. While the university plays an important part in the town’s economic success and arguably “puts the town on the map,” the town itself has the potential to be nationally recognizable in and of itself. The town is much more than just a host to the university, yet the university is not as involved in town affairs as one would expect. A defined partnership between the town and the university would be beneficial to both parties. Bloomsburg and its university need a defined relationship where each institution knows its role clearly.

An extension of the town-gown issue present in Bloomsburg is the number of students living in downtown apartments. Off-campus student housing is at an all-time high in Bloomsburg; almost every building on Main Street houses students in apartments above first
floor businesses. This greatly affects town dynamics; nine months out of a year (fall and spring semesters), downtown is busy and lively with students making up the majority of downtown activity. Students also impact downtown traffic and parking. Main Street in Bloomsburg is considered by many Bloomsburg University students as the place to live; it is right in the heart of the town’s bar and coffee house scene and does not hold the stigma of living on campus.

2.3.2 Town Governance Problems

The downtown manager and other Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. board members have expressed displeasure with the conduct of town officials including the mayor and town council members. They believe that town officials do not give enough credit to the downtown and the importance it plays not only for the town of Bloomsburg, but the entire county. Bloomsburg is the Columbia County seat; the county courthouse is located on Main Street and people from all over Columbia County come to Bloomsburg’s downtown every day. DBI members and downtown merchants believe that something could be done to help downtown Bloomsburg become recognizable for something other than being home to the county courthouse and Bloomsburg University.

There have been some efforts recently on the part of town council to help revitalize not only downtown Bloomsburg, but the entire town. This includes a recent town logo and slogan campaign which is believed will help Bloomsburg become more recognizable as a cohesive town. Local designers put in bids to design a logo that encompasses the town’s most meaningful aspects; these logos were then put to a public survey which was announced in the local newspaper and online (through several town entities’ Facebook pages and the town’s website).
The winning logo (see Figure 4) features the town’s famous fountain located at Main and Market Streets. Along with a new logo, a new town slogan was also sought. Two choices were put to a public survey: “Bloom with us” and “Grow with us.” Neither option was met with much excitement. DBI officials, merchants, and customers agree that both options were too generic and did not capture the essence of the town. A new town slogan was never decided upon. This is an example of the discord felt between Bloomsburg town official and DBI coordinators. Run properly, a town slogan campaign would bring great attention to all that Bloomsburg has to offer; a slogan should reflect what is special about the town. A proper slogan should also incorporate the town’s “brand” (Roger Brooks International 2013).
CHAPTER 3
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

3.1 Organizations Dedicated to Revitalization

Across the country and even the developed world, downtown revitalization and redevelopment has become a trending topic. People want to see downtowns thrive and become a fixture of American society once more (Pennsylvania Downtown Center 2014). To help local governments achieve their goals of revitalization, there are organizations at both the state and federal level that offer grants and other forms of assistance to newly burgeoning downtown efforts.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation (the Trust) is an organization dedicated to the maintenance and protection of the nation’s historic sites. The Trust was signed into legislation by President Truman in 1949 and since that time has overseen the protection of hundreds of historic properties and buildings all over the country. While the organization and its efforts were originally funded through the government, today the Trust relies on contributions from the private sector (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2014).

In July of 2013 a subsidiary non-profit of the National Trust for Historic Preservation was officially launched. This new organization, National Main Street Center, Inc. (NMSC), has actually been operating under the guidance of the Trust since 1980, but has recently declared its independence. The NMSC is dedicated to the economic revitalization of commercial districts through preservation and its proven trademarked Main Street Four Point Approach. In its over 30 year history, NMSC has guided the development of main street programs in more than 1,600 communities nation-wide (NMSC 2014).
Created in 1987, Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC) serves as the governing body of local downtown groups across the state of Pennsylvania. They are dedicated to helping downtown communities prosper and enjoy continued success in the face of increasing suburban competition. PDC knows the value found in strolling down a street and visiting a favorite boutique. This organization helps communities across the state stay active and vibrant as places to live, work, and play. PDC is a non-profit group and is funded in part by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). This funding is provided as a contract through the DCED for PDC to provide technical assistance and training to downtown groups statewide. One of these groups is Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. whose downtown manager position is funded through PDC. Most recently, DBI received a grant from PDC for main street façade improvements; business owners were reimbursed for half of their costs for improvements to their buildings outward appearance (personal interview with downtown manager, June 2013). PDC also provides assistance to downtown organizations in the way of training programs that cover everything from the basics of downtown management to the more complicated skill of business recruitment (Pennsylvania Downtown Center 2014).

There are also several privately owned organizations that strive to help communities prosper. One such organization is Roger Brooks International which formerly operated under the name Destination Development International (DDI). Roger Brooks International works with entities primarily in the public sector to turn communities struggling to survive into thriving destinations. This organization strongly believes in community branding and marketing and offers resources to help community organizations rediscover themselves. Because Roger Brooks International is a private organization most of these resources require a membership fee. There are a few planning guides and brochures available for free through the company’s website.
Additionally, the Roger Brooks team itself can be hired to completely transform a community from top to bottom. Case studies of successfully rebranded communities can be found on the website (rogerbrooksinternational.com) (Roger Brooks International 2013).

The downtown revitalization movement is not unique to the United States; Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and even South Africa have all joined the cause of protecting the downtowns of their cities and towns (Anderson et al. 2009, Baker and Wood 2010, Hernandez and Jones 2005, Ruffin 2010). While policies differ internationally, downtowns across the world remain a vital part of their communities and determined individuals do not want to see that go away.

3.2 Case Studies

Downtown redevelopment, downtown revitalization, urban renewal, whatever it is known as, saving downtown communities from the edge of ruin is something that scholars and business professionals are engaged with all over the developed world. Downtowns are important in many regards; they are historically the civic, cultural, and social centers of a community (Pryor and Grossbart 2005). Since the downtown’s heyday in the early 1900s and the introduction of powerful competitors like shopping malls, shopping plazas, and big box stores, downtowns have been struggling to survive and hold onto their unique qualities (Robertson 1997). Instances of downtown revitalization in the United States are documented as early as the 1950s (Cohen 2007). America’s first truly thriving downtowns worked around the influence of large department stores; one of the first cases of urban renewal comes out of New Haven, Connecticut where the first federal urban renewal project helped to restructure the downtown’s retail core (Cohen 2007). Ultimately, the proprietor of this venture, Ed Logue, missed the entire point of
downtown revitalization; he tried to save the downtown by bringing in something decidedly suburban – a shopping mall, anchored by a three story Macy’s department store. This mall essentially shut out the small businesses that called downtown New Haven home. It is argued that Logue’s vision stemmed from nostalgia for a time when downtown department stores were enough to save a downtown’s retail district; instead he should have thought more creatively to develop a unique downtown experience and keep the small businesses already located there (Cohen 2007). Logue also partnered with Victor Gruen (who is more famous for his shopping mall ventures) and others to plan a redevelopment strategy for the city of Boston in 1961 (Cohen 2007). Gross wrote of revitalizing downtowns in 1978 and pointed to European models as the answer (Gross 1978).

Due to the relatively small size of Bloomsburg, case studies featured here focus on projects in towns of comparable size and population. Popular downtown revitalization studies have primarily focused on large cities; Robertson (1999) sought to remedy this by examining renewal efforts in smaller sized cities with populations between 25 thousand and 50 thousand. His study of small cities was based off of survey findings from 57 U.S. sites and in-depth analysis of five cities. He found that decentralization and the increasing use of the automobile and highway systems greatly affected the degree to which attention was given to these small cities’ downtown districts. Economic investments were made in the periphery of these small cities and often the once bustling main street was left to its own devices (Robertson 1999). Regardless of a city’s size, maintaining a strong sense of place is important. Robertson (1999) offers suggestions about how accomplish this.

The state of Mississippi has an active Main Street program. Like Pennsylvania Downtown Center, the Mississippi Downtown Development Association follows the National
Main Street Center’s Four Point Approach for economic revitalization of downtown districts (Kelly 1996). One Mississippi city that experienced an economic renewal in its downtown is Clarksdale which has a population of almost 18 thousand. This small city’s renaissance was spurred on by the activity of community minded citizens who identified their city’s most recognizable feature, blues music, and built a new identity out of that (Henshall 2012).

Several studies have been conducted that examine the positive effects of branding a downtown district (Beckman et al. 2013, Runyan 2006, Runyan and Huddleston 2006, Ryu and Swinney 2011, Ryu and Swinney 2012, Sneed et al. 2011). Creating a brand for downtown districts helps to improve the areas image and attracts visitors that would normally just pass by. Place branding for downtowns is composed of two ideas: image and positioning. Business mix and sense of place are also important for developing a cohesive downtown brand that will attract customers (Runyan and Huddleston 2006). Branding of small community downtowns requires the involvement of all downtown stakeholders, particularly business owners and residents. A branding effort should not be completed before gathering their insights and thoroughly examining their view points. Residents, visitors, and business owners in a downtown are able to quickly identify what it is that makes that downtown special; this is where place branding begins (Ryu and Swinney 2012). Branding should focus not only on the physical goods the downtown has to offer, but also the experiences; this is appealing to tourists and locals alike (Beckman et al. 2013). Once a brand is decided, efforts must be made to maintain that image. It is not enough to say the downtown is known for something, visitors have to experience it (Destination Development International 2012).

Many downtowns depend on the development of business improvement districts (BIDs) to carry them through economically difficult times (Hernandez and Jones 2005, Mitchell 2001,
Runyan and Huddleston 2006). While more common in large cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, BIDs show a changing face of downtown revitalization. Redevelopment efforts are no longer solely funded by government entities, instead, local stakeholders – business owners and concerned citizens – are privately funding such ventures. The development of BIDs is one popular way these private groups can effectively encourage change in their downtown (Mitchell 2001). Business Improvement Districts work because they allow a group of like-minded business and property owners to govern a geographical area of their own accord. BIDs differ from average downtown districts in that they can offer increased levels of security and cleanliness as well as more community minded events. This is achieved through added local taxes or fees for services in that particular geographical area (Mitchell 2001). Downtown Bloomsburg has not formed a BID, but the idea has been investigated by the downtown manager.

