Town & Gown - University and Community Leaders' Perceptions on Mutually Beneficial Relationships: An Urban American University Case Study

By Joe Harasta[*]

This study examines the relationship between an urban university and its community through the perspectives of university and community leaders. Employing a phenomenological approach, the researcher used in-depth interviews for both groups of leaders to solicit their opinions about the relationship, the influences affecting the relationship, and what steps could be made to improve the relationship. Findings indicate a desire from both sides to improve relations between the institution and neighboring communities. However, a disconnect exists between what university leaders believe they are doing to improve the relationship and what community leaders actually interpret the university doing. Community leaders indicate mismanaged communication, conflicting messages, and isolationism as the university's primary offenses affecting the relationship. University leaders state that the community's stubbornness, lack of appreciation for university-initiated community improvements, and ignorance toward the University's mission negatively affects the relationship from the community's side. The article includes the techniques used to alleviate this disconnect.

Keywords: town-gown, community relations, service learning, community engagement, public relations

Introduction

The primary goal of the public relations department of any organization is to develop, facilitate, and foster goodwill between the organization and its stakeholders. Among the most important of these stakeholders are the community members neighboring the organization. Creating a positive relationship between an organization and these stakeholders, often generalized as the public, is crucial to the sustained success of organizations, including colleges and universities. However, the phenomenon of "studentification", or the changes in community makeup caused by the influx of young students into college towns each semester, often causes conflicts between students and non-college residents resulting in strained relationships between university officials and local residents (Smith, 2002). Broken Windows Theory helps explain this phenomenon, when a transient demographic population, like students, leads to the decay of the college-town community, especially for non-academic residents (Kelling and Wilson, 1982).

[*]Associate Professor, Department of Communication Studies, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, USA.

Accordingly, the individuals responsible for developing, facilitating, and fostering such goodwill must make crucial decisions concerning the implementation of programs aimed at improving community relations. In higher education, those individuals responsible for making such decisions are often public affairs or university relations directors. That job, however, is often not an easy one. Shaeffer (2017, p. 1) notes, "When the interaction of campus and community – often as not described in terms of town and gown relationships – is ignored, all too often a steep price is paid". Accordingly, without information on community perspectives, institutions may be blindly enacting and implementing policies and programs aimed at improving their image within the community that offer no benefit, or worse, create more problems.

While profit-based organizations can adapt to meet the demands of their publics by introducing new product lines or investing financially in the community heavily, university relations personnel often face a more difficult task of directing the institution to meet the demands of its community. Unexpected and/or difficult to manage issues such as campus crime, expansion, and tax-exempt status have forced university relations directors to maintain consistently positive relations with community members in an unpredictable environment. Despite these problems, many colleges and universities across the country have developed positive relationships with their surrounding communities. Nonetheless, many institutions of higher education still experience poor community relations and the damaging effects of poor public image.

"The story of the birth and survival of an inner-city college transcends its classes and campus" (Parment, 2011, p. 1). Poor relations between a college or university and the private citizens, businesses, community groups, and local government in which it resides with can decrease the institution's reputation and its ability to establish itself as a preeminent institution of learning. Moreover, poor community relations can drain resources that could go toward improving the institution's academic programs, resources for faculty and students, and future initiatives. Accordingly, colleges and universities must establish and maintain positive relationships with their non-academic neighbors to not only maintain a positive image, but also meet organizational goals. These community/institution relationships, also known as town-gown relations, are integral to an institution's overall success. In their study of town-gown relations, Murphy and Tacky (2002, p. 21) found:

> It's increasingly clear that poor community relations are risky. Problems with neighbors or local officials have diverted too much time and money from the school's core mission. At best, such problems can delay or frustrate plans, sap morale, and create long-term mutual bitterness. At worst, they can pit community against school and actually imperil the ability of the school to operate. Poor or mismanaged community relations can...effectively cancel an institution's license to do business.

