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A Town–Gown Collaboration to Reduce College Student Alcohol Misuse

Michael Curme, Kate Rousmaniere, and Stephen M. Gavazzi

Abstract

The quality of the relationship between a university and its host community both reflects and helps determine the effectiveness of the work they jointly pursue. Through the single issue of partnering to reduce college student alcohol misuse, we examined the quality of town–gown relations using a well-established typology grounded in the marriage and family literature. In describing the evolution of town–gown relationships over the dual factors of effort and comfort, we explored the circumstances and conditions that helped to create a (presumably mutually desirable) "harmonious" town–gown relationship—one characterized by high levels of effort as well as high levels of comfort.

Keywords: alcohol misuse; town-gown; evolving relations; partnerships

In fall 2017, the Town–Gown Initiatives Team (TGIT), a partnership between the City of Oxford, Ohio and Miami University, or what we will refer to as "Oxami," jointly administered the Optimal College Town Assessment (OCTA) to its community members. Roughly 1,000 Oxford community members and another 1,000+ members of Miami's faculty, staff, and student body took the time to complete the voluntary response survey. This strong community response served as a symbolic culmination of several years of intensive town–gown partnership work focused largely on the shared town–gown objective of responding to and reducing highly visible student alcohol misuse in the community.

In this article, we describe and reflect on how the work of reducing high-risk alcohol misuse in a college town evolved over 50 years, from a nonissue to an increasing source of town–gown tension to an issue that helped bring a somewhat fractured city and university together in a common cause. The last segment of this tale witnessed an evolution of the work from being the almost sole responsibility of an underfunded and overworked university office to a high priority issue for both the university and the city. We argue that the shared concern about high-risk alcohol misuse opened communication channels that allowed discussion of other long-standing (and related) issues of concern and ultimately strengthened the partnership across related town–gown offices, leading to the creation and recognition of a more formal infrastructure for enhancing town–gown partnerships and measurable progress toward the shared goals.

As a largely qualitative study, this paper draws upon the 3-year experience of a town–gown workgroup in which two of the authors were engaged as university dean of students and as city mayor. The article is both an analysis of the historic context of the town–gown relationship in one college town and an eyewitness account of intensive work that included planning and administering the OCTA survey. The study thus draws on an interpretive ethnohistory approach and, in the final conclusion, offers impressionistic "lessons learned" from reflection on the experiences that led up to and included the OCTA assessment process (described here in Phase 4; Quantz, 2005; Thorne, 2014). This article contributes to an emerging body of literature that describes, interprets, and makes recommendations for what are commonly called town–gown relationships, relying on a conceptual

framework for understanding perceptions of campus–community relationships, with a particular focus on a community-wide effort to address student alcohol misuse.

This work was further inspired by the scholarship of engagement. In 1996 Ernest Boyer, then president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, urged universities to apply their professional and scholarly expertise to current civic, social, economic, and moral problems in the local community (Boyer, 1996). The goals of community-engaged scholarship include the development of strong university-community partnerships that are mutually beneficial and that involve the exchange and application of socially useful knowledge and practices (Engagement Scholarship Consortium, 2020).

However, effective and egalitarian partnerships between town and gown are notoriously hard to come by because of differing power relations between universities and their communities and procedural conflict between university reliance on theory and expertise and community members' reliance on the experiential and local (Fisher et al., 2004). Differing expectations also lead to distrust, often fed by long histories of poor communication (and relations) between town and gown. Thus, critical to effective engagement of town and gown are purposeful relationship building and the institutionalizing of practices of "mutual respect, equal status, and mutual give and take" (LeGates & Robinson, 1998, p. 312). Effective town–gown work involves "taking advantage of strategic opportunities, remaining fluid, and establishing a level of trust and accommodation" (Feld, 1998, p. 286).

The case of Oxami's collaborative efforts to reduce college students' extreme alcohol misuse is one example of how a shared goal in town–gown relations can develop such trust and accommodation.

Conceptualizing and Measuring Campus–Community Relationships

Gavazzi et al. (2014) employed two related yet distinct dimensions that can be used to illustrate the quality of campus–community exchanges. The first dimension involved the level of *effort* being put into the maintenance of the relationship. The second dimension centered on the level of *comfort* that campus and community stakeholders experience together as the result of those activities. Four types of relationships (see Figure 1) resulted from combining the comfort and effort dimensions: harmonious, traditional, conflicted, and devitalized. The harmonious relationship—characterized by higher comfort and higher effort levels—is the most desirable form of campus–community relationship. All other types are regarded as suboptimal in descending order of functionality: traditional, then conflicted, and finally devitalized.

