The Blueprint

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 2024 edition of The Blueprint!

On both the University and local level, the Binghamton Policy Project (BPP) sets out to elevate student voices throughout Broome County through public policy. Every academic year, members of BPP come together to identify major issues within the community and propose policies that can bring about change and solutions. Adhering to our ideals of collaboration and civic engagement, The Blueprint seeks to lay a foundation towards progress, using these student voices to raise awareness through a collection of BPP's yearly policy work. The Blueprint's policies alone cannot solve the issues presented, but it is the start of a mission towards resolving pertinent issues on Binghamton's campus and beyond, and is a means to enable collaboration with local stakeholders.

Within this publication, we see contributions from our five active policy groups this year. Three full policies address the following concerns: the Criminal Legal Reform group advocates for reforming the Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) Program in the Broome County Jail, the Community Engagement group proposes a new first-year class at Binghamton University that teaches about Broome County and its history, and the Mental Health group argues for a monthly mental health newsletter at Binghamton University, among other new mental health outreach initiatives. Additionally, the Healthcare Access and Environmental Justice groups contributed spotlights on the work they completed over the past academic year that, while not resulting in a policy, is still crucial to improving Binghamton University and Broome County.

We truly hope that you enjoy our work, and feel motivated to join our cause in advocating for these policy solutions moving forward. It is only with the support of students, professors, and staff that positive change can occur.

Sincerely,
Jacob Knipes
Blueprint Director
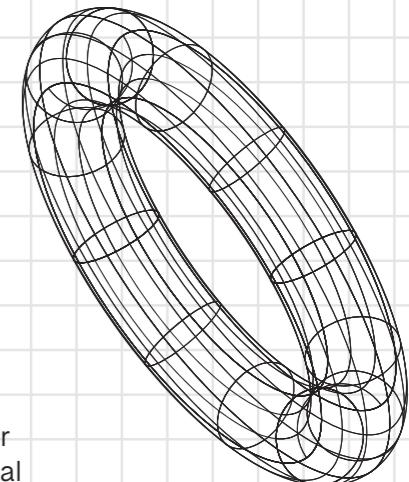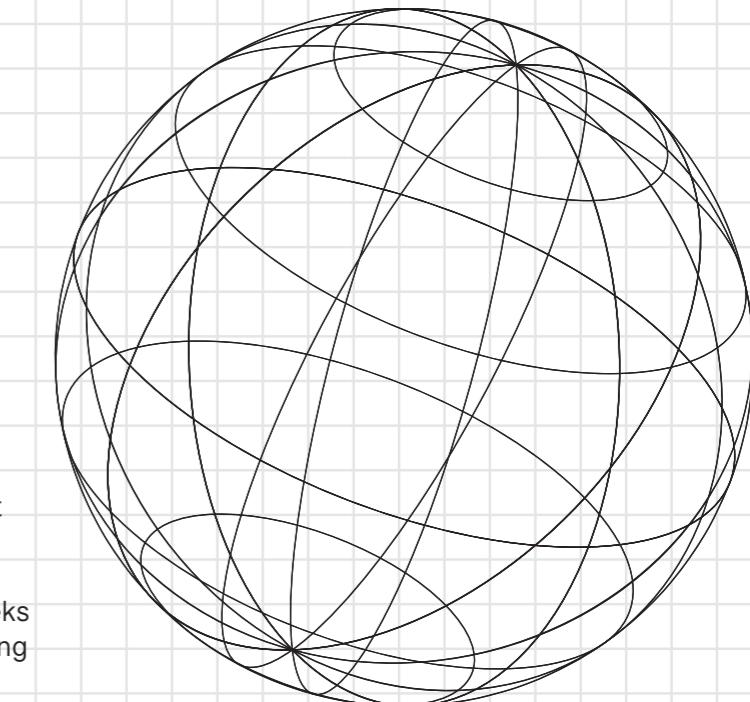
🌰 Sustainability in Action:

An Overview of Sustainable Infrastructure on College Campuses SPOTLIGHT — Environmental Justice

Foreword

The Environmental Justice team of the Binghamton Policy Project has collaborated with Binghamton University's Sustainability Hub to enhance their Equitable Sustainability Literacy Guide. This comprehensive guide aims to educate readers about environmental issues, offer insight on these issues through a social justice perspective, provide ways to get involved, debunk common misconceptions, and more. Below are the articles submitted by the Environmental Justice group to the guide - one exploring the pros and cons of electric vehicles, and the other providing an overview of sustainable infrastructure. Check out the Equitable Sustainability Literacy Guide at https://sites.google.com/binghamton.edu/eslg.

What is sustainable infrastructure?

Sustainable infrastructure refers to projects that are designed, constructed, and operated in ways that minimize negative environmental impacts, conserve resources, promote biodiversity, and enact other sustainable practices. It aims to meet the needs of the present populations without compromising future populations from meeting their own needs.[1] Recent advances on sustainable infrastructure have come with growing concerns of environmental well-being, with institutions such as college campuses turning to such projects for a sustainable future.