Accordingly, the goal of any organization is to foster positive, effective community relations. Burke (1999, p. 13) notes, "Attitudes, expectations, and behavior in communities…have to be managed. If they are not, companies will see their license to operate continue to erode and their competitive strategies become

unworkable". In the business of higher education, the University's license to operate entails successfully educating students and building prestige to entice students to attend its institution over the multitude of available colleges and universities in which it competes. Colleges and universities depend on student enrolment to operate, and without them, these institutions lose a major funding source that affects its operations. Furthermore, in the absence of a strong relationship with its community, an institution cannot expect to build prestige and recruit students. Therefore, institutions must seek feedback from the community if they are to manage this relationship effectively.

The "*Odd Couple*" Relationship

Mismanagement often stems from a lack of useful feedback from the community—a necessity in reducing complacency and initiating change in the institution's relationship with its neighbors. Issues affecting community relations were noted by the Center for Educational Leadership as early as 1978 found that real estate development, congestion, and construction were among the most notable sources of strife between colleges and communities.

Community members often find themselves at odds with their academic neighbors regarding taxes, crime, and congestion. Expansion plans that do not add to the community's tax base, increased vandalism and noise complaints, and large student populations that cause traffic and pedestrian gridlock often leave residents resentful of their academic neighbors. In opposition, college and university populations often feel antagonized by what they interpret at ignorant or burdensome locals who do not appreciate the institution. Sandman and Baker-Clark found (1997) that universities and communities must understand each other's needs as well as share the same goals if they are to coexist together. Accordingly, gathering and analyzing useful information from both community and institutional perspectives may enable university relations directors to gauge both groups' misconceptions and misinterpretations. In doing so, they may also help reduce hostility between the two sides and lay the groundwork for a mutually beneficial relationship. However, it is often not until a crisis or emergency occurs that a college or university revaluates its relationship with its community. By then, it is often too late.

While waiting for a crisis may establish a sense of urgency within the organization, it may also cause more harm than good. Kotter (1996, p. 45) notes, "Visible crises can be enormously helpful in catching people's attention and pushing up urgency levels. But in an increasingly fast-moving world, waiting for a fire to break out is a dubious strategy." In higher education, such "visible crises" often take center stage when issues regarding town-gown relations arise.

At the Heart of the Problem

Oftentimes, disputes over alcohol-related crime, noise complaints, and economic discrepancies facilitate many town-gown problems. The University of Florida's Town-Gown Taskforce (2002, para. 7) identified "...noise, parking, infrastructure upgrades, home ownership, neighborhood appearance, code enforcement, garbage and litter, landlord issues, nuisance parties, property values, special event attendance, and consistency of rule application and accountability" as the most common causes of friction between colleges and their communities. All of which negatively affect public image. Woldorff and Weiss (2018) found that residents of college towns take two strategies to cope with problematic student behavior – defensive and normalizing. Defensive involves actions like calling police, and normalizing entails avoiding conflict or simply rationalizing that life in a college town is going to be disruptive.

With frictions between the University and community come negative public image that can lead to reduced student enrollment, fewer alumni/grant donations, and diminished college ratings. Bruning et al. (2006, p. 126) state, "Oftentimes, universities became analogous to self-sufficient 'cities' where students could eat, sleep, be entertained, and have nearly all their needs met without ever leaving the borders of campus".

Cutlip et al. (2000, p. 542) add that colleges need positive relationships with their community stakeholders because:

1. Financial support is insufficient and precarious as other public institutions' roles in society are expanded.
2. Competition for qualified students is spirited and costly.
3. Constraints and regulations that make university administration difficult and costly are imposed by agencies of the federal government.
4. Academic freedom and tenure are challenged by both internal and external stakeholders.

Gumprecht (2003, p. 57) adds:

Universities are often viewed with conflicting emotions in college towns: welcome by the economic benefits and quality of life they bring, but resented because they are without regard for the interests of permanent residents.