Of particular interest to this study are town-gown issues, especially how universities and their downtowns create meaningful, symbiotic relationships (Weill 2009). The academic literature on town-gown relationships is limited and no two studies are alike. Only one truly comparable case was discovered and even that is concerning a beach-side community facing comparable issues to those Bloomsburg has experienced with Block Party (Aggestam and Keenan 2007). Other case studies involve far larger universities and communities such as the University of Chicago and its expansion into neighboring low-income communities (Heaney 2013). Regardless, the idea of the engaged university almost perfectly describes what Bloomsburg University should strive to be. The engaged university as defined by Mayfield means that “faculty, students, and staff” are engaged “with interests outside of the university as it develops new ways to pursue its functions” (2001:232). In Bloomsburg, some aspects of the university/town relationship are exactly where they need to be, while others are not (Mayfield
Bloomsburg University is a research institution that prides itself on providing a quality education to its students and while some of this research does involve activity within the town and surrounding communities, it would seem that the university is largely concerned with itself and its own success. Historically, universities and the towns that host them have been involved in conflicts both large (medieval riots) and small (campus protests) (Brockliss 2000). This has not stopped conversations about creating university-community partnerships; rather it demonstrates the importance of collaboration and support from both parties (Prins 2005).

3.3 Theoretical Implications

3.3.1 Group Identity

Those living in and around Bloomsburg have a very strong connection to the town as exhibited through both merchant and customer interviews. Bloomsburg was often referred to as “my town” and “home” even for those interviewees not living in town proper. Concerning downtown issues, interviewees conveyed an even stronger emotional connection. They remembered social functions, historic downtown events, and even shared stories about the town passed down through their own family. Bloomsburg residents exhibit a strong group, or social, identity. Chen and Li (2009) define social identity as a person’s sense of self which is derived from that person’s perceived membership in social groups. Social identity theory (SIT) was developed by psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner as a way to understand intergroup discrimination (1979). They believe that people classify themselves and others into various social categories, including organizational membership, religion, age, gender, and education level (Ashforth and Mael 1989). This categorization affects the way people perceive themselves and others (Chen and Li 2009). Tajfel and Turner’s definition of social identity involves three
components: categorization, identification, and comparison. We categorize ourselves and others into predefined groups, we then associate ourselves with one another through either “ingroups” with which we do identify with or “outgroups” which we do not identify with. Finally, we compare the group with which we identify to other groups and ultimately create a bias in which we see our group as more favorable, and perhaps, superior (Chen and Li 2009, Morita and Servatka 2013). Anthropologist Mary Douglas discusses similar distinctions in the form of “groups” and “grids” as outlined in *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (1970). She relates the formation of distinctive social groups to the formation of symbolic codes (1970).

Bloomsburg residents and those involved with the downtown have self-identified and created a social group around their ideals and shared views. Membership in these social groups helps to answer the question of “who am I?” (Ashforth and Mael 1989, Stets and Burke 2000). For Bloomsburg residents this answer is made easier through the creation of various groups who are all concerned with the downtown in some way. There are those that form an actual defined group, Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc., those that belong to a group of business owners and landlords, and those concerned citizens who become involved independently of any defined group. All downtown stakeholders identify with one another and form an “ingroup” (Chen and Li 2009). This larger group drives the downtown revitalization movement in Bloomsburg.

While many Bloomsburg University students live downtown and participate in some aspects of downtown life, they are not wholly a part of the larger group created by downtown Bloomsburg stakeholders. Bloomsburg University students belong to their own prescribed group that is invariably larger than the downtown and has more far reaching impacts. This makes Bloomsburg University and its constituents (students, faculty, and staff) part of a different “outgroup.” While some university representatives may be members of both the downtown
group and the university group, the majority of Bloomsburg townspeople fail to see the
distinction. A lack of understanding and comprehension creates a bias whereby downtown
constituents (group members) are hesitant to accept the university’s role in the revitalization of
the downtown (Chen and Li 2009). Truthfully, one person can belong to many social groups and
identify with each one differently; this creates tensions and can lead to an extension of time and
resources (Ashforth and Mael 1989). For instance, Bloomsburg University has a large commuter
population; many of these students have lived in the area around Bloomsburg for most of their
lives. This creates a conflicting identity for the student; are they town residents or university
students? One could perceive this unique identity as being more beneficial – resident-students
are more invested in the success of the downtown because it is where they grew up. This dual
identity gives them the power and focus to bring true change to the downtown.

3.3.2 Anthropology and Consumption

This study builds on and is situated within anthropological studies of consumption.
Today’s modern consumption driven society first emerged in the 18th century when the wealthy
discovered new ways to be seen; strolling to and from shops in bustling city streets making
purchases that would only reinforce their status (Stobart 2010). Anthropologists have long been
interested in consumption practices, although the focus has traditionally been on non-modern
societies and the way goods and services are exchanged to convey symbolic meaning (Belk
1995, Miller 1995b). The first displays of modern consumption in the nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries were largely symbolic; the well-to-do used shopping plazas and downtown
streets to display their wealth and social status (Stobart 2010). This has carried over into the
modern era and now it has become commonplace for everyone to display their social status through shopping and the products they consume (Belk 1995, Stobart 2010).

This new era of mass consumption has not been well received by many scholars who largely believe that consumption is a practice steeped in capitalism and if allowed to further progress unchecked could harm the social order (Zukin and Maguire 2004). Still others have taken to creating theories to understand consumption. Anthropologist Daniel Miller has written extensively about material culture and shopping behavior in the modern age. In *A Theory of Shopping* (1998), Miller theorizes that shopping and consumption is all about fulfilling needs as they relate to others. When discussing modern consumption and shopping, Miller notes that women are those most often making purchases, which reflects the condition of the modern household where women provide for their families and do the majority of shopping (1998).

While our modern consumption driven society was growing, most anthropologists and social scientists turned a blind eye; they were interested in the “other,” but did not realize the “other” could be found within their own society (Miller 1995b). Scholars finally began recognizing the implications of an anthropology of consumption as early as the 1970s. Mary Douglas and Pierre Bourdieu (most recognized for his idea of “capital” (1990)) were two of the first social scientists to concern themselves with the idea of modern consumption and what that meant for the world at large (Miller 1995a, 1995b). This new anthropology of consumption really emerged in the mid-1980s to early 1990s with Miller at the forefront (Graeber 2011, Miller 1995a). He, along with Arjun Appadurai, Jonathan Freidman and others, sought to truly understand why people place so much value on material objects. These anthropologists understood that the discipline could no longer ignore the cultural implications that modern consumption had on our societies (Graeber 2011). Furthermore, they could not look down at
consumption and material culture as something to be reviled, but rather as something that needed to be understood if there was to be any hope for controlling it (Douglas and Isherwood 1996). Before this realization, anthropologists tended to focus their research efforts largely on traditional societies and cultures devoid of “material goods” (Miller 1995a). Consumption is not the “erosion of culture,” it represents a new chapter in the discipline of anthropology (Miller 1995a:156).

It would not be too much to say that the modern, applied branch of anthropology that this study owes itself to would not exist without the pioneering work of Douglas, Bourdieu, Miller, and their fellow anthropologists. The paradigm shift experienced in the discipline during the 1970s and onward led the way for newer and more cutting edge approaches to the practice of anthropology (Miller 1995a, 1995b). Even so, anthropological studies concerning modern consumption in shopping malls and downtown districts are lacking. As evidenced in Douglas and Isherwood’s *The World of Goods* (1996), anthropology can easily be paired with other disciplines (here economics) to deepen the understanding of both and tell a richer story (Miller 1995a, 1995b). Marketing, economics, design, urban development, and other disciplines would do well to partner with anthropology and put its research methodology and rich history to use (Miller 1995a). Anthropologists have a unique way of viewing the world around them; they investigate beyond what is on the surface to bring deeper meaning to their findings.
4.1 Data Collection

Three data collection techniques were used over the course of this research. In-depth interviews with both merchants and town customers provided rich insights into the problems faced by the town; participant-observation at downtown events allowed the researcher to see how the town was used by its inhabitants and visitors alike; and customer surveys allowed an overall view of the type of people frequenting the downtown and their habits. Before data collection could begin all data collection methods were reviewed by the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board to ensure the protection of human subjects. IRB approval for the project was granted on May 7, 2013.

During the planning stages of this project, many different data collection techniques were discussed including shop-alongs with customers, intercept interviewing, and photo diaries. It was determined before the final proposal and IRB submission that due to time constraints and concerns about the ability to recruit participants that only customer surveys and merchant and customer interviews would be used. With more time and resources, any of the above mentioned techniques would have offered richer, more personal findings.

4.1.1 Customer Surveys

The first research tool to be released was an eleven question customer survey (see Appendix A). This survey addressed general demographic questions concerning downtown Bloomsburg residents and customers. The survey was available online through
kwiksurveys.com; it was launched on May 22, 2013 and shared on Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc.’s Facebook page, DBI’s email list serve, and my personal Facebook page. A snowball sampling effect then took place as people completed the survey and shared it for others to complete. The survey was shared three times after its first release in an attempt to entice people who did not complete it the first time around. The first page of the online survey presented an informed consent notice; it explained their rights as a research participant and allowed them to leave the survey without completing it. This section also provided the survey taker with my contact information should they have any questions regarding the project.

Surveying was also completed “on-the-street” in Downtown Bloomsburg by student volunteers from Bloomsburg University. To recruit Bloomsburg University students to help with data collection, a letter explaining the scope of the project and what would be expected of student research assistants was sent via email to the Bloomsburg University Center for Community Research and Consulting Director, Dr. Heather Feldhaus; this email was then forwarded to Bloomsburg University professors who were asked to share this research opportunity with their students. Two students, Jimmy Muwombi and Shannon Sursely, expressed interest in helping with data collection for this project. Both students were upperclassmen with an interest in anthropology and were looking for opportunities to expand their research experience. They completed the required IRB training before any discussion of data collection began. A meeting with both students was held at the University’s Andruss Library to discuss what would be expected of them; this meeting took place on June 5, 2013. Each student was given ten paper copies of the survey and a progress meeting was set for the following week. A follow-up email was sent after the meeting; this email included a summary of our discussion as well as copies of both the survey file and the project proposal (for them to use.
as a reference tool while interacting with customers). Within the first week, the students collected surveys from 18 downtown customers. After a brief discussion of their experiences we decided a weekly meeting was not necessary (as no problems arose) and an end date for survey collection of July 12, 2013 was set. Both Jimmy and Shannon primarily collected surveys downtown on weekday afternoons. As instructed, they did not loiter outside of businesses and asked permission from the business owner before actively surveying inside of the establishment. Each customer who completed the survey was presented with an informed consent notice which explained their rights as a research participant; the students were also expected to explain a little bit about the project before asking people to complete the survey. If any questions about the project were posed that the students could not answer, they were instructed to provide the customer with my contact information; I did not receive any phone calls or emails.

A small number of surveys were also given to business owners to set out in their stores. Originally, it was planned to give surveys to all of the store owners in the downtown and ask them to set up a table or area of their store for customers to complete surveys. It became clear after visiting the first few downtown stores that doing this might not be useful; foot traffic in many stores is lacking and many of the downtown merchants gave the air of not wanting to be bothered with the added task of collecting surveys. The few stores that did put out surveys only returned three completed.