The Four Dimensions of Sustainable Infrastructure

Sustainable infrastructure has the potential to offer benefits to communities in four distinct ways.[2] Firstly, sustainable infrastructure projects are economically sustainable. Sustainable infrastructure helps lower the costs associated with maintaining traditional infrastructure as well as prevents future costs incurred through climate change damage control. It also is projected to increase employment numbers in the renewable energy sector from 2.3 million to 20 million by 2030. Secondly, sustainable infrastructure is associated with social sustainability.[2] By providing essential services to the entire population it can help even out inequalities within society. Electricity for example could be provided through sustainability projects focused on renewable energy. Thirdly, sustainable infrastructure is environmentally sustainable.[2] Carbon footprints are reduced through these projects and also lessens the use of natural resources. This limits natural disasters such as hurricanes and rising sea levels and preserves the natural environment. Finally, sustainable infrastructure relies on institutions to promote its use.[2] International government agencies and agreements such as the Paris Agreement are essential to getting sustainable infrastructure initiatives off the ground. The other benefits associated with sustainable infrastructure can then have a reciprocal effect on institutions making them stronger and more cohesive due to better economic growth and social community. These impacts can even be seen and implemented in smaller communities like colleges and universities.

The four dimensions of
Infrastructure Sustainability [3]
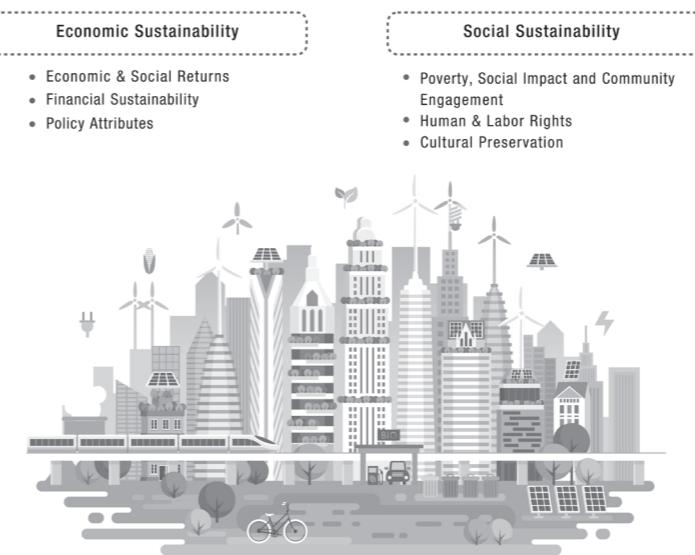
Economic Sustainability
- Economic & Social Returns
- Financial Sustainability
- Policy Attributes

Social Sustainability
- Poverty, Social Impact and Community Engagement
- Human & Labor Rights
- Cultural Preservation

Environmental Sustainability
- Climate and Natural Disasters
- Pollution
- Preservation of the Natural Environment
- Efficient Use of Resources

Institutional Sustainability
- Global & National Strategies
- Governance & Systemic Change
- Management Systems & Accountability
- Capacity Building

What does sustainable infrastructure look like on college campuses?

Sustainable infrastructure can look different on college campuses with different goals, spaces, and budgets. Here are some examples of common projects on campuses:[4]
- Bike friendly infrastructure: bike lanes, bike sharing programs, etc.
- Renewable energy: solar panels, wind turbines, and other installations to generate clean energy
- Energy efficient lighting: LED lighting fixtures to reduce energy consumption, lighting fixtures with timers and motion sensors
- Energy efficient HVAC systems: efficient heating, ventilation, and air condition systems that reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions
- Green spaces: rain gardens and vegetated channels that can manage stormwater runoff, prevent erosion, enhance aesthetics

- Water conservation: low-flow toilets, rainwater harvesting systems
- EV charging stations: electric vehicle charging infrastructure to encourage clean transportation
- Farm-to-food programs: on campus farming for sustainably grown food
- Single stream recycling: convenient recycling separation for paper, plastics, glass, and metal to encourage waste management

Advantages of sustainable infrastructure on college campuses
Sustainable infrastructure can provide many environmental, financial, social, and institutional benefits:[4,5,6]
- Limits flooding from stormwater that can cause damage to campus buildings and community
- Helps the campus meet stormwater discharge requirements through permeability and stormwater treatment
- Contributes to campus aesthetics
- Improves research and education between faculty, students, and staff through projects and their performances
- Improves water and air quality
- Provides shade
- Reduces building energy demands
- Creates and connects habitats for wildlife
- Saves costs through energy conservation measures and reduced water usage

Disadvantages of sustainable infrastructure on college campuses[7,8]
- Upfront costs may be higher than traditional approaches
- Requires additional space that may not be available on all campuses
- Involves navigating certification processes and construction timelines
- May underperform if installed or maintained improperly
- Resources required for implementation may be limited in availability (ex. Wind and solar power)

Case Study #1: Sustainable Food
The Bucknell Farm, Bucknell University

Bucknell University is a wonderful example of sustainable practices. Hosting a five acre farm, Bucknell University is able to produce food while allowing students to volunteer on its grounds.[9] It was established in 2018 as a collaboration between Bucknell and Lewisburg Borough. Alongside providing greater educational opportunities, the farm was built to provide some of the food for Bucknell Dining Services. It has a composting space on site which allows the food waste from the campus to be converted into new food. As of now it has vegetable beds and a pollinator habitat, however it is planned to include a fruit orchard and an outdoor classroom. Though this farm is currently a work in progress, it is already making great strides in improving Bucknell's sustainability.

