

Drury University

Community Visioning Challenge

Narrative Summary

Global Futures

3/31/10

Drury University approached the Community Visioning Challenge as a unique opportunity to put its general education, Global Perspectives program, into action. The program gives Drury students an opportunity to be actively-engaged global citizens. Drury's capstone course, "Global Futures", urges students to actively engage in civic participation and problem solving. Through the study of globalization, Drury students transform abstract concepts into the context of real-world problem and propose solutions. For this reason, Dr. Hue-ping Chin's "Global Futures" class has taken on this project to connect with the local community where they live and envision a sustainable future for all of us.

The team is comprised mostly of students who themselves are entering the workforce or graduate school in the next year across a wide range of fields; we are soon-to-be architects, accountants, doctors, mathematicians, teachers, lawyers, and community organizers. More than half of the team comes from outside of Springfield and a surprisingly high percentage are from outside of Missouri, which means we have a larger pool of experience from which to propose new ideas and directions for Springfield. Our varied backgrounds give us the means to ask important questions to the Drury community about Springfield and interpret answers with accuracy and insight, and it also means we have direct access to different segments of the Drury student population.

The Drury team wrote a 43-question survey asking students to evaluate Springfield and identify directions for Springfield to grow. From the online survey engine (SurveyMonkey) and hard copy survey collection, we collected 120 data, representing 1,500 Drury daytime students. The questions were grouped under the subheadings, "Employment," "Sustainability," "Transportation and "Center City."

Employment

Nearly 70% of Drury students surveyed claim that they do not plan to stay in Springfield after graduation. However, if students were offered a job in Springfield with equivalent pay and benefits offered in other cities, they would more likely to remain in Springfield after graduation from college.

Our survey found that jobs are the most important factor in students' decisions to remain in Springfield after graduation—they were more likely to influence students to remain in Springfield than graduate school, family, relationships, community, and diversity.

Students who do look for jobs in Springfield say that it is moderately difficult to find one. The students scored the robustness of the job market in Springfield as below average, which of course is endemic of the current job market nationwide. Nonetheless, this difficulty in finding Springfield jobs for college graduates causes very bright people to leave Springfield for other cities. Cities that are able to offer jobs will continue to attract college graduates, which give them a competitive advantage when employers are searching for locations for their operations.

If the city wants to see more students stay in Springfield after graduation, it needs to help them make connections to the community. Internships are a valuable resource for combating this brain-drain because it forges relationships between employers and students. Students with internship experience in Springfield are setting the foundation of their professional career. Internships are appealing to students because they are able to make valuable contacts in their career network, and in the future, students may turn to these people for advice. During internships, employers may find their intern makes an invaluable asset to their workforce and offer them a job—one which they might not have made available otherwise.

98 of 120 students surveyed showed interest in internships in Springfield, but there seems to be very little awareness of internship programs available in Springfield. It is important that employers in Springfield continue to expand internship opportunities available to students. The universities and colleges in the Springfield area should continue to offer services and resource to increase internship opportunity. The City of Springfield and the Chamber of Commerce are in the right place to promote internship and partnership between local business and local college students. Giving college students real working experience helps build relationship and establish foundation to keep college graduates in the great Springfield area.

There is also an apparent lack of job diversity in Springfield, which means students with specialized education move away in order to find jobs which better utilize their skills. While this poses a real problem, Springfield does have successful industries from which to create models. Springfield offers students many career opportunities in education through Springfield Public Schools, Missouri State University, Drury University, Evangel College, and a plethora of other private institutions. There are also many job opportunities in health care offered by Cox Health and St. John's Hospital. While these industries continue to expand, Springfield needs to see further growth in and awareness of internships in other areas. Springfield currently offers many service industry jobs in food services, retail, and banking, but these tend to offer lower salaries. Springfield can explore the possibility to build industry in non-traditional retail/service/manufacturing areas. Some areas the Drury students would like to participate in the future are technology related industry and green industry.