There are, however, means to supplant the tensions between colleges and their communities with respect and collaboration. Nonetheless, despite the positives colleges and universities bring to their communities; town-gown initiatives are often fraught with disagreements and misunderstandings. David Scott, chancellor at the University of Massachusetts (UMass), notes that:

UMass and neighboring communities tend to arrive at town-gown relations much the same way motorists arrive at a four-way stop sign, trying to work out the right-of-way without collision, obscene gestures, or rage. But with each successful stop and go... the campus and its neighbors develop a warmer relationship. (Steinkamp, 1998, para. 1)

In facilitating such amicable relationships, several universities and colleges have organized commissions and coalitions that seat the institution's administration with local residents and community leaders in hopes of building lasting partnerships between the two factions.

For instance, Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, has developed UniverCity Partnerships, which, "...will promote economic development initiatives among businesses, neighborhoods, and academic institutions" (Valenzia, 2004, para. 1). A similar program at the University of Pennsylvania specifically seeks to build mutually beneficial relationships that aid distressed West Philadelphia neighborhoods while providing faculty and students funds for program development and assistantships. Generally, colleges and universities provide a multitude of opportunities, both economic and cultural, to their communities, and they need to both utilize and publicize these benefits (Massey et al. 2014).

Because the studied organization's leadership required the institution's identity be kept confidential, the researcher is required to refer to it as The University throughout this article. At The University, the institution partners with its community through a program that offers its neighborhoods' schools, churches, and non-profits health, legal, and community revitalization programs

Addressing the importance of these university-community partnerships in her report to the Office of Partnerships in 2002, University of Pennsylvania President Judith Rodin, states (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2002, p. 2):

> Real progress takes a different mindset, asking not what we have to do to the community, or even for the community, but rather what we do with the community. I am convinced that sustained community partnerships will help define successful universities in the 21st century, and such partnerships will fail in the absence of a continuous dialogue

As a result, many institutions are implementing programs in hopes of spearheading their own town-gown improvement initiatives. Such partnerships and committees are also effective because they facilitate buy-in from both the community and the institution to develop programs that promote positive relations as well as provide "...a powerful coalition that can act as a team" (Kotter, 1996, p. 56). Such sustained teamwork can also promote the most important aspect of positive town-gown relations—trust. Kotter (1996, pp. 65–66) adds:

> The combination of trust and a common shared goal...make for a powerful team. The resulting guiding coalition will have the capacity to make needed changes despite all the forces of inertia...without a powerful guiding coalition, change stalls and carnage grows.

Therefore, it is crucial that colleges and universities extend themselves beyond the campus limits to their non-academic neighbors by seeking their perspectives and sharing the institution's vision with the community. Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, said institutions of higher learning, "... must become a more vigorous partner in search

for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems, and must affirm its historical commitment" (Boyer, 1996, p. 16).

Nonetheless, without a clear understanding of the issues that can negatively affect town-gown relations, even the most trusting coalition between institutions and communities may fail. This understanding comes from careful study and research of the relationship between the institution and the community by The University. Murphy and Tacky (2002, p. 21) found, "...schools have to understand that the benefits of good community relations are not the result of luck or the right chemistry between the [institution] head and the mayor...rather, these benefits come from strategic planning and activity." Moreover, Haberman and Dolphin (1988, p. 82) state:

> The heart of public relations is acceptable performance. But to help achieve it, practitioners must know what current performance is. They must also know if it is acceptable, and if it is unacceptable, they must know why and to whom it is unacceptable.

Accordingly, to identify acceptable performance that focuses on positive town-gown relations, public relations practitioners must proactively initiate research methods to understand the current state of town-gown relations. Thus, through research, public relations practitioners can know if this performance level is being achieved, and if it is not, what steps are necessary to achieve it. Hendrix (1998, p. 171) adds, "The public relations practitioner should assess problems the organization may have had with community groups and make searching analyses of community relations opportunities". Lastly, Gail Raiman, vice president for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities' public affairs, states the public relations practitioners, "...must go to these opinion leaders instead of waiting for them to come to us" (Cutlip et al. 2000, p. 543). Therefore, it is imperative that practitioners understand the influences affecting public perception prior to devising plans aimed at reinforcing positive relations and improving negative relations.

Scope of the Study

This study seeks to describe the issues concerning town-gown relations at The University as reported by university and community leaders, including overall perceptions of their relationships, sources of problems between the institution and its community, as well as ways to minimize these problems.