There are also many schools that already have their own running farms. For example, Hampshire College produces about 10,000 pounds of vegetables a year for their dining hall. This goes to their staff, faculty, and students.[10] Just like at Bucknell, students can apply to work on the farm, making it another great place for learning opportunities. Alongside this, the University of California has a 23 acre farm which runs multiple courses for students. For example, "Introduction to Sustainable Agriculture," "Organic Crop Production Practices," and "Garden and Farm-based Experiential Education Methods." It also allows students to volunteer to run the farm.[10] If more schools take the initiative to implement programs like this, the sustainability of universities in general will immensely increase.

Case Study #2: Sustainable Housing
Eddington Development, University of Cambridge

The University of Cambridge has been creative in developing new housing. The Eddington development project is a new section of the city of Cambridge that offers subsidized housing to both university students and staff.[11] The first phase of this development finished in 2017 with a cost of 350 million euros. The facilities are designed to accommodate public transportation as well as cycling and walking through numerous routes. Eddington also uses renewable and low carbon energy systems to power apartment units. This includes but is not limited to the use of solar panels and a centralized energy center that uses gas to heat units. Further green measures are taken through an innovative waste management disposal system. In this system traditional trash bins are replaced with underground chutes that only inform sanitation workers to pick up the waste when necessary which limits transportation emissions. Flooding is also managed through a rainwater attenuation system that distributes runoff water into new lakes. Eddington also prides itself on numerous green spaces that promote biodiversity.

The most impressive part of the Eddington project is that it acts as an incorporated urban segment of the city of Cambridge. Its sustainable policies promote a more cohesive and social environment within the confines of Eddington as well as for the rest of the city. Through renewable energy sources and flood prevention Eddington makes Cambridge as a whole a more green city. Furthermore, by providing university staff with subsidized housing in Eddington the University of Cambridge helps alleviate housing stresses for the city.[11] Overall, Eddington serves as a great example of how colleges can make their own campuses more sustainable as well as the greater community that they reside in!

Conclusion

Sustainable infrastructure projects demonstrate positive commitments to environmental stewardship. Although implementing sustainable infrastructure on college campuses may pose some challenges, the advantages make sustainable projects worthwhile. Sustainable infrastructure on college campuses and in broader society facilitate a transformation towards a more environmentally conscious future.

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☒ CREATING A NEW UNIV 101 COURSE TO TEACH BROOME COUNTY HISTORY

POLICY — Community Engagement

We call on Binghamton University administrators to implement a UNIV 101 class revolving around the history of Broome County and the ways in which students can become involved in the University's surrounding community.

Binghamton University students exhibit a notable lack of engagement and familiarity with Broome County, which poses a significant concern. Despite residing within the county throughout their college years, just 39.4% of the student population engaged in community engagement during the 2022-23 school year. We theorize that this limited awareness stems from a lack of exposure, rather than outright apathy.

The introduction of a UNIV class focusing on the history of Broome County for first-year students is a well-considered solution to address this challenge. Offering students insights into the county's historical background, cultural richness, and diverse population aims to cultivate a sense of connection and community between students and local citizens. This enhanced understanding will encourage greater student involvement in the local community.

The first half of the class would be dedicated to the history of Binghamton and Broome County, from the natives who first lived on the land to Binghamton's golden years with IBM and the Endicott-Johnson Shoe company to the more modern events that affect the landscape of the local area today. From there, the class would transition into lessons revolving around the community and how to get involved in it. Ideally, community leaders in both the government and local organizations would come in to help lead these lessons and talk to students in order to help bridge the gap between them and the students of BU. During this segment of the class, there would also be the possibility of building in field trips and extra credit opportunities around community events and service opportunities.

To wrap up the curriculum and fulfill the class writing-based requirements, students will produce reports on prompts related to the topics presented to map their progress and development of knowledge regarding the local area. This would conclude with a final project, in which students create an action plan for their future involvement within the community to tie everything from the curriculum together.

The UNIV 101 program is the perfect opportunity to reach students and mold active community citizens because the class

would be tailored to students who are new to Binghamton. To help fulfill their first-year and general education requirements, a majority of new students participate in some variation of the UNIV 101 curriculum. Due to the broad reach of the class, larger groups of students, who may not have sought out Binghamton-related activities on their own, will be more incentivized to take the opportunity to learn about the surrounding community through this lens.

It is especially crucial to connect with and motivate new students because this connection can shape their attitudes towards Binghamton in a positive manner immediately. It will be easier to motivate new students to participate in these opportunities for involvement, which will create a pathway to action that can exist throughout their entire college career. Furthermore, the younger the student, the more time that they will have to give back and contribute to the community as a whole. By making these long-term investments in the area through building up this infrastructure, new students can spend more time giving back to the community while attending BU.

Fordham University's first year Rose Hill Honors program course, "HPRH 1104: Bronx Exploration: History, Economy, and Culture," shares notable similarities with our proposed UNIV class addressing the history of Broome County. Like Binghamton University, Fordham faces a similar concern regarding first-years' limited knowledge and connection to the local community. In response, Fordham's Rose Hill honors program mandated this course for first-years starting in 2019 to directly address this issue, and over the past five years, it has proven to be highly successful.