The last section of the paper survey consisted of an area where customers had the option of leaving their contact information for the researcher. This section was completely optional and was meant to be a recruiting method for customer interview participants. It was made clear that contact information provided would be kept secure and would only be used in the event that the customer was selected for a customer interview. As an incentive a $10 downtown Bloomsburg
gift certificate was offered to customers selected for an in-depth interview. A space for the customer’s name, telephone number, and email address was provided on the paper survey; 19 people provided contact information, of those, 12 provided both an email address and telephone number, 5 provided only an email address, and 2 provided only a telephone number.

Customer interview participant recruitment was also attempted through the online survey, but due to the restrictions of the web application, those completing the survey were unable to provide their contact information. Instead, it was discussed in the informed consent notice to contact me should they be interested in being interviewed. Only one customer contacted me via email; this was during the initial release of the survey online.

Very few problems were encountered during the course of customer survey collection. The total number of surveys collected from online and paper sources was 114 which corresponded with the goal of 100 to 150 total surveys. Using the surveys as a customer interviewee recruitment tool proved fruitful, although a better solution should have been sought for surveys taken online. Perhaps a different survey website would have provided embeddable input boxes in their programming; this would have allowed the online surveys to have a similar format and layout to the paper surveys and would have let customers provide their contact information. This may have been easier for customers to do than contact the researcher of their own volition.

4.1.2 Merchant Interviews

Merchant interviews were the largest and most important component of data collection for this project. Merchants in downtown Bloomsburg deal with the problems of the downtown first hand and so had very valuable insights into the root of the problems and potential solutions.
Before contacting any merchants regarding interviews I wrote an email letter explaining the scope of the project and what would be expected of them during the interview process. This email was then sent to all of downtown Bloomsburg’s merchants and business owners by DBI director Adrienne Mael. I also sat down with Ms. Mael for several meetings in which we discussed the attributes of interviewing different downtown merchants and business owners; she provided me with a starting off point, giving me names of business owners and warning me of those with less than friendly dispositions. Undeterred, I was resolved to interview a representative sample of downtown merchants, even including those that were warned against. With Ms. Mael’s insights I went into the merchant interview portion of the research well prepared.

Once IRB approval was granted I set out to introduce myself to Bloomsburg’s downtown retail store owners. My first introductions began the week of May 20, 2013; my personal preference was to meet the store owner face to face, introduce myself, mention the email that was sent out to them, and then explain more about the project before asking if they would be interested in completing an interview at a later date. I conducted my first interview on May 24 and successfully scheduled four others for the week of May 27. Most of the merchants I approached were very nice and accommodating; a few were reluctant to be interviewed, but seemed to understand the importance of my research for the town.

Interviews were typically scheduled a week in advance and were planned almost entirely at the merchants’ discretion; I wanted the interview to work into their schedule as seamlessly as possible. Most of the merchants wrote down our interview date and time on a calendar or programmed it into their phone. One told me he would “remember my face” and to just come back some time the next week at a certain time; another just wrote down my name in his calendar.
and had no idea who I was when I showed up on the date and time we had agreed upon (after re-explaining myself we continued with the interview). Another did set a reminder on his phone calendar regarding our interview, but when I showed up, he was nowhere to be seen – his employees told me he had just left for an “emergency.” I waited around for about a half hour while they called him to find out where he was. I immediately got the impression that he bailed on our interview, so I decided to just leave and come back another time to reschedule.

Surprisingly, our eventual interview provided me with many great insights.

All of the interviews were audio recorded and took place in the merchants’ stores. Before beginning the interview I discussed the merchant’s rights as a research participant and presented them with an informed consent form requiring their signature before any questions would be asked. It was also made clear that the interview would be paused should a customer come into the store. Each interview needed to be paused at least once due to customer “interruption”; one interview had to be paused five times due to customer “interruption.” Despite the disruption to the interviews, I was glad to see customers coming into these downtown businesses.

A detailed, IRB-approved interview guide was used during each merchant interview. Each question was planned to address the primary research goals and the flow of the interview guide was written so that natural topics of conversation would work into it (see guide in Appendix B). The interview guide was used as a reference and was not relied upon during interviews; only during lulls in conversation was the guide consulted.

Twelve total merchant interviews were conducted from May to July 2013. Interview times ran from one hour thirty minutes to ten minutes. As stated before, all of these interviews took place in the merchant’s store; I was invited to sit down for half of the interviews with the interviewee pulling up a chair next to me. For the other six interviews I stood at the merchants
The interviews at the pay counter; on average, these interviews were shorter as I perceived an unwillingness from the participant to take time out of their daily schedule to speak with me. The merchants who stood were quick to answer and did not elaborate much on answers when prompted. Nevertheless, I found all of my merchant participants could identify a number of problems with the town of Bloomsburg and expressed a need for change and revitalization.

Merchant interviews provided a wealth of data and valuable insights into the challenges faced by the stakeholders in the town of Bloomsburg. Many merchants had suggestions for further research and were very interested in my overall findings. Several of the merchants I interviewed also hold positions in local government or town activity boards, so their interest was especially heightened.

4.1.3 Customer Interviews

As previously mentioned, customer interviews were conducted to gather data regarding downtown Bloomsburg visitors and residents and to get a better idea of the overall public view of Bloomsburg’s downtown. The 19 survey participants who indicated a willingness to be interviewed were contacted via email. A short message was included in the email, outlining the reason for the email (that they had completed the survey and indicated that they would like to participate in an email) and included my contact information and research credentials. Customers were messaged shortly after I received their completed survey from the student research assistants; this was typically no more than a week after the survey was actually completed by the participant. Responses were slow to come in; none of the subjects responded to the first emails sent. Ultimately, only five people responded and agreed to be interviewed. This was half of the original goal set for customer interviews, but time was running short and I
felt that the customers who were interviewed comprised a good representative sample of downtown Bloomsburg shoppers. After completing the merchant interviews it also became clear that not only are the merchants of downtown Bloomsburg business owners with a financial stake in the town, they are also concerned citizens with a personal stake in the success of the town. Additionally, similar concerns arose during both the customer and the merchant interviews.

Once customers responded via email and acknowledged that they would still like to be interviewed, a date and time was set for a face to face meeting. The first person I interviewed originally wanted to be interviewed over the phone, but I explained that it would then be difficult for them to receive their $10 downtown gift certificate. Typically, interviews were scheduled during the afternoon hours and were held at one of two local coffee shops. These coffee shops provided a secure public location for the interviews to take place and were quiet enough for the audio recorder to pick up our conversation. Customer interviews began the week of June 24, 2013 and were completed the second week of August 2013.

As with the merchant interviews, a separate customer interview guide was created to ensure all of the project’s research questions were addressed (see Appendix C). Interviews ran from forty minutes to fifteen minutes. Each participant showed interest in the town in their own way, and each had a special connection with Bloomsburg’s downtown. It became clear through each interview that downtown Bloomsburg means a great deal to people from all over the area. Not all of the customers interviewed lived in Bloomsburg; one lived in downtown Bloomsburg, two lived outside of the town, but still in the Bloomsburg zip code, and two lived in completely different boroughs bordering the town of Bloomsburg. Meeting in downtown Bloomsburg provided a central location for both the participant and the researcher.
As stated previously, customer interview participants were given a $10 downtown Bloomsburg gift certificate for their involvement in the project. The gift certificate was given to the interviewee at the beginning of the interview after the project was explained and the informed consent form was signed. All gift certificates were provided by Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. and could be used for purchasing at any downtown store or restaurant. Gift certificates were included as an added incentive for customers who agreed to be interviewed and served as compensation for the time and effort taken by the interviewees.

While only five customer interviews were completed, the data collected from these encounters brought numerous issues regarding Bloomsburg’s downtown to light. The interviews also provided a nice contrast to the more business-like approach the merchants took when talking about the downtown district. Each participant has a different view of the downtown and utilizes its offerings in different ways. This is reflected in the demographics of each participant and their personal story with the town of Bloomsburg.

4.1.4 Participant-Observation

Participant-observation was another valuable tool used to assess downtown Bloomsburg’s atmosphere. I visited downtown Bloomsburg for either interviews or meetings at least twice a week for the duration of the data collection period. During my time downtown I would make general observations, including the amount of foot and car traffic, parking space occupation, and the number of people shopping in downtown retail stores. As much of the research took place during the summer months, it was determined that any customer traffic observed would be less than that observed during the months while Bloomsburg University regular semester classes were in session.
Any interaction with downtown Bloomsburg merchants and other customers was used to gather insights into the downtown. This included time spent downtown as a customer myself as well as time spent waiting for interviewees to arrive at the aforementioned coffee shops. One observation that was readily apparent was the level of camaraderie between business owners and their regular customers. Observations were also made at several events held downtown throughout the duration of the data collection period. Events during which participant-observation was conducted include (1) Renaissance Jamboree, (2) Brewsburg, (3) Artfest, (4) Friday Night Shopping, and (5) First Fridays.

1) Renaissance Jamboree

The first event I attended was the downtown’s annual Renaissance Jamboree, held this year on Saturday April 27, 2013\(^1\), a type of street fair that attracts local and non-local vendors alike to set up booths for a day along Main Street. The downtown’s four-lane main street is shut down to traffic, which is re-routed around the festival. This fair is a great opportunity for

\(^1\) Since this event was held before IRB approval was granted, I only attended the event and did not speak to anyone or collect any data other than general observations.
downtown businesses to showcase their offerings and open their doors to the foot traffic that is attracted by the festival. This year, the Jamboree was held on a beautiful spring day and was attended by over 1,000 town residents and visitors (see Figure 5). Attendance to the event is free and free parking is provided at the Bloomsburg Fairgrounds, with shuttle service all day. Event vendors pay a fee to rent a space along Main Street. The Renaissance Jamboree is a great opportunity for people to experience all that downtown Bloomsburg has to offer and more.

While the Renaissance Jamboree fills downtown Bloomsburg’s Main Street with people, it is difficult to say that there is a great benefit to downtown retail businesses. Visitors may walk the streets, but never step foot inside a building. A reason behind this could be that street vendor booths were set up directly in front of downtown buildings and could have been seen as blocking downtown businesses. At best, the Renaissance Jamboree brings exposure to Bloomsburg’s downtown, but does not directly benefit downtown merchants.