Gavazzi and Fox (2015) reported on the development of the Optimal College Town Assessment (OCTA), a measure that operationalized the conceptual framework offered by Gavazzi et al. (2014). The OCTA was designed to evaluate perceptions of campus–community relationships as the combina-

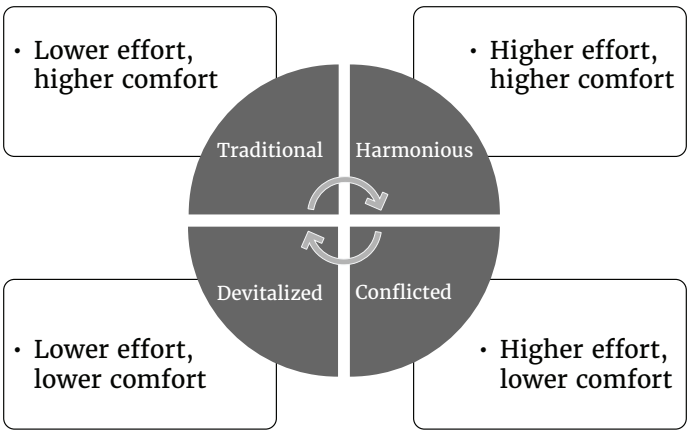

Figure 1. A Campus–Community Relationship Typology (Gavazzi, 2016).

tion of effort and comfort levels, capturing participants' direct personal experiences of these two dimensions as well as their opinions about overall community sensitivities. Gavazzi (2015b) also demonstrated how the quantitative approach to relationship assessment embedded in the use of the OCTA should be balanced by the collection of more qualitatively oriented information. For one recent report on an OCTA survey of another college town, see Coryell (2021).

The gathering of this kind of quantitative and qualitative information has been described as part of a "mobilization cycle" by Gavazzi (2015a). This mobilization cycle contains two pre–data collection phases—awareness raising and coalition building—that involve identifying and reaching out to the primary campus and community stakeholders whose voices should be heard through the data collection process. Two post–data collection activities—data interpretation and evidence-based planning—round out the mobilization cycle process, as they comprise organizing, analyzing, and reporting information that is understandable to the intended audience(s) and can be used to build a strategy to develop more harmonious campus–community relationships. Finally, Gavazzi (2018) has discussed how all these activities are impacted in both positive and negative ways by the leadership of universities and municipalities alike.

That the Gavazzi framework for describing and assessing town–gown relations was derived from marriage and family research represents a reality for many small college towns, where the university often plays the role of stereotypical "big brother," reflecting the entitlement, position, and size often characteristic of older brothers that can manifest in loving but painful ways. College–town relationships, like many sibling relationships, can be marked by long histories and deep grudges, as well as the recognition that the two entities are reliant on each other.

Although many issues have impacted town–gown relationships over the last 50 years in Oxami, we speculated on the nature of that relationship within the Gavazzi framework exclusively through the lens of the town–gown response to student alcohol-related issues. Concerns about alcohol misuse and the associated negative consequences—those directly experienced by users as well as the indirect costs imposed on the broader community—were not new. Much like the impact of *Not Alone*, the report by the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault (2014), on the recognition and measurement of sexual violence as a campus scourge, the Harvard College Alcohol Study (Wechsler, Davenport, et al., 1994; Wechsler, Lee, et al., 2000) brought the extent of and the costs associated with collegiate alcohol misuse into the national spotlight.

The National Institutes of Health and National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) have since worked to keep awareness of collegiate alcohol misuse on the front burner for most college presidents. The urgency of the issue has been reinforced by its significant overlap with the campus sexual assault crisis, as well as the well-documented increase in mood disorders and mental health service utilization on U.S. college campuses (Duffy et al., 2019; Eisenberg, 2019; Lipson et al., 2019).

Analysis of Evolving Town–Gown Relations

We have divided our analysis into four chronological phases of the town–gown relationship as defined by the Gavazzi typology.

Phase 1: Pre-1970s. We argue that this period was likely characterized by a "traditional" town–gown relationship: high comfort and low effort.

