

**WNY Regional Economic Development Council**  
Higher Education as an Economic Development Driver Work Group  
8/30/2011

- Introductions
- Power Point presentation
- Explanation of SWOT Analysis
- SWOT Analysis
- **STRENGTHS**
  - Higher education (HE) is a major strength of the region and the various institutions, while mindful of their competitive nature, work together well.
  - Diversity exists amongst academic programs, presenting opportunities for different students.
  - Student population is equal to that of Raleigh-Durham.
  - Diverse programs come with broad spectrum of affordability and strong higher ed infrastructures.
  - Generates additional \$ for the region that wouldn't otherwise be part of the economic cycle. \$8000/student per one analysis.
  - Importer of \$, through students and research.
  - Creates a pool for employers to select from.
  - Can grow even in a downturning economy.
  - Cost of living in region is low.
  - Trains K-12 teachers.
  - Serves as a major research enterprise.
  - Large pool of qualified PhD candidates.
- **WEAKNESSES**
  - Lagging turnaround time on approval of new programs creates a competitive disadvantage for institutions.
  - High school graduation demographics are weak.
  - Low seed capital funding.
  - Graduation rate often exceeds 4 years, and graduation readiness is weak.
  - College readiness of high school graduates in the region is poor.
  - Low level of internships and co-ops.
  - Insufficient number of nationally-recognized programs
  - Region has a negative self-opinion.
  - Need for stronger philanthropic community.
  - Need for more prestigious faculty hires, as students look at faculty's reputations when selection institution.
- **OPPORTUNITIES**
  - Good faculty brings \$.
  - Wide array of institutions in region- community colleges, research, etc.- provides full complement of state's offerings.
  - Potential for more public/private collaboration.
  - Can help Buffalo public schools with college readiness.

- Willingness to innovate and collaborate exists amongst 21 HE consortium members.
- Collaborative investments to create nationally-recognized programs.
- More resources could go to maximizing research in the region to prevent movement out-of-state.
- Could ID themes, i.e. energy
- Many institutions at various levels could look at areas of excellence to maximize strengths.
- Opportunity to market region as “college town” that is young and vibrant.
- Promote good quality-of-life through restaurants, bars, etc.
- Could think strategically about internships and link specific employers’ needs with students.

- **THREATS**

- HE in region has a strong dependence on federal (Pell) and state (TAP) financial aid to students, and both programs are at risk.
- Low-income background of students inhibits students’ ability to graduate and enter into economy.
- Declining demographic of college-age students in region requires outreach to new markets.
- Immigration laws inhibit students’ abilities to enroll in HE and stay in region after graduation.
- Broad economic conditions are not strong.
- Loss of part-time jobs for students affects students’ ability to afford HE.
- Virtual education is fast-growing competitor to regions’ HE institutions.
- Difficult competition with low cost and ease of distance and international education.
- Difficult competition for faculty and staff.
- “Silo nature” of Buffalo culture prevents links between HE and economy.
- Higher turnover rate of college presidents.

- **REGIONAL ECONOMIC DRIVERS**

- Demand from employers
- Student demand
- Employment opportunities
- Easy access
- Cost of living and tuition
- Border access
- Cost differential (with Canada)

- **CRITICAL ISSUES**

- Bureaucracy of State Department of Education requires a cultural shift in thinking.
- Research process is onerous at state level, creating additional costs for researchers because of slow delivery of funding and unpredictability of state appropriations.
- Buffalo public schools dismal graduation rates and college readiness.
- Organized labor acts as impediment.