This course incorporates a variety of components, including course meetings, coursework, and, notably, immersive excursions into the local community. These excursions encompass a range of activities such as community organizing events, local film/music gatherings, and visits to museums and sites of historical significance. According to an Honors Program Administrator for Fordham College at Rose Hill, the class of 2023, the first graduating cohort to take the class as a required part of the curriculum, demonstrated a substantial increase in community engagement. Specifically, 76% of these students were involved in some form of "service or social justice" work while at Fordham, compared to 60% of students the preceding year, whom the class was not required for. This suggests that the course played a significant role in enhancing community engagement and familiarity among the students who attended the course.

Fordham University's accomplishments with the "HPRH 1104: Bronx Exploration" course provides a reputable model for addressing Binghamton University's comparable challenge. Much like Binghamton, Fordham recognized a concerning lack of knowledge and engagement among first years concerning their local community. The proactive introduction of a specialized course at Fordham, integrating lectures, coursework, and immersive excursions into the Bronx community, effectively bridged the gap between students and their surroundings.

This tangible success at Fordham serves as a pertinent model for Binghamton University's proposed UNIV class focusing on the history of Broome County. Fordham's experience demonstrates that structured educational initiatives can significantly enhance students' understanding and connection with the local community. The success in increasing student involvement in service and social

justice activities post-course completion at Fordham offers a glimpse into the transformative potential of a similar program at Binghamton. Fordham's model not only validates the relevance of such courses but also emphasizes their potential to instigate a profound shift in the student-community dynamic, fostering a deeper connection that extends far beyond the classroom.

While it would be inaccurate to say that Binghamton University does not provide pathways for community engagement for first-year students, those pathways are either dedicated to students who were already likely

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to become involved or fail to focus directly on Binghamton and a student's relationship with it. The main example of this is the Public Service Learning Community, which provides a living/learning community for first-year students who want to learn and partake in community service. While a great opportunity for community engagement, there is clear selection bias within this pathway, as it is designed for students who already have community engagement in mind, compared to educating and building interest in first-years who may not have been interested otherwise.

Beyond this, BU does already provide the opportunity for the incorporation of public service through community-engaged learning classes, or CEL, an initiative backed by the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE). However, these classes are not catered to teaching students about Binghamton and

its surrounding community. Instead, these options are more focused on discussing community and civic engagement principles at large without taking a deeper dive into a student's specific responsibilities to the community they spend their college years in. This includes a first-year focused CEL class called "Foundations of Civic Engagement," which features Binghamton non-profits and examines them through the lens of understanding how "core concepts of civic engagement, such as democratic participation, community organizing and civil society" work as a whole rather than solely their impact and importance in Binghamton.

By creating an option that's more accessible and specific to Binghamton, the gap between university students and their community can be lessened and thus both the pathways to and the mindset surrounding student engagement in Binghamton can fully blossom.

As evidenced by data from the CCE, Binghamton is confronted with an enormous obstacle regarding student engagement and familiarity with Broome County. Drawing inspiration from the success of Fordham University's initiative, the proposed UNIV class focusing on the history of Broome County emerges as the promising solution to this challenge.

Fordham's experience has shown that a dedicated course, with a detailed community-based curriculum, coursework, and immersive excursions into the local community, can

significantly enhance students' understanding and engagement of their local community. The success stories of increased involvement in service and social justice activities among Fordham students who participated in such a program provide a tangible example of how a structured educational approach can bridge the gap between university life and the local community.

By introducing a UNIV class tailored to the unique history, culture, and offerings of Broome County, Binghamton University aims to instill a sense of pride and connection among its students. This proactive measure not only addresses the current disconnect but also lays the foundation for a future where graduates are actively involved in and contribute meaningfully to the local community. In doing so, the UNIV class has the potential not only to fix the existing problem of student disengagement but also to foster a lasting sense of community and responsibility among the students at Binghamton University with the local area where they spent their precious college years.

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⚖ WE CHALLENGE BROOME COUNTY OFFICIALS TO:

Revise & Properly Implement the Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) Program

POLICY — Criminal Legal Reform

The opioid epidemic has become a pervasive public health crisis, affecting diverse communities and demanding urgent attention. A significant portion of those impacted are individuals within the criminal justice system, where high rates of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) contribute to a cycle of substance abuse, criminality, and recidivism. Correctional facilities in New York State have introduced various programs to help address this issue—namely the Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) program and the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) program. The MOUD program gives incarcerated individuals access to medication that supports them through withdrawal and helps them battle their addiction. The MAT program also provides support through medication, counseling services, and behavioral therapies. The proper implementation of these programs is imperative to the success of incarcerated individuals once they are released and ensures that the time they spend while incarcerated is rehabilitative.