Phase 2: 1970–1990. This period was largely characterized by diminishing levels of comfort, thereby moving the town–gown relationship toward "devitalized" (low effort, low comfort).

Phase 3: 1990–2010. Increasing effort levels represented the predominant trend over this period, moving the city–university relationship toward "conflicted," with high effort and low comfort.

Phase 4: 2010–present. OCTA was administered at the end of this period, and it also represents the endpoint of our story. In our view, the enhanced effort that characterized the prior period was not only sustained but intensified, and it actually served to enhance comfort as well, so that the town–gown relationship approached a "harmonious" (high

effort and high comfort) relationship.

In recognition that town–gown relations are ever evolving, a short epilogue is also included after our Phase 4 discussion. The article closes with a conclusion and a summary of lessons learned.

Before discussing the four phases of our ethnological reflection on the state of town–gown relations, it is important to note that our analysis was speculative in that it was not directly informed by any prior administration of the Optimal College Town Assessment (OCTA) instrument. The 2017 administration of the OCTA provided our only data explicitly designed to formally measure the quality of the Oxami town–gown relationship. In addition to providing a snapshot of that relationship at a very specific point in time, as will become evident later in our narrative, the OCTA survey was important to our work for a number of other reasons as well. For example, simply reaching agreement that the survey should be launched served as validation of our town–gown efforts to work productively toward common goals. Likewise, effectively executing the survey took a high level of town–gown coordination and communication, much of which occurred under the coordinated leadership of the university dean and the city mayor, both contributing authors of this article.

The shared desire to better understand where our town–gown relationship stood at a specific moment in time also naturally stimulated serious reflection about where we had been, as well as how and why our town–gown relationship had evolved over time. So in a sense the OCTA instrument and process, in and of themselves, helped motivate this review. Together, we hoped that having a better sense of how our relationship evolved and the factors that shaped that relationship would serve to inform our actual evaluation and interpretation of the OCTA data collected in 2017 in deep and meaningful ways. Likewise, we hoped that this sharper focus on the town–gown relations snapshot might in turn help more clearly identify the best route forward for even higher future levels of effort and comfort and a more productive working relationship.

In fact, a more formal analysis of and reflection on the OCTA data collected in 2017, and how those survey results can be used to enhance town–gown relations, is a parallel project to this article, and is currently under preparation. As the formal analysis, presentation, and discussion of those data are the focus of a separate project, in Phase 4 we will simply provide a few brief and general highlights from the OCTA that focus primarily on our overall perception of the state of the town–gown relationship at the conclusion of the assessment process.

Phase 1. Pre-1970s: Traditional

In Oxami, in part because of its broader rural location, historically there had been a good deal of overlap between the citizens of the town and the employees of the university. Until the 1980s, most of the faculty of the college also were permanent residents of the town, as were many staff members. Thus, the children of faculty, staff, and unaffiliated citizens were educated together, and their parents mingled and connected in all the ways that parents often do through the activities of their children. As a result, many citizens of the town were either directly connected to the university, or closely but indirectly connected as spouse, neighbor, parishioner, or fellow coach.

This dynamic was probably rather typical of American college towns from the 1950s through to the 1970s (Gumprecht, 2008; Rousmaniere, 2021). In 1950, Oxford's census population was 6,944, and full-time student enrollment was 4,916. Of these, 3,405 of the students were housed on campus, leaving 1,511 full-time students residing off-campus. Similarly, the 1960 census population was 7,828, and there were 2,608 students living off-campus and 3,928 residing on-campus (18th Census of the United States Census, 1960; Miami University - Oxford Campus, 2020). Additionally, the town's permanent population included a high percentage of the college's faculty and staff. Because the residential neighborhoods were disproportionately populated by permanent residents, including faculty and staff known by students, organic community standards had a moderating effect on the behavior of those students who lived in town.