To promote Springfield's economic growth, the City, local business and the educational institutions should work together to foster a triangular relationship and cultivate economic activities on a global level. By retaining college graduates, Springfield will not only retain good employees; Springfield will also gain citizens who are more likely to be engaged in their community. These college graduates will be leaders in their neighborhoods, city, and organizations that they participate. They will better understand how Springfield's place in the global economy. Retaining graduates from Springfield's colleges and universities will help to make Springfield a more attractive place to live.

Sustainability

When surveyed, more than two-thirds of the respondents ranked environmental sustainability as important or very important to Springfield's growth. In the next twenty years, Drury students want to see Springfield practice and promote green living; they want sustainability to become more than just a buzz word.

Ninety-seven percent of surveyed Drury students show an interest in recycling, but only a quarter of respondents reported they are satisfied with Springfield's existing

recycling facilities. At first glance this is a disturbing statistic, but it is actually a problem with a simple explanation: current recycling programs are not being fully promoted. Although all Springfield waste collection services offer curbside recycling, very few households seem to practice this. One way to approach this is to do what Siloam Springs, Arkansas did: the city asked high school students to write and perform a short, fun play for elementary students showing the importance of recycling at home. This play used the city's bright red recycling bins as a focal point, and at the end of the day students was sent home with paperwork for their parents to request a bin. Within the next several weeks, red bins started popping up on curbsides throughout the city, which raised awareness of the city's recycling program tremendously. This simple act set off a chain reaction that helped recycling become an important part of Siloam Springs' culture, and could be easily replicated by Springfield.

Springfield should also work with residents and owners of high-occupancy housing to encourage large-scale collection. Springfield is missing an opportunity to simplify the collection process for these residents, who currently must individually take their recyclables to recycling centers. The city currently offers large-scale collection services for businesses; this kind of collection service could be expanded to include apartment buildings, lofts, college campuses, and other high-density living environments.

Besides recycling, the survey also asked students about the city's existing green spaces. Without a doubt, Springfield has an incredibly extensive parks program, which is a huge asset to our community. However, these green spaces appear to be somewhat underutilized by students. Regardless, Springfield's parks expansion program shows tremendous foresight and will prove to be an important part of making Springfield's future bright.

Environmentally, Springfield could really benefit from more people biking instead of driving. In the next twenty years, students want to see the city become more accommodating to bikers. In the transportation section of the survey, just over half of the students responded they would bike more frequently if bike lanes were made prolific

throughout the city, but in the sustainability section of the survey, students seemed leery of using bike lanes because of safety concerns. The Ozark Greenway offers a great alternative for safety-conscious bikers, and it offers a model for future integration of bicycles in the city's transportation system. The city should seek to expand this program while educating drivers on bicyclist safety. It is suggested to include some bike/drive safety questions in the driver's test to raise awareness. The city should also seek out grants meant to help cities improve their bicycling services. The city can work with public schools and colleges to promote biking and public transit.

The student population of Drury University believes that environmental sustainability is very important to Springfield's growth. In improving environmental sustainability, the city guarantees its commitment to improving the qualities of its residents' lives for years to come.

Transportation

The vast majority of Springfield is scaled for cars, not pedestrians. Because of this, most residents see owning a car as a necessity for living in Springfield. Currently, Drury students see public transit as a last resort and indicate that even if more money was invested in the program, they would not ride more frequently. There seems to be little knowledge of bus schedules or routes. Students do not have strong opinions with Springfield's current navigability and traffic control, and students tend to consider Springfield's road conditions are slightly below where they should be.

In the future, Drury students would like Springfield to depend less on cars. Among other things, students are interested in making the city more bike- and pedestrian-friendly. This rescaling is easiest to achieve in already urban areas like Downtown and Commercial Street and can be done by rerouting traffic and creating pedestrian-only streets. Within the next twenty years, Springfield should work to create a transportation link between its more urban areas so that residents who have already opted for living in an urban environment can do so with less dependency on automobiles. Public transportation should be seen as something other than "last resort."

Center City

The Center City is the heart of Springfield; it's an opportunity to present a physical manifestation of the city's core beliefs and values. Most students surveyed agree that the development of Springfield's urban environment is important for Springfield's future as a robust city. Springfield has come a long way in the past decade to revitalize downtown Springfield, but there is still work to be done. In the next twenty years, Drury students want Springfield to promote density, which will go a long way toward addressing transportation, environmental and even employment concerns.