In February 2024, 315 people were housed in the Broome County Jail. A 2021 law mandates that all New York jails distribute medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) to those incarcerated. The most recent report released by the sheriff's office contains data from 2022-2023 stating that 429 people engaged in substance use disorder programming, both MAT and MOUD. Volunteers from the Justice and Unity for the Southern Tier organization (JUST) have held weekly conversations with people inside the BC Jail over recent months. Too often, the voices and experiences of incarcerated people are left out of discussions of the criminal justice system, yet they remain the most authoritative sources on the subject. In these conversations, inmates have bemoaned the ineffectiveness of the BC Jail's MOUD program and other medical services: many of those incarcerated have suffered through withdrawal and other serious health conditions without receiving care. Medical neglect remains widespread in the Broome County Jail, especially for those who are struggling with substance use. During one conversation with an incarcerated individual, they shared, "I have still not been put on methadone, as I need and is supposed to happen." He continued to tell us that 10 people have been in similar situations and are willing to testify to this. In addition, he shared, "There's one horrific story of a person who was on I think, 180 milligrams of methadone prescribed on the street who was brought into the jail and was given nothing but Tylenol threes for 5 days so he was screaming as he went through withdrawal." This demonstrates how the MOUD program has been poorly implemented and managed. The neglect of medical attention and response from officials, when an incarcerated individual is voicing their needs, illustrates the lack of

training that officials have and how the needs of incarcerated individuals are not taken seriously and are often ignored. The Sheriff mentioned in his 2023 Progress Report that anyone who seeks the program can receive access to it; however, this testimony contradicts that.

There has been an egregious lack of transparency from the sheriff's administration regarding who qualifies for substance use disorder treatment and the quality of the treatment being provided. A 2021 New York Focus article revealed that multiple incarcerated people who told corrections employees that they required medical care were denied care.[1] Rather than receiving appropriate medication, people experiencing withdrawal were placed in COVID-19 isolation cells or even shackled to restraining chairs. In September 2023, New York Focus documented the ongoing inhumane treatment of those with substance abuse issues.[2] The article shared the experiences of sixteen persons, formerly incarcerated in the BC Jail, who, although they were suffering from substance abuse withdrawal, either did not receive adequate medication, were given it at improper intervals, or were completely denied participation in the jail's lacking MOUD program.[3]

At a recent public event, Undersheriff Sammy L. Davis challenged the veracity of the New York Focus article. Yet he went on to acknowledge that it "could" take weeks for people to access SUD medication. As is clear to anyone, withdrawal medication is an immediate need. Providing critical medication after such a period is not adequate access. Furthermore, the undersheriff stated that people who requested medication after they've gone through initial screenings are put at the end of the list, meaning the time period to get medication can be much longer.

Jail incarceration rate in Broome vs. non-NYC counties
Rate calculated per 100,000 residents
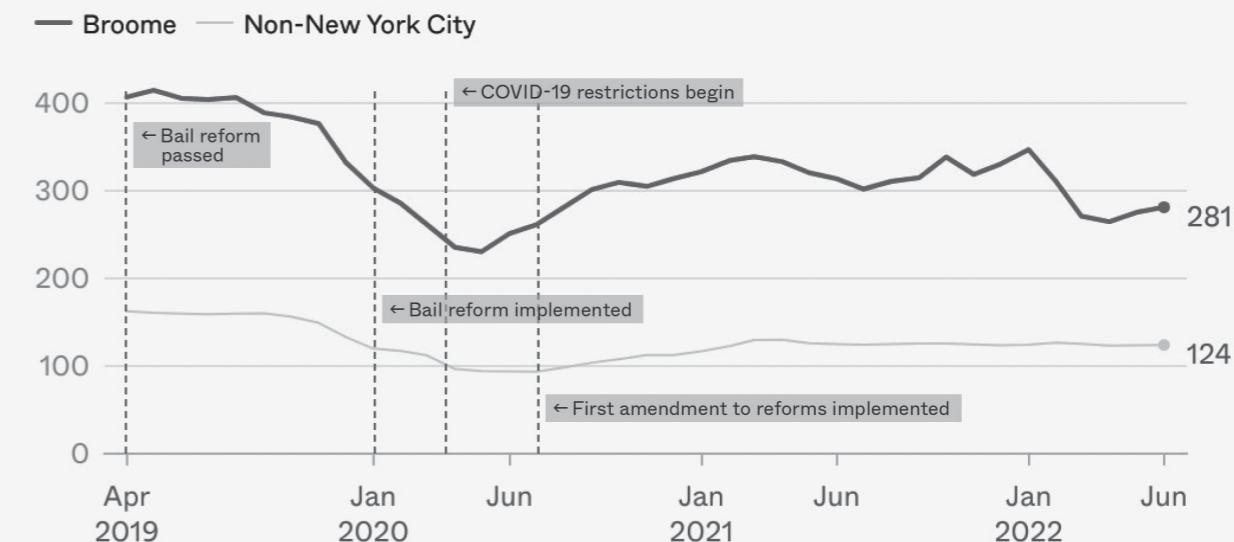
Source: Vera Institute of Justice (graph); New York Division of Criminal Justice Services and Office of Court Administration (data)

Many people in the jail also described not receiving Subutex (buprenorphine) prescribed for opioid withdrawal, or receiving it only once a day when they were previously prescribed it multiple times a day. In response, they experienced intensified withdrawal symptoms and other ailments. Those inside were also often only offered their medication at strange hours—one person explained that they were woken up at 4 a.m. every morning to receive their dosage of Subutex and were denied it otherwise. By the time he would wake up and begin his day, the medication would begin to wear off, and he would experience excruciating withdrawal symptoms.