In finding ways to build these mutually beneficial relationships between the institution and the community, university public relations directors must acquire community members' perspectives and opinions regarding institutional image. Haberman and Dolphin (1988, p. 83) note, "...the practitioner needs facts. Failure to get the necessary facts can undermine an attempt to achieve good public relations. Ignorance of important facts can make further action futile or even harmful".

Thus, acquiring community members' opinions of the institution may help university relations directors counter anger and distain felt by the community and,

in doing so, instill a shared goal or vision between the institution and the community—specifically, the institution's vision for itself and its community. Kotter (1996) states that such a shared vision helps clarify the need for change as well as its benefits. "A good vision acknowledges that sacrifices will be necessary but makes clear that these sacrifices will yield particular benefits that are far superior than those available today—or tomorrow—without attempting to change. Accordingly, communicating the vision is paramount" (Kotter, 1996, p. 70).

Background on the Organization

The University was established in the second half of the Nineteenth Century in a large East-Coast city in the United States. Currently, approximately 6,000 students enroll in the school's nearly 70 undergraduate and graduate programs. The campus comprises over 50 buildings including dormitories, apartment complexes, and town homes on over 100 acres within its urban neighborhoods. Nearly 2,000 university students donate approximately 100,000 hours of service to the community each year. In 2017-2018, the University:

- Donated nearly $2 million to promote businesses development near its campus.
- Provided over $1 million for security to its community, including a liaison to the neighborhood town watch.
- Gave approximately $10 million to its host city for hometown student scholarships.
- Employed faculty and staff, of whom, nearly half reside in the city with over one-third living in neighborhoods near the campus.

Table 1. Total Population of The University's Four Primary Neighborhoods 1960-2010

	1960	**1970**	**1980**	**1990**	**2000**	**2010**
Neighborhood A	67,152	65,377	56,306	52,441	50,696	46,195
Neighborhood B	31,781	32,392	32,854	30,223	25,958	22,412
Neighborhood C	36,838	35,797	32,967	34,839	37,229	42,133
Neighborhood D	22,122	23,144	22,776	20,691	18,866	17,862

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2010*).
*2020 Census data were not available at the time of this article's writing.

Table 1 illustrates the changes in overall population of the neighborhoods The University borders. The most noticeable trend from these forty years includes the decline in residency in all neighborhoods from 1960 to 2000 except for Neighborhood C, with Neighborhood A losing the most residents during this time. Also noticeable is the market decline in population within Neighborhood A and Neighborhood C between 1970 and 1980.

Table 2. Median Home Sales Price of The University's Neighborhoods: 1975-2015 (Constant 1999 US$)

	1975	1985	1995	2005	2015
Neighborhood A	$25,000	$26,000	$39,000	$42,000	$41,000
Neighborhood B	$34,000	$29,000	$35,000	$37,000	$26,000
Neighborhood C	$45,000	$39,000	$39,000	$45,000	$45,000
Neighborhood D	$39,000	$35,000	$39,000	$51,000	$46,000

Table 2 shows that both Neighborhood B and Neighborhood D experienced the greatest decline in house values from 1985 to 2015 while Neighborhoods A and C remained constant since 2005. As with Table 2, Neighborhood C remained most consistent of all the neighborhoods over the forty-year period.

Table 3. Most Frequently Cited Neighborhood Complaints in 2018 (Reported by Current and Former Residents in Percentages)

Complaint	Neighborhood A	Neighborhood B	Neighborhood C	Neighborhood D
Not safe	42	49	46	49
Too much noise	N/A	38	38	38
Trash and litter	N/A	37	37	36
Not enough parking	30	33	33	38

Current and former residents of The University's neighborhoods unanimously cited unsafe conditions as their biggest complaint. Whereas information on noise and litter was unavailable for Neighborhood A, the numbers of these complaints were all quite similar for Neighborhoods B, C, and D, thus illustrating that crime is a major concern of The University's residents (Table 3).