2) Brewsburg

Brewsburg is a local craft beer and wine tasting event sponsored and directly benefitting Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. The event was held the evening of Saturday June 29, 2013 in one of downtown Bloomsburg’s oldest buildings, the Caldwell Consistory. Tickets could be purchased ahead of time or at the door and included admission to the event, which showcased live local entertainment as well as voucher tickets to redeem on samples of beer, wine, or food, all from local establishments. This event appealed to a wide range of people; many were young and gathered in groups. From my observations it seemed that people made plans to meet at the event and spend the night enjoying the beverage selections and live music. Others used it as a date night; I saw many couples walking through the main room hand in hand. While this event directly benefitted DBI financially, it did not provide much exposure for the downtown’s retail
businesses. Event goers were confined to an indoor space and a small sectioned off outside space and the event began around the same time most downtown retail businesses were locking their doors for the day. A benefit could be seen whereby event goers will look back fondly on their event experience and from there decide to visit downtown Bloomsburg during normal business hours.

3) Artfest

Artfest is another annual event held downtown. It features local artisans and allows them to sell their wares and advertise their services. This event was also held outdoors, but only occupied the length of three town blocks off of Main Street. Again, vendors paid to occupy a space along the street. Traditionally, this event was held in conjunction with an Art Walk-in, where local artists would install their paintings or other works within downtown businesses. Customers could then both see the art pieces as well as the merchandise being sold by downtown retail businesses. While on paper this sounds like a very effective way of getting people into downtown businesses, both Ms. Mael and the downtown merchants I spoke to did not see a direct benefit of showcasing artwork in downtown retail businesses.

As it was done this past summer, held Saturday August 3, 2013, Artfest drew people downtown for the purpose of seeing local vendors; since the event was isolated to a side street off of Main Street, exposure for downtown retail businesses was limited. It would be safe to say that, much like the Renaissance Jamboree and Brewsburg, Artfest sheds a good light on the town, but does not directly benefit downtown retail businesses.

4) Friday Night Shopping

Every Friday from the beginning of June to the end of August downtown retailers provided extended shopping hours for customers. Most retailers agreed to stay open until 8:00
pm on Fridays; this allowed customers who were unable to visit the downtown during normal operating hours (due to work or other restrictions) to shop and experience the downtown. A cross promotion was also provided for these Fridays where patrons could receive ten percent off at select downtown restaurants or stores with proof of a previous downtown purchase that same day. DBI hoped that having downtown retailers open later on Friday nights would bring increased traffic to downtown businesses, including the downtown’s restaurants and would prompt those not typically able to visit downtown shops to do so.

5) First Fridays

Another series of events put on by Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. were collectively known as First Fridays. Special downtown events were planned for the first Fridays of the months of June, July, and August. These events were held on the same side street as Artfest, except for the last, which was moved indoors due to rain. Each monthly event had a theme which helped attract townspeople to attend the events. June’s event, held June 7, 2013, was a kind of children’s fair; there was face painting and tables set up for children to draw. The downtown’s most well-known children’s store also gave away balloons and candy. July’s event, held July 5, was patriotically themed. Event goers could register to enter a watermelon eating contest for prizes and again there was face painting and door prizes. August 2 was the date of the last First Friday event; held the day before Artfest, this event started the “Arts” weekend downtown.

Unfortunately, the event was moved indoors, and so did not have the exposure that the previous outdoor events had. For all three First Friday events, attendance was low, but those that were in attendance and participated seemed to have a good time. These events were aimed at being family friendly and many people with small children attended.
4.1.5 Field Notes

Although not a huge part of the data collection process I did take field notes after most data collection instances. After interviewing participants I would take a few minutes and jot down anything that came up during the interview that I thought would be of importance. I also took field notes during participant-observation; any special observances I made would be noted. The field notes I kept allowed me to remember what was on my mind at the moment of data collection. Although I tried to transcribe interviews soon after they were completed it was oftentimes difficult. Field notes helped me to review any connections I might have made and forgotten about at the time of the interview.

4.2 Data Analysis

To analyze all of the data collected into actionable insights, typical ethnographic techniques were used. Merchant and customer interviews were transcribed and coded using qualitative data analysis software. Survey data were analyzed using spreadsheet software as well as the quantitative analysis software SPSS. Findings were compiled after data analysis was completed.

4.2.1 Transcription of Interviews

By far the most time consuming, yet insightful data analysis tool was the transcription of the merchant and customer interviews. I had planned to transcribe each interview before performing the next, but quickly found that to be nearly impossible as each interview took almost a full day to transcribe and some weeks I had interviews every day. Transcription software (such as Dragon) was not used; I simply played the recorded interviews on Windows Media Player,
listened intently, and typed as quickly and efficiently as I could into Microsoft Office. The pause and play buttons on my computer keyboard were quite helpful as I could simply pause the recording whenever I needed to catch up my typing. I also used headphones so I could be immersed completely in listening to and transcribing the interviews.

Transcribing in such a meticulous way proved to be very insightful; I quickly identified possible themes throughout the interviews and was able to adjust future interviews to better address important issues that emerged. While transcribing each interview I kept in mind the original research questions and how each individual was addressing them. This helped to ground my process so I could stay focused on the project and the important issues I was set out to uncover. Also while transcribing I began a list of codes which helped to ease the next step in the data analysis process.

4.2.2 Atlas.ti/Analysis of Qualitative Data

Coding and the discovery of themes was a very important step in my research process. Coding really began after the transcription of my first three interviews; at that point I felt I had a nice handle on my interview technique and could identify emerging patterns in each interview. To start, I created a list of possible codes in a Word document. These codes were based on the study’s original research questions as well as anything else of significance that arose during the interview and subsequent transcription process. Once all interviews were transcribed I exported each into the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti. Since merchant and customer interviews were different, each group of interviews (twelve merchant and five customer) were coded separately. Although merchant and customer interviews each had their own code lists, some of
the more important and telling findings about the downtown did overlap between the two sets of interviews.

The use of Atlas.ti streamlined the coding process. I would read through each transcribed interview and when I came across something I had already identified as a code, or something completely new (in which case a new code was created), I would highlight the quotation and link it to a one or two word code. Once the first round of coding was completed I went back into each document (Hermeneutic Unit) and re-read each interview a second time to assure myself that nothing of significance was passed over. This entire process took about a week of serious dedication to complete.

From these individual codes emerged themes from which I could begin to develop answers to the research questions outlined as well as other questions that were not part of the original proposal, but arose throughout the course of the research itself. Almost 40 codes total were used to analyze customer interviews, while almost 50 were used to analyze merchant interviews. To identify and analyze the most important themes to come out of the interviews, a list of the codes that came up most often was compiled – this shows that they were at the top of mind of the most interviewees and therefore essential to understanding the problems at hand.

Some of the most frequently appearing codes included advertising, Bloomsburg University, brand, community, suggestions for improvement, and meaning of town. These most frequently appearing codes became ‘themes’ themselves while codes occurring less frequently were merged with other like codes to create other ‘themes’. For example, a ‘special events’ theme was created from the Artwalk, Friday Night shopping, Halloween, Renaissance Jamboree, and special events codes. Similarly, the ‘advertising’ theme was expanded with the addition of
Combining codes created more coherent, involved ‘themes’ from which I could draw my findings.

4.2.3 Excel/SPSS for Analysis of Quantitative Data

While the customer and merchant interviews provided the bulk of the data from which answers were gathered, customer surveys were also used to form an overall picture of the condition of the downtown’s retail. Analysis of customer surveys was completed using a combination of Microsoft Excel’s spreadsheet functions and IBM SPSS statistics software. Quantitative data was not the focus of this research, but the customer surveys were designed to reveal the places that customers visit the most downtown and how they spend their time downtown.

Customer surveys completed online through the kwiksurveys.com website were readily available to download in Microsoft Excel format. Each question became a column while each response became a row – while this was somewhat difficult to sift through at first, once I got my bearings the simple spreadsheet functions were easy enough to handle. Customer surveys collected on the street were manually added to Excel; this process was somewhat time consuming, but once completed made the quantitative analysis process easier. From here I was able to find percentages, make charts and graphics, and develop an overall better understanding of the customer survey data.

The SPSS software was used in a limited manner. As this research focused largely on qualitative data and not quantitative data I found it unnecessary to use in-depth analysis techniques on the customer survey data. The Excel spreadsheet created from the survey data was exported to SPSS and cleaned up to be more usable. SPSS allowed me to run cross analysis of
survey questions as well as pinpoint demographic groups to certain actions. The most used functions in SPSS were those for discovering simple statistics and frequencies.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

After the analysis of all 114 customer surveys, 12 merchant interviews, and 5 customer interviews a number of key findings were identified. As discussed in the previous chapter, these findings emerged from the codes and themes discovered during analysis. They include the impact of advertising, concerns with downtown parking, ideas about the town brand, the Bloomsburg University and town relationship, the importance of customer insights, feelings regarding Bloomsburg, the East vs. West (Main Street) debate, the impact of special events, and sources of competition. It is important to note that while customer and merchant interviews were written and conducted specially for each group, most of the following findings pertain to both interview groups. One of the first insights discovered when analyzing this research is that merchants are really customers of the downtown themselves and so hold special views regarding the issues surrounding their downtown. Downtown merchants work, shop, and in some cases, live downtown so they are most fully immersed and invested in the success of the downtown. The downtown merchants I spoke to are passionate about their town and want to see it succeed and become something truly special.

5.1.1 The Impact of Advertising

The topic of advertising was discussed thoroughly during each interview. Merchants report using traditional methods of advertising via the local newspaper, the Press Enterprise, and the local radio stations, including WHLM-FM which broadcasts from its studio right on the
downtown’s main street. A popular resource among interviewed merchants are the town advertising packages put together by downtown director Adrienne Mael; these packages offer group pricing for both newspaper and radio advertising. Many merchants believe it is the best way to get the most exposure for their money. The overall advertisement will be for downtown Bloomsburg, but individual merchants can choose to pay a certain amount to guarantee their business will be mentioned in the piece a certain number of times. One merchant describes the dialogue that typically accompanies these advertising packages as follows: “You know, just kind of ‘come to downtown Bloomsburg. Walk up and down the pretty street, look at the fountain, shop our shops’.”

Merchants are willing to put their money into these group advertisements because of their cost effectiveness and ease of use. Ms. Mael handles all of the work with the media outlet while the individual merchants just have to decide how much they want to contribute. Some merchants did talk of putting their own advertising packages together independently of DBI, but the use of this advertising technique has dwindled.

Each business owner sets their own advertising budget for the year. A few have a dedicated amount set aside for advertising purchases while the majority of those interviewed treat advertising expenses as a normal business expense. Two of the newest business owners downtown said they do not have a dedicated advertising budget because they cannot afford it but said they would consider adding a budget to their business plan for the next year depending on their success. Those that do have a dedicated budget for advertising previously used it to purchase ad space in the Press Enterprise, but are now reporting a decline in usage, citing that newspaper ads have become too expensive and less effective. A downtown business owner that has operated for over 40 years explained, “we do occasionally advertise in the Press Enterprise
newspaper, but the Press Enterprise has really gotten to be, I think, quite expensive. And the reach doesn’t seem to be all that significant.”