The horrific experiences of medical neglect reported by New York Focus have been corroborated in conversations with JUST volunteers who have spoken with people in the BC Jail this past fall and into the spring.

The way that medication is administered is unsanitary, uninformed, and inhumane. One of the most common grievances that those in the jail expressed was witnessing the same tools being used to crush different kinds of pills for distribution without being cleaned. One person estimated that the same tool was used for thirty to forty people's medication. This dangerous practice could potentially contaminate one person's medication with another's, leading some to experience new side effects.

In addition to receiving improper care, those incarcerated have been subjected to extensive, intrusive searches for drugs in their cells and body. Inmates described heavily enforced oral searches: one man was denied medication just for having too much saliva in his mouth, and another was wrongly accused of diverting medication and had his prescription of

Subutex halved in retribution. Others also described experiencing random, excessive body cavity checks by corrections officers.

Denying treatment to those struggling with substance use disorder treatment is inhumane. It is also in the best interest of the sheriff's administration and the county to have a well-functioning and accessible MOUD program. This has been shown to reduce both recidivism and overdoses among those released from jail. For example, Albany County Correctional Facility has lower rates of recidivism, fewer nonfatal overdoses, and lower mortality rates with a revised approach. The recidivism rate of participants in the MOUD program was 13 percent in November 2019, much lower than the county's overall rate of 40 percent.[4] In using the methadone maintenance treatment, Albany County Correctional Facility has demonstrated lower rates of illicit opioid use and higher adherence to OUD treatment. Post-incarceration, people are less likely to be reincarcerated and are more likely to be employed one year after incarceration.[5]

Being incarcerated is already an extremely isolating and mentally and physically taxing experience, the stress and difficulty of which are exacerbated for those experiencing health issues. The jail's MOUD program especially needs bolstering. Strict standards should be created and enforced to ensure that those with substance use disorders are receiving proper treatment, and the jail must be transparent about what criteria they use to grant people participation in the program, who is participating and who is being denied participation, and what kinds of services are being provided. It is imperative that Sheriff Akshar and his administration ensure that employees tasked with providing medical care and MOUD programming within the jail are doing their jobs. Investing in the comprehensive training of correctional staff on the principles of MOUD programs is essential for successful implementation. Educated staff are better equipped to support individuals in treatment and create a rehabilitative environment within correctional facilities. Additionally, establishing robust partnerships with community healthcare providers, treatment centers, and social services is crucial for ensuring continuity of care upon release. Coordinated efforts between correctional facilities and community organizations enhance the overall impact of MAT and MOUD programs.

Ultimately, the implementation and reinforcement of the MOUD program in the Broome County Jail represents a crucial component of a comprehensive strategy to address the opioid epidemic. There has been a lot of support from the state given to local organizations that support people with addiction and substance abuse. With the MOUD program being effectively implemented and more transparency between the Sheriff's administration, incarcerated individuals, and the community, those inside of the Broome County Jail can be better supported and taken care of.

Interior of Broome County Correctional Facility
Source: Broome County Sheriff's Corrections Division Website

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Mental Health Resource Awareness & Visibility On Campus

POLICY — Mental Health

College students consistently face a distinct set of challenges to their mental health that require adequate school resources and support. Binghamton University does not advertise their services actively enough to reach all students in need of help, and does not fully connect the student body with the mental health resources that are available for them to utilize. Additionally, transparency about the way that these resources, particularly those provided by the University Counseling Center (UCC), operate is severely lacking.

To address these problems and obstacles, we propose that Binghamton University implement a monthly mental health newsletter to directly share updates about mental health resources on campus with students, as well as to distribute information about wellness-oriented events occurring throughout campus during the upcoming month. Binghamton University has a great number of mental health resources that are available for students to utilize, however, most students are not aware these resources exist. A monthly newsletter will advance students' knowledge and understanding of the resources available to them. Consistently sharing information about these resources will consequently promote their accessibility and reinforce the transparency surrounding them.

We furthermore propose that the University create more physical signage for the University Counseling Center, to both make the center more accessible to students and to reduce the ongoing stigma that clouds mental health help. Better signage for the UCC will most significantly ensure that students know that the UCC exists, which will subsequently make it easier for students to find and receive help from the UCC. When we spoke to representatives of the UCC they did express hesitation to install signage out of concern for students' privacy. However, if this sign is placed in the window of Old O'Connor, similar to how there are signs for the Alumni Center and VARCC in these windows, then students' privacy will remain protected, but the center will be easier for students to find, minimizing feelings of anxiety associated with getting help. It would remain impossible for a bystander to know that another individual entered Old O'Connor specifically to access the UCC.