The preceding data evidence declining populations coupled with low median home values and concerns over safety and sanitation, which indicate the four neighborhoods near The University may be experiencing urban blight. The Urban Institute (2019), an organization that seeks to eliminate urban blight defines it as:

> …the downward spiraling malady afflicting many of our city and inner suburban neighborhoods. Marked by trash strewn lots, graffiti-covered buildings, barricaded storefronts, abandoned buildings, overflowing dumpsters, treeless corridors, and a proliferation of ugly signage, including billboards, broken sidewalks and poor lighting--urban blight chokes the life out of a neighborhood as surely as a blighted or diseased plant can spread and destroy an entire crop. Urban Blight drives out active residents and tax-paying businesses because most people want to live and work in a pleasing visual environment if they can. Those who stay often feel powerless to change the forces that have made their world ugly.

Need for the Study

While The University provided over $1.5 million to the city from annual payments to through taxable wages and city provided services, as well as over $13. million in expenditures with city businesses each year, the institution continues to receive some criticism for its expansion plans, community-perceived isolationism, and student behavioral issues.

The University's master expansion plan has placed additional strain on its relationship with neighboring communities. The plan calls for student housing, additional academic buildings, parking garages, athletic facilities, as well as additional commercial property.

Much of the criticism has come from The University's expansion into surrounding neighborhoods, its effects on the community, the redirection of traffic as well a rape case, which resulted in the resignation of the women's and men's basketball coaches following allegations of previous cover-ups of sexual misconduct among student-athletes. The University reiterated its commitment to the safety of students and neighbors during the crisis and its emphasis on openness to its community. However, some in the community feel The University often does close itself off from it, thereby adversely affecting university-community relations.

The "bully mentality" that some of residents seem to feel The University embodies, its tax-exempt status, its development of sections of the neighborhood, as well as the common problems that plague many colleges' town-gown relations, is at the center of this study—specifically, about community and university leaderships' perceptions. Therefore, this study examined leaders' opinions on the issues affecting town-gown relations between the community and The University as well as seek to find means to build an amicable relationship between the two that, as the literature suggests, benefit both the institution and the community.

Positive relationships are mutually beneficial for both the college and the community. For these relationships to exist however, the institution must become the catalyst to changing the oftentimes-strained relations between town and gown (Singer, 2001). Thompson, Story, and Butler (2003, p. 386) add that the University must be the, "Initiator of the process, moderator or facilitator of deliberation, and broker of scholarly knowledge." Therefore, through research, institutions of higher education can understand and learn from their communities and develop positive relationships with their neighbors in the face of campus crime, tax breaks, isolationist attitudes, and campus expansion (Spagnolia, 1998).

Despite the importance of understanding the town-gown phenomenon more fully, which would aid both universities and communities in establishing stronger relationships, relatively few studies have been conducted on the issue, and even fewer have been conducted that focus on community and university leaderships' views on their relationships with each other. As leaders, these individuals shape the relationship directly, and therefore, their views provide information that adds to the body of knowledge on the subject of town-gown relations. Lastly, case study methods lead to greater understanding of the phenomenon of town-gown relationships, both academically for in practice (O'Mara, 2012).

Research Questions

This study seeks to describe university and community leaders' perceptions of these relationships. Specifically, how do The University leaders and community leaders currently view the relationship between The University and the community? What do The University leaders and community leaders believe are the primary issues affecting the relationship between The University and the community? What do The University leaders and community leaders believe can be done to improve the relationship between The University and the community? How do The University leaders and community leaders foresee the relationship between The University and the community in the future?

Methodology & Research Design

Public relations' effectiveness is contingent on effective research. Without useful, meaningful information, even the best public relations plan is useless. Brody and Stone (1989, pp. 1–2) state that public relations research:

> ...requires identifying and understanding the function of diverse environmental influences within the context of specific public relations problems...As research in public relations must necessarily involve greater breadth and depth...practitioners must develop and maintain substantial bodies of knowledge concerning the environments with which they deal.

Moreover, Hendrix (1998, p. 171) adds, "...community relations research consists of carefully identifying audiences to be targeted for communication and learning as much about each audience as possible".