With respect to student alcohol use, for most of the 20th century prior to Prohibition the city itself was "dry"—the sale of all alcohol was outlawed through a local referendum in 1905. After Prohibition (established by the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, and effective 1920–1933) was lifted through the

21st Amendment, the city followed state law, which allowed the sale and consumption of beer containing 3.2% alcohol by volume. At the time, this beverage—colloquially known as 3-2 beer—was considered a "nonintoxicating" beverage according to an influential study by A. J. Carlson et al. (1934; cited in *Studies on the Possible Intoxicating Action*, 1934) that received at least $6,000 of funding from brewers (Pauly, 1994). After the repeal of Prohibition there was significant variance in legal drinking ages across states, and some states set different ages for different alcoholic beverage types (distilled spirits or fermented beer and wine). In Ohio, post-Prohibition, the legal drinking age was set at 21, with the exception of 3-2 beer, for which the legal age was 18. Thus, most students in the college could legally consume 3-2 beer, and only 3-2 beer.

Community disruptions (and the resultant tension) related to student alcohol misuse were relatively infrequent in this period because the local, legal availability of alcohol to students was limited to 3-2 beer, the student residential population in the city was "outnumbered" by permanent residents, and many permanent residents were directly affiliated with the university. And, perhaps in a signal that the community acknowledged and wished to maintain this relative peace, in 1969 local voters—mostly permanent residents, given the 21-year-old voting age—rejected a referendum that would have widened the availability of alcohol in the city beyond 3-2 beer.

Thus, before 1970 it appears likely that there was a high level of comfort between the university and the town: The university staff and town residents overlapped significantly, and adult community standards prevailed in the residential neighborhood closest to campus (referred to as the "Mile Square"). Further, it seemed that there was little need for town–gown effort related to combating high-risk alcohol misuse. Thus, in the Gavazzi typology, the town–gown relationship prior to 1970 was likely "traditional," characterized by high comfort and low effort, particularly as it related to student alcohol misuse.

Phase 2. 1970–1990: Devitalized

The 1970–1990 period was largely characterized by diminishing levels of comfort, thereby moving the town–gown relationship toward what the Gavazzi framework identifies as "devitalized" (low effort, low comfort). This change was due largely to enrollment changes at the university in the significant Baby Boom growth of the 1970s and 1980s. Full-time student enrollment at the university had grown steadily, increasing from 6,536 in 1960 to 11,251 in 1970. Over this same period, the number of enrolled full-time students living off-campus increased from 2,608 to 4,647 and, by the end of the 1970s, to 5,655 (Rousmaniere, 2021).

A 2005 study by the local League of Women Voters (League of Women Voters of Oxford, 2005) highlighted some of the changes that occurred over this period, and reported that by 1990, the percentage of owner-occupied housing in the city was only 35%. Moreover, many of the remaining permanent residents of the Mile Square were segregated into the northwest section of the area, which butted up against a public K-5 grade school.

In Oxford as in other college towns, a variety of forces acted to both pull away and push out permanent residents of the Mile Square during this period. Growth in the student body in excess of the number of available residence hall beds on campus created higher demand for off-campus housing. Simultaneously, local city zoning related to rental properties at the time was generous, leading some homeowners to be "pulled away" from residency by the opportunity to earn a handsome flow of rental income, or sell their property at a premium price. At the same time, the increasing density of student residents eroded the organic community standards of behavior normally associated with single-family owner-occupancy, and effectively "pushed out" other homeowners who decried the growth of noise, litter, and student parties, much of which was the result of changes in alcohol use and availability.

What happened over this period echoed the experience of other American college towns, which some scholars term "studentification." In studentification, specific neighborhoods become dominated by student residential occupation, properties are architecturally reshaped for student occupants, and rents rise in an increasingly closed market (Allinson, 2006; Fox, 2008; Hubbard, 2008; Massey et al., 2014; D. Smith, 2008; D. P. Smith, 2005; N. Smith, 1979; Unsworth & Smales, 2009).

National and local alcohol laws also underwent significant change over this period.

Prior to 1970, most states had adopted 21 as the legal drinking age for all alcoholic beverages. Between 1970 and 1975, however, 29 of those states reduced the legal drinking age to either 19 or 18 for all or some alcoholic beverage types, and additional states followed by 1980 (Wagenaar, 1981). These drinking law changes were driven by two important historical events. Due to the Vietnam War, the United States was drafting 18-year-olds into military service and possible combat duty, and so there was a sense that those developmentally ready to risk their lives for their country also surpassed the maturity threshold necessary for consuming alcohol. In addition, the 26th Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1971, extended voting rights to those same 18- to 20-year-olds who were deemed old enough to defend their country (Toomey et al., 2009; Wagenaar, 1993).