Additionally, we suggest that the University Counseling Center be more transparent and more clear about its 10-session limit by specifying exactly how that limit is handled under the Brief Therapy section of the "individual counseling" page on the center's website. Greater transparency around the Brief Therapy model, and the 10-session limit, will ensure that students understand that they will not be abandoned after they have completed their 10 sessions. This will reduce miscommunication about resources on campus and increase students' willingness to see counselors at the UCC, as they will better understand that the Brief Therapy model, despite its limited sessions, can set them up for long-term success.
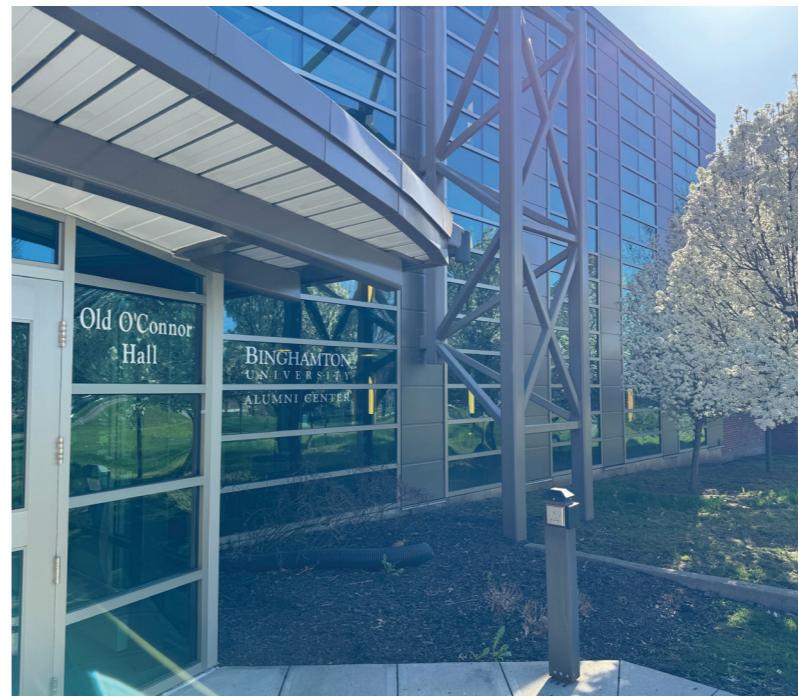
Finally, we suggest the Student Health Advisory Committee have a subcommittee that can be solely devoted to mental health. This will ensure that students' opinions on mental health services specifically, and the changes students may be seeking, are consistently and reliably communicated to faculty at the University.

Many universities send out a monthly newsletter that covers mental health events happening on their campus over the course of that month, as well as information and updates about mental health resources available on their campuses. This ensures that crucial information about resources that students can utilize is delivered straight to their inboxes once a month. For example, Cornell has a monthly health-promoting campus newsletter titled "CU Flourish Newsletter." It includes a list of health-oriented events that are happening throughout the month and a list of directly-linked resources for students to utilize. Additionally, Cornell has said that this newsletter is a way for them to get direct feedback from students.[1] Likewise, many universities have counseling centers that are better labeled, and thus easier to find, than the UCC. Towson University[2] and the University of Alabama[3] are just some examples of schools with counseling centers that are easy to find. SUNY Geneseo has a student advisory board, comprising faculty and students, that is solely devoted to mental health. In 2022, this committee evolved into the Well-Being Collective, which is a group that focuses on promoting well-being across their campus.[4]

The academic and social environment within universities can exacerbate mental health struggles. The transition from living at home to living on a college campus can, in itself, impose a large number of new challenges on students, including copious amounts of stress. Furthermore, college students often search for a sense of belonging and community, whether it be through student organizations, social groups, or other spaces in the larger community. Additionally, students must grapple with their classes, and academics often inflict undue amounts of stress and pressure, as many students have to adjust to a college workload. Finally, college students are regularly looking for opportunities, including internships and jobs, that will prepare them to be successful upon graduation. There is great pressure to find the right opportunities and to build a resume that guarantees success. According to the Mayo Clinic, 44% of college students experience depression,[5] 37% experience anxiety,[6] and 15% have considered suicide.[7] Four out of every ten students have considered withdrawing from college, often due to emotional stress. As many as 75% of students are reluctant to seek help.[8] When the resources that are available to help students are not properly advertised, this problem is compounded. The tragic campus suicide that occurred in October of 2023 made it glaringly clear that students are both looking for change, and that many students are misinformed about the resources that do exist on campus. Improved transparency and outreach efforts can help address both of these problems.

Although most students are satisfied with the quality of care available at the UCC, many students have expressed frustration with the process of receiving mental health care. Many mental-health-related frustrations are rooted in students'

significant lack of knowledge about resources on campus and the accessibility of these resources. This policy will provide students with clarity about the resources Binghamton University provides and how to access them. Although a brief overview of mental resources is helpful, providing more thorough information readily accessible can minimize miscommunications that steers students away from using these resources. In implementing the outreach policies outlined above, the University will properly demonstrate the support that Binghamton University gives its students and ensure that students know that adequate help is available, thus encouraging more students who need help to seek it out and receive it.

These are small requests aimed at resolving some of the problems that Binghamton Policy Project and Wellness staff have mutually identified in relation to mental health resources on campus. At a previous meeting earlier this fall, outreach, accessibility, and transparency were thoroughly discussed as areas in which the mental health department falters. This policy provides solutions to those aforementioned obstacles. Students have actively voiced their concerns repeatedly, and students know best how they can most effectively be supported. These policies are a first step toward addressing the concerns that University staff agree have validity.

It is critical that college students have access to a wide variety of mental health resources and that they fully understand how to utilize those resources. When students are properly equipped with mental health resources they can truly thrive and find success in their college environment and beyond.