In the next two decades, the city of Springfield should work harder to attract businesses to take up residence in existing urban environments instead of building new buildings on the outskirts of the city. The reasoning behind this is twofold: firstly, it is more environmentally responsible to repurpose older buildings than to build new ones—especially when those new buildings are farther and farther away from everything else. Secondly, businesses bring workers who will help feed the downtown economy—they give more people a reason to go downtown.

Springfield currently has a huge urban sprawl problem that must be addressed. The city should first propose more restrictive regulations on urban sprawl, and secondly provide more incentives for businesses and residents to choose an environmentally-friendly way to live or conduct business. Improving center-city schools is also essential to draw and retain residents in the urban areas. Many of the issues we address here are inter-related: revitalizing the urban area needs collaborative and creative methods. By offering effective transportation, green space, good education, sensible business opportunity, people and business will flock into the urban district(s).

Density allows for the cross-pollination of money and ideas, and ultimately as individual businesses build networks with their neighbors, they increase the overall strength of the entire urban district in which they operate. Besides bringing businesses together in urban centers, Springfield should also work to promote urban living. People who live close to where they work rely less on cars and spend their money in nearby businesses, giving both environmental and economic benefits to the future city.

Eventually, Springfield will develop a unique cultural flavor and fabric, as higher density living means more exposure to cultural diversity. People who live in urban centers have a deeper connection to the city itself because they are so heavily invested. As such, they tend to be more civically engaged, which means more people are looking out for the city's best interest.

Conclusion

According to 65% of survey responses, diversity is an important element in future-Springfield, but most students agree that Springfield is not currently very diverse, and it is a hard issue to directly solve. Diversity is something that comes about organically; it cannot be forced or coerced, it must be fostered and allowed to grow in an accepting environment. Springfield must be firm in its fight against discrimination for any reason, and it must continue to use school systems to educate students about the importance of diversity in order to become the city Drury students want it to be.

Ultimately, our survey and research show that for the most part, Springfield is already on the right path to becoming the city Drury students want it to be twenty years. However, Springfield could benefit from being more vocal about its existing programs and future plans. The city should not be afraid to brag about successes, and it should cross-promote events and services so that residents are more aware of all the great things Springfield already offers. Springfield should also continue to seek out new voices and fresh ideas from its own community, because a dynamic city is a living city, and a living city is a great place to be.

Methodology

The first action Drury's Community Visioning team took was to have a discussion over the kinds of questions we should ask the larger Drury community. After defining broad areas of interest concerning Springfield's future as a class, we worked individually to enumerate specific ideas we wanted to see addressed. As a class, we then combined and narrowed down our question lists to a select few that seemed to capture an overarching picture of diverse interests. Once the class reviewed all the questions, a subset of students rewrote the questions into easily-analyzed, survey-friendly phrasing.

The second step of our process was data collection. Once a survey was created, we had to get it approved by the psychology department, which oversees all surveys conducted on Drury's campus. This ensures a certain level of quality control. Attached to each survey was a consent form that assured the privacy of the survey taker and gave permission for our team to use the survey taker's responses. Two forms of the survey were used; an online survey was sent out over Drury email to students but had no guaranteed response, and team members also administered physical surveys. Although these physical surveys had lower exposure to students, they had a 100% guaranteed response. Team members distributed these surveys to classes after receiving the instructor's consent, and students who had already taken the online version were asked not to complete the physical one.

Paper surveys were tallied by hand and online survey responses were electronically recorded. Once all the responses were collected, they were analyzed together in Microsoft Excel. Questions which used the Likert scale were weighted and averaged, and other questions were analyzed using percentages. Open-ended responses were grouped together in like-minded categories.

The narrative response was a synthesis of survey results and class discussion. It was written in part by different team members and then rewritten so as to have a consistent voice throughout. The narrative response is the culmination of our team's ideas and opinions based on statistical and classroom research.