In the face of less effective traditional advertising techniques, downtown merchants are turning to the internet and social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. A few downtown merchants have websites dedicated to their businesses. Of those, only two have the capability to sell directly from the site. Others’ websites are purely informational, providing contact information and other information about the business. Those that have a website outsourced the design of that site to programmers; one frustrated merchant told a story of paying a designer for a website, but not receiving the results they expected.

The Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. website, visitbloomsburg.com, was another topic of conversation during customer and merchant interviews. While all but one of the five customers interviewed talked about visiting the DBI website, all of the merchants discussed the confusing layout and incomplete information on the organization’s webpage.

The use of the internet and social media is becoming increasingly important for effectively advertising to large numbers of people. The internet has also changed how businesses interact with consumers as well as other businesses (Downtown Development International 2013, Papasolomou and Melanthiou 2012, Rapp et al. 2013). All of downtown Bloomsburg’s merchants have a Facebook site, but use them to varying degrees; they find it to be a cheaper advertising tool that reaches a wider and more diverse range of people than both the local newspaper and radio. The use of social media is something that DBI strongly encourages; the downtown director has even been actively involved in helping some merchants set up their Facebook fan page. Also of note is how being active on social media allows downtown businesses to show their support for one another. DBI’s Facebook, run by the downtown
manager, follows all of downtown Bloomsburg’s businesses and shares important posts with their followers; this increases the reach of an individual merchants’ post.

Facebook is the most popular social media platform among downtown merchants, but some are beginning to use Twitter as well. Merchants find the small fees involved in running a Facebook fan page worthwhile and a few have gotten quite involved, even posting to their site every day. Still others are less actively involved and actually let their children or spouses run their businesses fan page; one said that they simply do not have the time to be as involved as they need to be. It is important to remember that using social media requires an increased level of involvement on the part of the merchant; it is oftentimes not enough to simply post a promotion or provide information about your store, active engagement with the customer is crucial. One merchant understands it as follows: “Today we have to be so much more dynamic with what we show on the internet.” Engaging with the public and getting a conversation started is the most effective way to get people to remember your business; merely posting about products and promotions is oftentimes not enough to draw in customers. Merchants must remember to be active and listen to their “fans” (Hersant 2011, Papasolomou and Melanthiou 2012).

Additionally, merchants and customers alike cite word of mouth as being helpful for reaching people who are not exposed to any traditional forms of advertising. Potential customers will hear of downtown events or in store promotions from their friends and then turn to the internet or another source for details. Easy access to information is paramount; keeping websites and social media pages up-to-date with current hours, store location and phone number, and promotions is crucial. Sometimes word of mouth is the only way that people hear of sales or downtown events and if that is the case, they need to be able to refer to a reputable source. In
some cases, customers said they would just call the business for information instead of relying on an online source.

Another form of advertising discussed during merchant and customer interviews was the use of window signs and window displays. One merchant that I spoke to said putting together a nice window display was all they did in the way of advertising; another said they always tried to make their window look inviting and keep it current with the seasons and any holidays. Merchants also post signs in their windows detailing special events and sales. Customers interviewed admitted to not usually paying attention to store windows unless they are downtown specifically to shop. Those just walking by are not typically drawn into a store by window displays and unless signs detailing events are large enough to catch someone’s eye, people will not stop to shop. One customer explained, “if they’ve been in shops or in shop windows I unfortunately haven’t taken notice, and I haven’t seen any kind of flyers or anything.”

5.1.2 Downtown Parking Concerns

Parking has long been a topic of conversation in Bloomsburg’s downtown and no doubt a problem that plagues many towns just like it (Edwards 2006). The opinions of downtown Bloomsburg merchants are divided on this issue. Some see it as a real problem while others argue that it is merely a perceived problem and no different than parking in a shopping mall parking lot and walking throughout the interior of the mall (in terms of distance walked). One merchant described the way they see the problem, “if you perceive walking 100 feet to a store as a parking problem then yes, we have a parking problem, if you perceive not being able to get a spot immediately out in front of the store you’re trying to shop at then yes, that’s a problem.”
Regardless of the answer to this question, merchants do wish parking was easier for their customers, because if parking is a problem in the eyes of the customer, it is a problem for the merchant. They do not want anything to deter people from visiting the downtown.

Merchants did discuss some of the reasons why parking in the downtown is such a topic of contention and some believe it has to do with Bloomsburg University and the number of university students living downtown. This includes a recent re-zoning of downtown parking lots to permit-only spaces which was done to accommodate the growing number of university students renting apartments downtown. Many metered parking spaces were eliminated and turned into permit-only spaces in the downtown’s two largest parking lots. Merchants had plenty of suggestions, one even proposed that students not be allowed to park their cars in downtown lots, instead parking would be provided outside of the downtown and a shuttle service would be available to transport students to and from their parked vehicles. This, of course, is not a feasible solution; students are legally renting their apartments downtown and by doing so are eligible for a permit to park just like any other town resident. Another merchant mentioned the possible use of parking tokens for repeat downtown visitors; participating retail stores would be able to give parking tokens to their loyal customers which would offset the cost of feeding a meter. The perspective that Bloomsburg University is to blame for the town’s parking woes was only held by half of the downtown merchants interviewed and none of the customers mentioned Bloomsburg University as being a culprit.

Surprisingly, the customers interviewed did not have a lot to say regarding parking in downtown Bloomsburg. Overall, they wish parking throughout the downtown would be more consistent. Signs are posted on downtown streets so those driving into town can identify designated parking areas, but these signs are small and some customers expressed interest in
posting larger, more descriptive signs. Customers expressed frustration about downtown lot zoning restrictions and permit only parking spots; parking lot signs may point to a lot with limited visitor spaces. This leads to “cruising” for a parking spot and causes undue frustration with customers looking to park quickly (Shoup 2006). On-street parking is available but oftentimes spaces are filled all day, especially on the busier East side of Main Street. Then there are those visitors that do not like to parallel park and so avoid on-street parking and immediately try to find a space in a back parking lot. Again, this leads to unnecessary frustrations and may eat into downtown visitors’ valuable time (Shoup 2006). The customers interviewed were so familiar with the parking situation in downtown Bloomsburg that they reported how they have learned to cope with parking downtown; this includes leaving their home earlier if they need to be somewhere at a certain time or avoiding the downtown at peak hours. Still, solutions should be sought that satisfy all downtown stakeholders.

5.1.3 Town Brand

The topic of finding a town brand has long been of interest to town stakeholders. It is generally agreed that branding is useful to downtowns because it establishes a downtown’s image (Beckman et al. 2013, DDI 2012). In an attempt to discover a potential brand for Bloomsburg’s downtown, questions were included in both customer and merchant interview guides that addressed peoples’ perceptions of the Bloomsburg town brand. When asked what they think the town of Bloomsburg is most widely known for the majority of interviewed merchants and customers answered with Bloomsburg University (BU). It is the most recognizable feature of Bloomsburg and puts the town “on the map.” Many Bloomsburg University students are from New Jersey and New York as well as from all over the state of
Pennsylvania. BU’s name is known throughout the mid-Atlantic region and some academic programs and sports teams have even gained national recognition. The relationship between Bloomsburg University and the town has always been a mutually beneficial one. But this response also touches on one of the original research questions for this study – is Bloomsburg a town with a university or a university town that would not be recognizable without the University? As one merchant put it (rather bluntly), “fight it all you want, it’s a college town.”

The Bloomsburg Fair (the largest agricultural fair in Pennsylvania which just celebrated its 158th season) was also mentioned as something synonymous with the town, but not the downtown. Surprisingly, customers interviewed spoke highly of the downtown’s restaurant selection; some even suggested that the diverse mix of restaurants downtown is the key to the town’s success.

Moreover, when asked what they would like the downtown to be known for, both merchants and customers were not hesitant to say that they love Bloomsburg and the small town charm it evokes. All agreed that it is a great place to live, work, and raise children, because it is safe and close to many major cities. One merchant expressed, “I would love for it to be known as being a nice town to visit, you know. And I think it’s there. I just think – I don’t know how well we’re promoting the town.”

Additionally, merchants talked about a downtown branding effort conducted a few years ago that determined that downtown Bloomsburg should be branded as an arts destination. Many were pleased with the results of that study, saying that becoming an arts destination would be achievable for the downtown. The downtown has a local theater with its own ensemble which puts on several nationally acclaimed shows every year (Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble at the Alvina Krause Theater). There is also an art gallery downtown which hosts the collections of local artists and a non-profit arts and cultural center that is home to the studios of several local
artists and hosts art showings, dinners, and other cultural events. The Moose Exchange, as the building and the organization is called, has also successfully partnered with the art department at Bloomsburg University; students showcase their work there for the entire community to see (personal interview with Moose Exchange director, May 24, 2012).

Overall, merchants and customers just want the downtown to be successful, in whatever manner necessary. Merchants know that the downtown’s retail scene will never be what it once was, but are hopeful that an established brand will shed some positive light on the downtown. Once that is achieved, the downtown’s retail shops will flourish and a larger merchandise mix will be available to customers. Merchants also generally agree that in order for a town brand to be successfully rolled out, cooperation is needed from all of the key downtown stakeholders including town council, the mayor, and DBI. Some merchants voiced concerns about the amount of work needed to truly find the town’s brand. One merchant talked of the “disjointed” nature of the town and its constituencies. Many merchants compared Bloomsburg to other area towns with more successful downtown programs and expressed interest in Bloomsburg striving to be like them. One merchant said, “I can’t put my finger on what it is that they’ve [other area towns] got and we don’t, but there’s something that they have.”

Lewisburg, a small town about 25 miles west of Bloomsburg was mentioned quite often in both merchant and customer interviews. In comparison to Bloomsburg, Lewisburg has successfully branded itself as a small town arts destination and has partnered with local Bucknell University to bring national acts to the downtown. Unlike Bloomsburg University, which belongs to the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), Bucknell University is privately owned and as such has more money to invest in the town and cultural events. Overall, the borough of Lewisburg and the town of Bloomsburg have comparable median
household incomes (U.S. Census Bureau 2012); many merchants and customers asked what is preventing Bloomsburg from becoming as renowned for the arts as Lewisburg?

5.1.4 Bloomsburg University Relations

The town of Bloomsburg and the university it is home to have a long and winding history. Because this topic was of great concern to downtown officials, both merchant and customer interviews included questions regarding Bloomsburg University, its students, and its involvement downtown.