Therefore, a phenomenological study was utilized to help understand the influences that affect the University's town-gown relations. Stake (1985, p. 277) define the study as:

> ...the study of a single case or bounded system, it observes naturalistically and interprets higher order interrelations within the observed data. Results are generalizable in that the information given allows readers to decide whether the case is similar to theirs. Case study can and should be rigorous.

Dukes and Oiler (as cited in Creswell, 1994, p. 56) state that phenomenological studies include, "The examination of human experiences through detailed descriptions of the people being studied. The procedure involves studying a small number of subjects…to develop patterns/relationships of meaning."

Data from this qualitative research design enables a clear understanding of both The University and community's perspectives of town-gown relations. It is important to note that studying embedded units is crucial in this phenomenological study—that is, university and community leaders' perspectives. de Vaus (2004, p. 221) writes:

A well-designed study will avoid examining just some of the constituent elements. It will build up a picture of the case by taking into account information gained from many levels...Since many cases will consist of different elements, different methods of data collection may be required for the different elements.

Participants

Participant selections for interviews and focus groups are critical for the study's effectiveness. Purposeful sampling was used to determine the interviewees. Interviewees include the director of communications, provost, dean of students, director of safety and security, vice president of community and government relations, and university president. This selection was made because the preceding individuals are trusted with making decisions that affect nearly all university operations, most notably those that affect or react to issues concerning The University relationship with its community. Accordingly, these individuals are the most knowledgeable about issues addressed. Interview questions center on issues pertaining to the relationship between The University and the community.

In addition, civic and business leaders were interviewed to gauge community leadership perceptions. These individuals include block captains, civic leaders, business leaders, and neighborhood council representatives. Information from these individuals provided insights regarding the relationship between The University and the community from a community leadership perspective. As community leaders, these individuals influence and affect community-oriented perceptions of the University, and therefore, their input provides valuable information as well as an additional view of The University-community relationship.

Qualitative Procedures

To obtain a thorough depth of understanding into the town-gown relationship at The University, the researcher interviewed a variety of university officials and community.

Questions focusing on community and The University leaders' opinions of town-gown relations, who has more power in the relationship, the responsibilities between the two entities, influences affecting the relationship, perceptions of communication between the two, steps to improve the relationship, as well as their views on the future of the relationship. The same questions for community leaders were utilized.

The use of both structured and unstructured interview questions provided greater insights into the mindset of The University officials, community leaders, and focus group participants than would be possible using either open or closed-ended questions exclusively. University officials including the president, provost, campus police chief, and dean of students were engaged in in-depth interviews. A series of five focus groups were held with community members. Additional in-depth interviews were conducted with local business owners, clergy, and civic leaders.

Qualitative Data Analyses

Interview responses and focus group data were coded and analyzed. Coding, segmenting, and enumeration techniques enabled the researcher to identify themes, compare responses, as well as draw conclusions based on the interviewee's answers regarding The University and community's feeling regarding the town-gown relationship.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the preceding qualitative research techniques, the researcher used reflexivity because, as a former employee of The University in the study, there might be the possibility of researcher bias. Mruck and Breur (2003, p. 1) define reflexivity as "…examining the research process (and) using empirical examples to show in which way (sub-) cultural, social, professional, biographical, and personal characteristics of what is perceived, interpreted, and published".

Results

Most of The University leaders noted the complexity of the relationship considering the conflicting demographics between the student body and the citizens of the neighboring communities. Moreover, there exists a clear difference between how The University sees its relationship with the community and how community leaders interpret it. Community leaders often spoke of isolationism, university-centered agendas, and lack of contact when characterizing the relationship between non-academic neighbors and The University.

In contrast, The University leaders regularly spoke of partnership and shared vision when describing their relationship with the community. At the heart of these conflicting statements seems to be a lack of agreement concerning which entity possesses the most authority between the two. Most of The University leaders pointed to shared power, even though several university leaders noted the physical size dominance and purchasing power the institution has over the community. Community leaders expressed the opinion that The University exercises its power of purchasing when expanding, thereby putting the community in a position of inferiority when it comes to making important decisions concerning neighborhood redevelopment. Other community leaders described the relationship as isolationist on the part of The University. Those individuals stated The University introverts itself to the confines of the campus too much and does not provide enough services to aid the non-academic community such as business-assistance programs and student-community programs.