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University Mental Health Resources:

www.binghamton.edu/hpps/covid19-resources/covid-19-mental-health/copingmhresources.html

Broome County Resources:
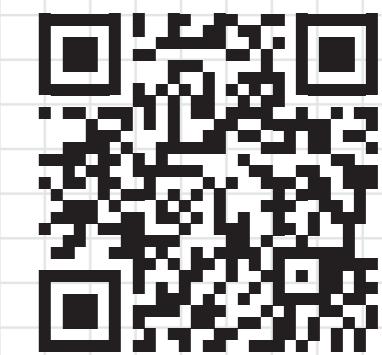
www.gobroomecounty.com/mh

Healthcare Access

a review of areas for improvement on campus

This chart shows the percentage of college students in the U.S. who agreed or disagreed that their health and well-being is a priority at their college/university as of fall 2023.

This indicates that while progress has been made in prioritizing student health, there is still room for improvement in fully meeting students' needs and expectations.

SPOTLIGHT — Healthcare Access

The expansion of student health services has become an important concern in higher education. The increasing need for such services has fostered discussions regarding the responsibility of universities in promoting student health. Investing in affordable and accessible healthcare for college students is important in enhancing the overall physical wellbeing of university students. In the United States, this issue is further complicated by the high costs of healthcare nationwide, necessitating greater efforts from colleges and universities to ensure the availability of these essential services for students.

The American College Health Association[1] outlines several key health metrics, including birth control rates among students, nutrition, sexual health initiatives, accessibility of contraceptives, healthcare provider accessibility, and the frequency of preventative hospitalizations. These measures serve as benchmarks for universities to evaluate their student support practices and enhance campus health efforts.

The recent initiative to implement a more accessible way for students to obtain emergency contraceptives such as Plan B through vending machines is a monumental achievement and indicates progress towards making students feel safer knowing that there are convenient options available within the campus perimeters. However, it shouldn't stop here.

Some ways to improve healthcare access within the university include:

1. Extend the operating hours of the Student Health Services Center. It may be difficult for students to accommodate their schedules to make time for the 8 a.m. - 4:45 p.m. timeframe. Including evenings and/or weekends would ensure access to health services outside of typical class hours.

2. Promote existing services and resources. Although the vending machine proposal is a significant step in normalizing sexual and reproductive health by allowing it to be more widely accessible, many students were unaware that Plan B was already being sold by Decker Student Health Services at the same rate. Increasing the visibility of existing services on campus can raise awareness for healthcare needs.
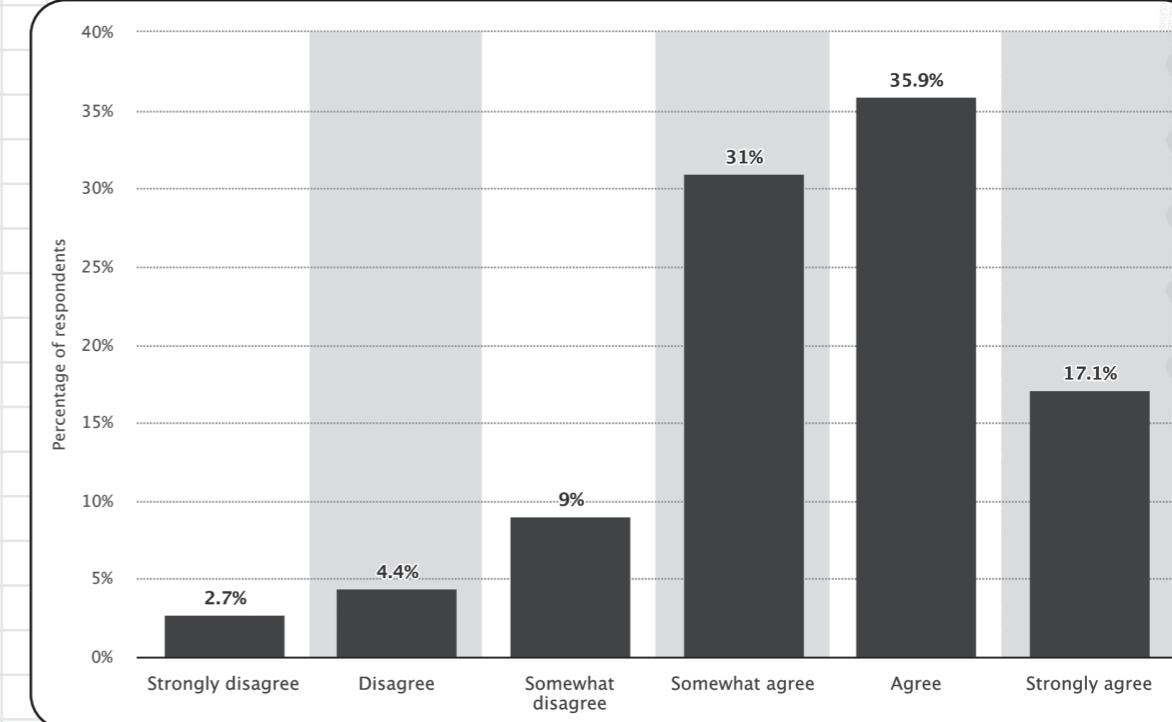
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