Merchants and customers agreed that Bloomsburg University is crucial to the stabilization of Bloomsburg’s economy – it provides jobs, fills downtown housing, and attracts students from across state lines. Regarding the contribution Bloomsburg University has in the town’s economic future, one merchant said, “There were pockets of hard time, but everything has been relatively even. Which, with the university in town, we can rely on that and things will be ok.” The exact nature of the relationship is oftentimes unclear, but both groups understand the importance of the university to the town. Another downtown merchant describes the relationship this way, “we depend on it absolutely. It’s also, the university depends on Bloomsburg absolutely. Without these 5,000 places for kids to live, the university would be half its current size, so the town is resentful, the university is arrogant and we need to work to change that.” The “arrogance” this merchant talks about stemmed from a discussion about downtown parking concerns and the transportation of students living downtown to campus via university buses. The commuter boundary line was redrawn a few years ago by university officials without the input of town stakeholders; meaning that students living a certain distance from campus are eligible to drive to campus and park. Essentially, this boundary shrunk so more students are able
to drive to campus, meaning more students have their cars downtown. University buses do not pick up students outside of this boundary, so they are given no other option but to drive (or walk) to campus. The boundary includes East Main Street, and ends at Market Street – the last bus pick up and drop off are on the corner of Market and East Main Streets. This is an example of the issues created because of an uneasy town-university relationship.

Merchants also discussed the conduct of university students downtown. The majority of this research took place during the summer months, when the university is not as active and there are not as many students living downtown. But merchants remember examples of poor student conduct during the normal fall and spring semesters. They talked about broken bottles in off-street parking lots, trash strewn upon their businesses’ door steps, and customers who avoid the downtown while school is in session. But they also admit that a large number of university students do good for the town as well.

As a step to alleviating these issues, it is generally agreed that a better line of communication is needed between town and university officials. A town/university partnership should be sought that would address issues of student housing, student conduct downtown, and overall, how to get Bloomsburg University students off of “the hill” and downtown more frequently to shop and participate in town events. Even though the presence of university students downtown is known and talked about (often negatively), retail merchants say that they see very few university students shopping in their stores. Curiously, many Bloomsburg University students rent apartments downtown, either in a dedicated apartment building or above downtown storefronts. If downtown retail stores carried more items needed by these university students, perhaps they would shop more frequently in the downtown instead of driving to area grocery stores, malls, and super centers (Farrell 2003). One merchant discussed a lack of
merchandise mix in Bloomsburg’s downtown – a greater variety of retail stores meant to attract university students and other townspeople alike may be what the downtown needs to see a boost in retail activity.

Former and current university students that were interviewed reflected this sentiment saying that Bloomsburg University hardly ever encourages their students to shop downtown or attend events downtown (unless university sponsored). The overall perception of the Bloomsburg University and Bloomsburg town relationship is one of hopefulness that a positive partnership can be forged. Both merchants and customers spoke of other university towns that have successfully created partnerships including Lewisburg and Bucknell University and State College and Penn State University. While each town and university is unique, these examples prove that a successful town-gown relationship is possible.

5.1.5 Customer Insights

Customer use of downtown Bloomsburg is broken into three categories: shopping, eating, and taking in entertainment (special events, theatre, and nightlife). Customer surveys were used to discover how the majority of people use the downtown and all it has to offer. Customers interviewed from the selection of survey takers did not have much to say about their downtown shopping habits when asked, because they do not actually do a lot of shopping downtown. Most people do not do major shopping downtown, but do shop for certain items, especially if they have a good rapport with shop owners. Typically customers frequent one or two stores, but rarely browse others downtown unless they have a need for something they know is sold there. Surprisingly, advertising was not mentioned as a catalyst for downtown shop visits. Customers reported they would frequent the downtown more often for shopping purposes if everything they
needed was there. As it is, the downtown lacks the merchandise mix to be a major shopping destination. Customers instead turn to malls and online shopping, which is more convenient and often cheaper. It is easier to drive to a shopping mall or plaza that has easier accessibility, more readily available parking, and a larger merchandise mix (Farrell 2003).

Again, the restaurant selection downtown is viewed highly by customers; 93 out of 114 shoppers surveyed reported that they typically visit downtown Bloomsburg to eat. Special events are also important for keeping customers engaged with the downtown. Of the three major reasons people visit downtown Bloomsburg, shopping was the least frequently chosen. This is not good news for downtown retail merchants but they are hopeful that positive changes can be made and more shopping choices will soon be available downtown.

Overall, customers are happy with the service they receive while shopping downtown. Customers like being greeted and cared for. Small, privately-owned stores like those in downtown Bloomsburg can offer customers something chain stores cannot – a personal shopping experience and a high level of attention. One customer describes this personal shopping experience: “Cause I mean you go in, you feel like you’re important and that makes you want to spend your money, you know.” Some downtown merchants have gained faithful customers by being friendly and accommodating to customers’ needs (Kim and Stoel 2010). Downtown retail merchants should be wary of offending customers by not engaging with them; most expect to be greeted and offered assistance. Customers who feel slighted will likely not return to that particular store and may be soured to shopping downtown entirely. Poor customer service at one store is often seen (unfortunately) as a reflection of the entire downtown. One customer interviewed talked of a negative experience at a downtown retail shop; this experience has deterred them from visiting that store and others downtown. The customer also said they would
not recommend the store to friends because of the poor customer service. Many of the
merchants interviewed were aware of the impacts of customer service; some even discussed the
desire to achieve high levels of customer service as the reason behind opening a small downtown
business. A merchant expressed it best: “I think that that’s the magic of a downtown the size of
Bloomsburg. Is the opportunity to be able to greet people and be able to make them feel good
about their shopping experience.”

5.1.6 Feelings Regarding Bloomsburg

The town of Bloomsburg holds a special place in the hearts of many. Merchants and
customers refer to it as “home”, whether they are lifelong residents or newcomers, or don’t even
live right in town. One merchant expressed what the town means to them: “Um, home is what it
means to me. It’s a place where I feel very welcome, no matter where I go, um, I can’t say
enough about it.”

The town is very accepting of new people and has the small town charm that many other
area boroughs and towns lack. It was described as being friendly, safe, and inviting. Merchants
and customers agree that it is a great place to raise children because there are many cultural
opportunities and educational institutions.

Customers were asked if they had any special memories of the downtown; many of their
stories involved special downtown events. These events have a more lasting impression on area
residents than any of the shopping options downtown. As mentioned previously, the
downtown’s restaurant, bar, and coffee house scene are a large draw for area residents.
Downtown coffee houses especially allow people living in the more rural areas surrounding
Bloomsburg a place to hang out and relax. Students are also pleased with these establishments,
which fit nicely into the idea of branding Bloomsburg as an arts and culture center. This idea is exemplified by this insight: “Its [the town] got places for dessert, places for coffee, places to relax and sit and enjoy, so I think they do – and I think they do a really great job of catering to residents – like of Bloomsburg as well as college students.”

Being a merchant in a small close knit downtown means a great deal to the small business owners interviewed. Most were raised in the area and while some moved away and came back to start their business, all of the merchants identify Bloomsburg as home. They say they could not have picked a better location for their shop than downtown Bloomsburg and that even with some problems the downtown is a great place to run a business and live. Merchants love the feeling of togetherness exhibited by other downtown business owners; whether they are competing for the same clientele or not, all downtown business owners want each other to be successful.

Successful businesses equate to a successful town. Retail store owners like the idea that customers who stop in their shop are likely going to visit another downtown establishment be that another store or even a restaurant. One merchant explained, “So it’s important that we support other stores, other shops, and then to support other restaurants. We want to keep bringing people down into the downtown.”

Merchants also say that if they were asked to recommend a place for customers to purchase something they do not carry, they would rather point them in the direction of another downtown competitor than a big box retailer or super store, saying, “you know, someone comes in here looking for something – and you know I don’t have, I’ll send them somewhere else that’s my competition. I’d rather see them stay down here [downtown] at least than go somewhere else.” Sticking together during hard times is something that the merchants of Bloomsburg
believe in. They do not just live in a community; they have formed their own community (or group) dedicated to the success of the downtown.

5.1.7 East Vs. West Main Street

Perhaps unique to the town of Bloomsburg is the debate regarding East Main Street and West Main Street. It is argued that East Main Street is the hub of downtown Bloomsburg; it is closer to the Bloomsburg University campus and is home to more downtown establishments. Main Street is divided into East and West halves at the Market Street square. It is commonly believed that there is little to no retail happening west of Market Street. One merchant talks of the “old adage” that “retail stopped…at the square.” This is simply not true; there are two standalone retail shops on West Main Street and another three in the Moose Exchange building which is located just one block west of the square.

Regardless of this distinction, merchants operating their businesses on the east side of Main Street claim that they have greater business than those located farther down the road on West Main Street. Some merchants who started out on West Main and moved their business to a new location on the east side of Market Street have seen a marked improvement in business after doing so. Still, merchants with businesses on West Main Street do not have a problem being on the “lower” end of town. They say the parking is better, streets are quieter, and altogether there is a less harried atmosphere. One says, “I like to be kind of down here by myself. It’s quieter. I have parking front and back, it’s not as congested.” They also say that their business does not suffer like many believe. They have dedicated customers who like that they can always find street parking and do not have to deal with college students on the sidewalk.
5.1.8 Impact of Special Events

Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. strongly believes in the importance of holding special events downtown and many downtown merchants share this view: “I’m a firm believer in the more activities we have downtown the more benefit it brings to our store.”

Some events held during data collection and attended by the researcher included the Renaissance Jamboree, Brewsburg, Artfest, Friday Night Shopping, and First Fridays. Customer and merchant participants discussed some of these events as well as past events held downtown.

Special downtown events are well received by most merchants. Even though the events might not put money into their cash register that day, merchants recognize that any event showcases the downtown favorably and may prompt a return visit by event goers to the downtown and their store at a later date. One merchant described the Renaissance Jamboree: “Renaissance is always a feel good day. There’s times where I don’t make a lot of money – always a lot of people, sometimes they spend, sometimes they don’t.”

The Renaissance Jamboree is by far the most popular event for merchants and customers alike; many customers make it a point to attend the Renaissance Jamboree. They enjoy the crafts available and the overall spectacle of the event. It is not often that Main Street (both east and west) is closed to traffic and turned into a street fair. A few merchants talked of the difficulties of the day of the Renaissance Jamboree because it disrupts their normal business. Luckily the Renaissance only happens once a year and its effects are not so great that the merchants cannot recover within a few days. Rather, the Renaissance puts downtown Bloomsburg in the spotlight for one weekend. This event not only draws Bloomsburg townspeople downtown it also attracts tourists and other out-of-towners to the center of downtown Bloomsburg. Even if people are not
buying from downtown shop owners, they are downtown making memories and will likely return to the town at another time.

Another popular event discussed during interviews was the extension of Friday night shopping hours during the summer months. Since the interviews took place during the summer, this was top of mind for many merchants. Results were varied, with most merchants reporting few if any customers during their extended Friday hours. Despite this, merchants felt it necessary to participate to show their support for the downtown with one expressing this sentiment: “you know, it’s worth a try, you know what I mean? I had a couple days where we had some sales out of it, there might have only been two people that came in, but if they’re spending 30 to 100 dollars then it was worth it.”