Nonetheless, The University leaders stated that their primary responsibility to the community was increased partnership and greater respect. Community leaders stated that The University must also work more mutually with the community, but also follow-through on initiatives that represent The University, such as service-learning projects. The University leaders contended that the community has a responsibility to The University including being more open to working with The University and more appreciative of the benefits The University brings to the

community, such as increased security and retail development. Community leaders admitted that the community needs to "learn to live" with its academic neighbor and accept the negatives as well as the benefits of residing near The University.

Despite The University leaders stating that their communication was responsive, many mentioned that improved communication would benefit the relationship between the University and the community. Community leaders agreed. In addition to communication, both community and The University leaders indicated that improving students' behavioral issues, especially those stemming from off-campus residences, would benefit the relationship. The University leaders also pointed to neighborhood revitalization to improve relations; however, community leaders added that too much restructuring of the neighborhood would adversely affect the relationship. The University leaders also expressed the hope that community leaders would take a more enlightened view of The University initiatives and have a greater acceptance of university-led projects. Community leaders expressed the desire to have The University provide more services to the community.

Data seems to indicate that The University leaders do not appreciate what they seem to perceive as an inability to "see the big picture" regarding university projects aimed at improving the neighborhood. Community leaders at times appeared to be rather unyielding in their stances on university projects and unwilling to accept changes to the neighborhood that benefit institution as well as the community. As with any relationship, give and take is needed form both sides; however, it seems that community leaders, at times, are overly protective of the status quo and unwilling to accept changes The University needs to fulfil its mission.

Both community and The University leaders most often pointed to the age differential between students and residents as the single greatest issue affecting the relationship between The University and the community. In addition, both sides added that the influx of students living in the community away from campus magnified the problems with student-resident relations. The University leaders spoke of traditional-aged college students and the "normal" activity associated with young adults of that age leading to many problematic interactions with non-academic neighbors. Loud parties, late-night noise, and alcohol were among the most-mentioned issues associated with student behavior. Similarly, community leaders stated the lifestyle of the community's high population of senior citizens did not often mesh well with the lifestyle of their college-aged neighbors. As an ancillary effect of off-campus residences, both The University and community leaders often noted parking and congestion problems as another key issue affecting the relationship.

It appears that The University leaders' admitted lack of regulated communication negatively affects the institution's ability to reinforce its commitment university to the community. The University leaders often noted the many services the institution avails to the community; however, community leaders often noted they wanted services from The University. It appears as though university leaders believe the institution is providing a wealth of services to the community.

Again, because most community leaders stated that they either desired additional services or were not aware existing services, The University does not seem to be communicating its offerings strongly enough. This study coincides with previous studies (Thompson et al., 2003; Nyden et al., 1998; Stoecker, 1999) that concluded communication and ongoing partnership must be a goal of any institution of higher education that seeks to strengthen relations with its community. Bruning et al. (2006) found similar sentiments where community members felt disengaged from the campus and its opportunities.

The University leaders stated that the relationship between the University and the community would evolve and improve in the future. Likewise, some community leaders expressed an optimistic future while some felt it would remain the same. Both university and community leaders stated that the future would depend on the actions of the other.

Conclusions & Steps Taken

This study illustrates the need for clearer communication and greater mutuality. Accordingly, The University leadership expanded its community services while making an effort to advertise them more to community leaders. For example, an advisory board was created composed of community leaders who meet at regular intervals and during key times (crises, new development, etc.) that provide The University with up-to-date information concerning community sentiments toward The University as well as suggestions to improve the relationship on an ongoing basis. Also, be The University is situated in a large city, it should easier for it to build stronger relationships with its non-academic neighbors than its rural or suburban counterparts (Mosier, 2015).