Surprisingly, most customers interviewed were completely unaware of the extended shopping hours on Friday Nights; of those that did know of it, only once did they come downtown to take advantage of the special restaurant/store discount. This shows a need for more far reaching advertising; if customers are aware of the extended hours, merchants surely would have seen at least a marginal boost in sales. Merchants and customers agree, Friday night shopping is a good idea, but to be truly successful, customers need to be made aware of the event and given a good reason to show up. Unfortunately for downtown Bloomsburg, the retail offerings on Main Street are perhaps not great enough to attract customers.

Customers were asked during interviews what special memories they have of downtown Bloomsburg and a number of them answered with life events that happened during previous special downtown events. One customer recalled a special Valentine’s Day spent downtown with their spouse and newborn baby. Another popular event discussed with both merchants and customers was downtown movie night, which was held outdoors during the summer in previous
years. The event featured a free children’s movie and other entertainment for children. Again, events like movie night did not really bring downtown retail stores any additional business, but they do shine a positive light on the downtown and all that it does for the larger community.

5.1.9 Sources of Competition

As discussed previously, most Bloomsburg townspeople and other area residents do not do much shopping at downtown retail stores. Even those living right in the downtown area drive to go shopping. Instead, people go to local grocery stores, regional shopping malls, and super stores for their needs. The convenience of having shopping plazas within a five minute drive is too appealing to most; also appealing is having everything one would need in one enclosed, easy to access space. Residents of Bloomsburg and its surrounding boroughs have the convenience of three nearby shopping areas, the businesses located along State Route 11 which is locally called Columbia Boulevard and the Walmart Shopping Plaza and Columbia Mall located in neighboring borough, Buckhorn. Customers and even some merchants interviewed discussed doing their grocery shopping in one of the two grocery stores on Route 11; two male customers interviewed talked of going to the Columbia Mall should they need to go clothing shopping (although both admitted to not liking shopping).

Other customers interviewed talked of driving to larger malls or shopping plazas for major shopping. The internet is also quickly becoming a true source of competition for every kind of brick and mortar store. And recent technological advances will soon make shopping online comparable in many ways to shopping in an actual store. All of this is done in the name of convenience – better merchandise selection, better parking, and better prices. But again, downtown Bloomsburg can offer customers something that they will likely not receive in a mall
or a shopping plaza – advanced levels of customer service and personal attention. And furthermore, DBI and downtown merchants can take comfort in knowing that many downtown customers do not shop at Walmart. This big box competitor could blow a small downtown out of the water, but many are loyal to the localist movement and avoid the super center at all costs (Hess 2010).

To stay relevant and able to compete with these other popular shopping destinations, downtown Bloomsburg will need to implement changes to its retail scene, mainly in the way of increasing the merchandise mix. If downtown Bloomsburg had a grocery market or at the very least a convenience store other than Dollar General, it was indicated that residents living in the downtown would shop at these establishments. Similarly, if more clothing stores were downtown and offered clothing at prices comparable to department store and mall specialty stores, customers would shop downtown.
6.1 Suggestions for Improvement

It is clear that Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. is headed in the right direction to creating a revitalized, community-oriented downtown. Merchants speak highly of the work that DBI has done to help their individual businesses and the downtown as a whole. Suggestions for continued downtown improvement have been formed based on the insights of merchant and customers participants, observations, and a thorough review of the literature concerning downtown renewal as well as university and town partnerships.

6.1.1 Continued Adherence to NMSC’s Four Point Approach

As discussed, the National Main Street Center’s trademarked four-point approach has been helping communities like Bloomsburg manage and revitalize their downtown districts since the 1980s (National Main Street Center 2014). Continued adherence to the guidelines set forth through this approach is crucial to DBI’s success. The four committees of design, promotion, organization, and economic restructuring, created out of these guidelines have helped DBI become focused and split the responsibilities of managing such a massive project like downtown revitalization. A strengthening of these committees and their involvement in downtown issues is suggested to continue the path to revitalization (Wagner 1995).

Though funding is limited, equal amounts of time and attention should be paid to each committee. If possible, DBI should continue seeking grants which might aid the non-profit in carrying out all that it surely has planned for the downtown. Opportunities for networking are
found everywhere; the downtown manager and DBI board members should always be on the lookout for new connections. The website LinkedIn is a great way to find like-minded people all over the world that are dealing with the same issues or have overcome those issues. There are numerous groups where downtown professionals ask questions, post stories, and offer advice (visit linkedin.com for more information).

DBI’s promotions committee should remain at the forefront of the revitalization efforts. Events in downtown Bloomsburg have a great effect on the image people have of the town. Customers participating in this study enjoy attending events in downtown Bloomsburg and even expressed interest in the return of events no longer held (for example, summer movie nights). To further the reach of downtown events and other downtown activities the promotions committee should talk to downtown stakeholders for event suggestions (Pryor and Grossbart 2005, Robertson 1999). DBI committee members should focus on the experiences people can have at downtown events (Schmitt 2003). This requires the involvement of essential downtown stakeholders, including downtown business owners and town officials. Events planned should be representative of the image downtown Bloomsburg wants to convey. Artfest, the Renaissance Jamboree, and Brewsburg are great examples of the kind of events DBI needs to continue. These special events showcase local artists and vendors and indicate the small town, family charm so many believe Bloomsburg should continue to convey.

Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc.’s economic restructuring committee should focus on more aggressive business recruitment (Milder 2005). Merchants and customers that were interviewed talked about a need for a greater merchandise mix in the downtown. As it is, the downtown’s current retail offerings are not varied enough to attract a great number of people. The economic restructuring committee should examine the current downtown business mix and identify where
improvements could be made. Having a fully rounded sample of retail businesses, restaurants, and services would help the downtown compete with shopping malls, shopping plazas, and big box retailers (Milder 2005). Retail store suggestions discussed with interview respondents include a shoe store, a gift shop, a deli/market, and more affordable men’s and women’s clothing stores.

A community outreach program should also be considered that would help to showcase the importance of the work Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. does for Bloomsburg’s downtown. A great way to keep residents and visitors abreast of downtown activities, news, and events is through social media (Papasolomou and Melanthiou 2012, Rapp et al. 2013). Websites like Facebook and Twitter could be a great way to get townspeople involved with and excited about the downtown. DBI already has an active Facebook presence, but there is room for improvement. As discussed, most downtown business owners also use Facebook as a way of connecting with their customers. Similarly, the DBI website should also be used to actively engage with visitors. Customers participating in this study expressed concern over the layout and ease of use of the DBI website (visitbloomsburg.com). The organization’s website should be reexamined and reformatted where it seems fitting.

6.1.2 University/Town Partnership

As addressed, a dedicated Bloomsburg University/Town of Bloomsburg partnership should be established. This is something that will undoubtedly take time and will most likely be constantly changing and evolving. Suggestions for getting students downtown to shop include incentive programs and increased advertising activity on the Bloomsburg University campus (Prins 2005). In order to get students downtown they should feel like they are welcome; this will
not be accomplished without addressing the issue of group identity (Chen and Li 2009). A new committee should be formed with the involvement and resources of the University and Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. that helps to address these town-gown issues. Merchants and customers expressed interest in the development of such a committee where opinions could be voiced and problems solved.

6.1.3 Developing a Brand

All of these suggestions would help to create an identifiable Bloomsburg brand which would bring about an increased level of marketability for the town. Downtown Bloomsburg should strive to create a branded experience where visitors can gain pleasure out of their interactions with the town (Beckman et al. 2013). Merchants discussed the possibility of developing a town brand out of the abundance of art and other cultural offerings in the town. Not only is there a downtown art gallery showcasing local artists, Bloomsburg University and Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble bring national acts to the town. The Moose Exchange\textsuperscript{2} also plays an important role in bringing the art scene downtown. Creating a Bloomsburg town brand will not happen overnight; it takes time and a lot of hard work by dedicated stakeholders (Runyan and Huddleston 2006). Taking these suggestions into consideration and playing to the town’s strengths will help downtown Bloomsburg become a destination rivaling its competitors.

6.2 Suggestions for Further Study

If possible, it is recommended that the topic of Downtown Bloomsburg’s revitalization be expanded and further studied. While this project began as a retail study, it quickly became

\[\text{Saturday, The Moose Exchange experienced a devastating fire on January 30, 2014. Considerable damage was done to the historic building and the artists and merchants that ran their businesses from within suffered great loss. But, The Exchange director has vowed that the spirit of The Moose Exchange will go on.}\]
apparent that the downtown’s issues are all encompassing and the involvement of all downtown stakeholders is important. This includes not only retail merchants but other business owners, landlords, and town officials. Many of the merchants interviewed were quick to give their suggestions of key stakeholders in the downtown who have valuable knowledge of the downtown’s issues and who could give meaningful recommendations. These key stakeholders include landlords, bankers, town council members, and other local service providers. These people live and work in the downtown and rely on it absolutely for their livelihood.

Public meetings should be held to discuss the downtown’s future and should include editorials from the local newspaper. It is important that the scope of the downtown’s revitalization efforts be known; the best way to accomplish this is through public forums. Additionally, since the Bloomsburg University and town relationship is such an important topic of interest, speaking to university officials would be beneficial and is the first step to creating a true town-gown partnership.
CHAPTER 7  
CONCLUSION  

7.1 Personal Reflection  

This project and the town of Bloomsburg hold a very special place in my heart. I grew up in a rural area just twenty minutes away from the town and was born in Bloomsburg Hospital (now Geisinger-Bloomsburg Hospital). Bloomsburg was the first town I knew of; as a child going to town was a special treat and the car ride over was always full of anticipation. Unfortunately though, as a child I never experienced the wonders of downtown Bloomsburg. These trips were always to the Columbia Mall or one of the grocery stores on Route 11. My parents tell stories of shopping downtown at Sears or JCPenney, but by the time I was old enough to remember (the mid-1990s), these department stores were moved to the Columbia Mall and downtown Bloomsburg was already struggling to stay vibrant.  

When it came time to start thinking about colleges Bloomsburg University was my first and only choice. I was confident enough in myself that I did not even bother applying anywhere else. It was as a commuter student at BU that I truly started discovering the importance of the downtown area, but because I was a commuter I still did not really have a reason to shop or visit the downtown on a regular basis. All of my friends were commuters and by the time I was done with classes and my work study job on campus I did not much feel like spending extra time away from home, especially downtown. I did not even drive through the downtown to get to campus, unless snowy weather prevented the safe travel of the hillier shortcut I normally followed. Even though I did not spend time downtown as a university student, I knew people who did. By the time I was a senior, most of my friends had at least one friend who lived downtown. They talked
about their favorite places to eat, the entertainment venues where they went to see local bands play, and of course, the bars.