Town hall-style meetings, also at regular intervals, now provide The University leaders with greater insights into the community's mindset. Such meetings are open to community members to voice his or her opinion first-hand. Through such meetings, The University leadership also impart information that allows less-than-desirable initiatives such as street closures to be more easily accepted by the community.

Community members now voice their opinions and feel as though their suggestions and concerns are an important component to the initiative's planning. A secondary benefit other than reinforcing communication is making the community aware, and perhaps more appreciative of The University contributions, which The University leaders seek. Such communication comes at regular intervals rather than only when a problem or new construction occurs. Doing so also reduces what community leaders characterized as isolationism on the part of The University. Standardized communication reduces the perceived isolationist attitude that community leaders characterized the University.

Continuing an ongoing, open dialogue familiarizes the community to the everyday operations of The University, and it also helps ease tensions when problems do arise. Community members no longer look at The University communications as being the bearer of bad news. This coincides with Boyer

(1996) and Beck et al.'s (2000) assertion that universities are becoming more isolated as their relationships become more complex. To further improve relations, The University addresses issues of student behavior, especially off-campus.

Based on predominate sentiments from both community and The University leaders that student, off-campus residences present a major problem, The University develops greater restrictions and improved policing of student housing. In agreement with Murphy and Tacky's findings (2002), the interaction between college students and non-academic neighbors appears to be negatively affecting the relationship between The University and its neighbors, and thus, adversely affect The University's ability to further its mission. The University considers addressing the rising population of off-campus students with restrictions on the numbers of students permitted in neighboring communities.

Specifically, The University introduces policies that keep freshman and sophomore resident students on campus through rules that simply state that all freshman and sophomore students must use on-campus housing if they wish to attend The University. To further ease tensions, a combination of increased communication and student involvement in the community further alleviates pressures arising from off-campus residences.

Currently, The University offers many student-community programs; however, changes to the current programs enhances their benefits. One such enhancement is to increase the amount of time students must participate in their community programs.

For instance, requiring students to be involved over the four-year period of their undergraduate education shows the community The University's prolonged commitment to it while teaching students valuable life skills that reinforce the importance of their contribution to the community. As an example, an 18-year-old freshman sees how his or her tutoring at a local elementary school affects the life of a student who grows from elementary to high school as well as how the 18-year-old has grown as an individual the same four years. Such lessons cannot be taught in the classroom, and these programs provide the community, the college student, and The University with a valuable resource.

One such program is the inclusion of "community service" to a particular neighborhood. These community-student programs include planting gardens, renovations, etc. that enhance the community and help preserve it from the trash and vandalism that many community leaders stated was plaguing the neighborhoods—often coming from college students according to community leaders. College students are less likely to drop trash in a garden they helped plant or allow their friends to, so such programs create a domino effect of community "protection" on the part of college students. Another component of the college student-community connection comes from the integration of the real-world community into the lessons taught in the classroom. Collaboration between institutions and their communities must be part of any college or university's master plan (Dalton et al., 2018).

The inclusion of the community into the college classroom provides benefits to the students, professors, and community members (Dardig, 2004). For instance, business school classes include having students provide local businesses the help

they need based on lessons learned concerning the operations required to run a business successfully. Rather than simply reading a textbook on marketing, students integrate marketing techniques for a local business to (a) increase the business's profits and (b) show students how to market in the real world, thus benefiting both the student and the neighborhood and reinforcing the bond between The University and community. This type of highly engaged interaction between students and community members is key to developing positive town-gown relations (Gavazzi and Fox, 2015). Furthermore, involving students in the process of hands-on learning, while also helping the community at the same time, increases both engagement and positivity between The University and its neighbors (Filinson and Raimondo, 2019).

The University considers publicizing its services to the community more effectively, possibly through greater media exposure, which some community leaders expressed would benefit communication as well. Additionally, the community's demographic is predominately aging and elderly individuals who digest communication through printed materials. Accordingly, The University provides communication via mailers, postcards, etc. that publicize The University's offering to the community using large print to ease readability as opposed to social media and online communication. Drawing positive publicity and improving public image by advertising these initiatives provides an added benefit to the reputation of The University and further strengthens bonds between the community and its academic neighbor.

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