I rarely participated in after-hours outings to downtown Bloomsburg bars or music performances. I was too involved with my studies and too much of a homebody to spend unnecessary time in town. Upon my graduation from Bloomsburg University I was already thinking about my next step, moving out of the area to pursue my graduate degree. When I returned home to Pennsylvania to continue my graduate studies online I found myself thinking about downtown Bloomsburg and what it had to offer. My cousin was working at the local theatre and always talked about the great opportunities available downtown. Then in my search for an applied thesis client I was lead to Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. and was instantly enamored of the possibilities for revitalization of the downtown area.

The methods and skills I have learned as an applied anthropologist seemed like a perfect fit for a study about DBI. There were plenty of people to talk to, a built in community where I could become a participant observer, and an organization that needed and welcomed my help. Even before my first meeting with the downtown director I was brainstorming about the methods I could use and the key stakeholders I would be able to speak to. The downtown director and DBI’s board members gave me the freedom to design the project however I saw fit and for that I am very grateful. Furthermore, the downtown director, Adrienne Mael, holds an M.A.in Applied Anthropology from the University of South Florida, so we had similar views and were able to communicate with each other with ease regarding the project and how research was to be conducted.

I presented my findings to the Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. board of directors on Friday October 11, 2013 at the board’s monthly meeting. Time was limited because many board
members had their normal jobs to get to and other business had to be attended to so I was asked to only spend fifteen minutes on the most important findings. I started by outlining the original research questions and then spent the majority of my time discussing the merchant and customer insights that best answered those questions. Because I knew time was limited I made handouts of the PowerPoint presentation as well as a five page executive summary. I had about five minutes to answer questions and made sure to let those in attendance know not to hesitate to email or call me if they developed questions after the meeting. The presentation of my findings was well received and board members agreed that the information I presented to them would help in developing DBI’s 2014 business plan. Finally, the downtown director asked me to write a quick guide for merchants to be included in her next email newsletter; this guide included tips about customer service and the importance of staying connected and involved with the community.

My journey to DBI was long and winding but I am glad that I have been able to reconnect with my town and think about the possibilities for the future so that the next generation can know the wonders of the downtown. The vision DBI and downtown merchants have for the downtown is an attainable one and I was lucky to be involved with such a passionate group of people. I know I did not solve all of their problems, that is not what I set out to do, but I hope that I did help them understand a little better the options they have for further revitalization. If I could revisit my time at Bloomsburg University I definitely would have made more of an effort to support the town that has supported me for so many years.
7.2 Final Thoughts

Downtown revitalization and renewal is an ongoing movement in the United States and other developed countries. Across the world, concerned citizens and government officials have noticed a decline in the vitality of their downtown districts and have developed methods to combat suburban sprawl and bring life back into ailing downtowns. This study of downtown Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania will serve as just one tool for Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. to use toward their revitalization efforts.
APPENDIX A

SHOPPER SURVEY
Downtown Bloomsburg Customer Survey

1. What is your gender?
   □ Man
   □ Woman

2. What is your age?
   □ 18-25
   □ 26-35
   □ 36-45
   □ 46-55
   □ 56-65
   □ 66 and older

3. What is your occupation? (check which best applies)
   □ Education
   □ Laborer
   □ Sales
   □ Student at:
     □ Bloomsburg University
     □ Other:__________________
   □ Health
   □ Government
   □ Business
   □ Service
   □ Self Employed
   □ Unemployed
   □ Retired
   □ Other: _______________________

4. Why do you typically visit Downtown Bloomsburg (check all that apply)?
   □ Shopping
   □ Entertainment (BTE, Art Galleries, Etc.)
   □ Eating
   □ Nightlife/bar
   □ Other:__________________

5. What is your zip code?
   □ 17815 (Bloomsburg)
   □ 17820 (Catawissa)
   □ 17821 (Danville)
   □ 17846 (Millville)
   □ 17859 (Orangeville)
   □ 18603 (Berwick)
   □ Other: _______________

6. If your zip code is 17815 (Bloomsburg), how close do you live to the downtown?
   □ In the downtown
   □ Within walking distance
   □ 5-10 minute drive away
   □ 10 minute drive or more

7. On average, how often do you visit Downtown Bloomsburg per month?
   □ 1-3 times
   □ 4-6 times
   □ 7-9 times
   □ 10 or more

8. On average, how much time do you spend downtown each visit?
   □ 30 minutes to 1 hour
   □ 1 to 2 hours
   □ 3 to 4 hours
   □ 5 hours or more
9. Which downtown retail stores have you visited in the past 6 months? (check all that apply)

☐ Alice and Dots Antiques and Collectibles
☐ Al’s Men’s Shop
☐ As Nature Intended
☐ B Green Loft
☐ Bella Donna Boutique
☐ Bloom Tobacco
☐ Cloak and Dragon Bookstore
☐ Covered Bridge Smoke Shop
☐ Darling Lingerie
☐ Dollar General
☐ Dutch Wheelman Bicycle Shop
☐ Exclusively You
☐ Fabric’s Galore
☐ J. Lylo Jewelers
☐ Karen’s Candy Barrel
☐ Krickett Square
☐ Lil Kids Stuff
☐ Main Street Video Games-N-More
☐ Salvation Army Thrift Shop
☐ Shade Mountain Winery
☐ Sneidman’s Jewelry
☐ The Costume Shop
☐ Top Drawer Menswear
☐ VanDyke Goldsmith
☐ Other:____________________

10. How much money do you estimate you spend at downtown retail stores per month?

☐ Less than $10
☐ $10 to $30
☐ $30 to $50
☐ $50 to $70
☐ $70 to $90
☐ More than $90

11. Have any advertisements ever affected your decision to shop in downtown Bloomsburg?

☐ No
☐ Yes, please select the form of advertisement(s) (select all that apply):

☐ Television
☐ Radio
☐ Internet
☐ Sales Flyer
☐ Newspaper
☐ Other:__________________

Are you willing to participate in a follow-up interview regarding this survey at a later date? If selected, you will receive a $10 Downtown Bloomsburg Gift Certificate!

☐ No
☐ Yes, please provide your name, email address, and phone number.

Name: _______________________________________________

Email: _______________________________________________

Phone: _______________________________________________

(Your identity and contact information will be kept confidential. A pseudonym will be used during analysis and reporting.)

If you have any questions about this survey please contact Victoria Schlieder at victoriaschlieder@my.unt.edu

Thank You!
APPENDIX B

MERCHANT INTERVIEW GUIDE
Merchant interview guide:

Date: _________________

Interviewee name: ________________________

Store name: ______________________________

Start Time: _____________ End Time: _________________

1. What made you decide to locate your shop in downtown Bloomsburg?
   a. How long have you been here?
   b. What kind of investment did you make to locate here? [Ballpark figure – if they’re comfortable]

2. What was your original plan/dream for your shop?
   a. Is that plan/dream being realized?
   b. Is Bloomsburg providing the clientele that you had hoped for?

3. What kind of people do you see coming into your store? Do they represent the kind of people you had originally envisioned?
   a. If no, why do you think that is? How are they different?

4. How many people do you employ?

5. When is your store open?
   a. Why?
   b. Would it be difficult to make a change in your store hours?

6. What does the town of Bloomsburg mean to you?

7. What does being a merchant in Bloomsburg mean to you?

8. Does Bloomsburg University [and its students] affect your store?
   a. How?

9. How do you think the other non-retail businesses in the downtown affect your business?

10. Have you ever used any kind of advertising for your business?
    a. Do you have a budget allowance for this?
    b. Do you have a website? Facebook fan page?
    c. Do you feel that these outlets influence your business?
    d. What other methods do you rely on for publicity?

11. What other forms of shopping do you feel affect your business?
12. In recent years, have you noticed the downtown changing?
   a. How? [negative or positive]

13. How has the current economic crisis affected your business?

14. What is your relationship with other downtown merchants and business owners? What about Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. and the Chamber of Commerce?

15. How has Downtown Bloomsburg, Inc. and the Downtown Manager helped your business? (either directly or indirectly)
   a. Or, if they haven’t, what would you have liked to see them do?

16. What would you like to see the Downtown Manager do to help your business in the future?

17. How do special downtown events affect your business?

18. What would you like downtown Bloomsburg to be known for [aimed at finding brand]?
   a. What do you think it is mostly known for currently?
APPENDIX C

SHOPPER INTERVIEW GUIDE
Shopper Interview Guide:

Date: ____________________

Interviewee Name: ______________________

Start Time: _____________ End Time:__________________

1. Do you live in Bloomsburg?
   a. If yes, ask how long it takes them to get downtown – do they drive or can they walk?
   b. If no, ask where they do live – how long does it take for them to get downtown? Ask about parking if not brought up.

2. What comes to mind when you think of the town of Bloomsburg? {question aimed at finding brand}

3. What about Bloomsburg’s downtown? What does the downtown mean to you?

4. Tell me about the last time you visited the downtown?
   a. What was the visit for? Was it planned or spontaneous? With friends/family or alone?
   b. Was there shopping involved?
      i. If yes, where did they go? Did they purchase anything? How long did they spend in [each] store? [How much money did they spend?]
      ii. Why did they decide to visit [each] store? {i.e. word of mouth, online, drawn in by window display?} What did they think of the store? (décor, service, etc.)
      iii. If no, why not? Have they ever shopped downtown? If yes, what was that experience like?

5. Is there a particular time you visited the downtown (for any reason) that sticks out to you? When was it? What was that experience like? What made it memorable?

6. Have you noticed any changes to the downtown in the past few years?
   a. If yes, what do you think brought the changes on?

7. Where do you tend to do most of your (non-food item) shopping? {i.e. Superstore (Walmart/Target), online, mall, boutiques (downtown), etc.}
   a. Why? Because of convenience? Expense?
   b. If answer with boutique/downtown, is this a conscious effort? Why?

8. Do you feel there is anything missing from the downtown? {type of store/restaurant/entertainment venue, etc.}
   a. If any of these venues would locate to the downtown would you frequent the downtown more often?
b. Do you feel there is any type of establishment that should not locate downtown? Why?

9. What do you think about the events that take place periodically in downtown Bloomsburg?
   a. Have you ever attended any? If yes, which ones? Did you enjoy the experience? Why/why not?

10. What do you think of the hours the stores in the downtown keep?
    a. Are their hours of operation convenient for you?

11. Have you ever been influenced by advertising for the downtown? What was it?
    a. Have you ever looked up Bloomsburg’s website? What did you think of it? Is it effective?

12. Are you a ‘fan’ of any downtown Bloomsburg businesses on Facebook or any other social media website? How do you use these pages?
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