This change in the voting age in particular had a profound impact on Oxford. Virtually overnight, the growing proportion of 18- to 20-year-old students residing in town became a powerful voting block—a block that also was restricted by state law to purchasing only 3-2 beer. As the city lacked home rule authority to deviate from the state's 21-year-old legal age (for alcoholic beverage types other than 3-2 beer), the new student voters nevertheless helped to expand the overall availability of alcohol in the city by helping to pass, in 1975, a referendum that permitted the carry-out sale of all forms of alcohol (e.g., spirits, wine, higher gravity beer) in the city. As a result, a state-regulated liquor outlet opened, making available to students and all city residents, for the first time, alcohol stronger than 3-2 beer. Another referendum was approved in 1979 that allowed, again for the first time, on-site (bar/club) consumption of alcoholic beverages other than 3-2 beer.

Shortly after this expansion of alcoholic beverage types available for sale in the town, the legal drinking age in the state for beer was increased—first to 19 for 3-2 beer in 1982, and then, in 1988, to 21 for all beer as all U.S. states moved to adopt the 21-year-old standard established by the 1984 National Minimum Drinking Age Act. Even with the higher legal drinking age, however, the expanded availability of all forms of alcohol within the Mile Square residential area now dominated by undergraduates (including over 25 fraternity chapter houses) resulted in increasingly widespread student alcohol misuse in town, creating a new source of town–gown tension, challenging the prevailing "comfort" that was characteristic of the earlier period. Moreover, since high-risk collegiate drinking had not yet been identified as a pressing national public health concern, there was neither a significant university nor town-led effort to formally respond to the growing problem. Thus, retrospectively, at least on the issue of high-risk alcohol misuse, using the Gavazzi framework, this period is likely best described as "devitalized"—low (and certainly diminishing) comfort and low levels of effort.

Phase 3. 1990–2010: Conflicted

Although the state (and town's) legal drinking age increased in steps to 21 by the end of the 1980s, state and local conditions still contributed to a growing challenge with alcohol misuse by college students who now dominated the Mile Square residential area of the town. Furthermore, even after the increase in the drinking age, state law still did not explicitly prohibit 18- to 20-year-olds from entering bars and clubs, and the decision to admit underage patrons—who might come to dance, socialize, and so on but not (legally) consume alcohol—was left to each permit holder. Those younger than the legal drinking age could still attempt to access alcohol in clubs and bars through the use of a fake ID that misrepresented their true age and through "drink passing" whereby a patron evaluated to be of legal drinking age purchased a drink for someone not of legal drinking age. Generally, state law insulates permit holders from legal liability related to underage consumption. Instead, those who accessed (or provided) alcohol in the ways described typically faced the legal risk, as permit holders could argue that they had not knowingly sold (in the case of a fake ID) or furnished (in the case of drink passing) alcohol to anyone below the legal drinking age.

The university has a long-standing and strong Greek community, and historically, members of collegiate social fraternities would drink more, and more frequently, than nonaffiliated students (Borsari et al., 2009; Wechsler, Kuh, et al., 2009). Although fraternity membership nationally began to decline in the 1960s, interest and involvement in Greek organizations rebounded in the 1980s and 1990s after the establishment of the national minimum drinking age. With

a 21-year-old legal drinking age, most students on a residential college campus reached legal drinking age during their third or fourth year on campus. With declining access to alcohol, fraternity chapter houses—large residential structures often occupied by a mix of students over and under 21—began to play a much greater role in collegiate social life in part because of their lack of age discrimination with respect to alcohol access, both for members and for party guests (Nuwer, 2001).

Between one quarter and one third of the undergraduates on campus had a formal Greek affiliation in this period, and due to their role in accessing alcohol and social networks, the campus Greek community became increasingly prominent. By the mid-1990s, as many as 30 fraternity off-campus chapter houses dotted the residential area of the city, housing as many as 2,000 men. Many more fraternity members also resided in private "annex" houses characterized by rental agreements that were traditionally "passed down" from older to younger members of the same fraternity chapter. These annex houses often served as de facto extensions of the associated formal chapter house, especially with respect to hosting parties with easy alcohol availability and minimal formal oversight. The Greek chapter and annex houses were all located within what was now the student-dominated Mile Square residential area, and a short walk to as many as a dozen bars and clubs catering to college students located in the business district bordering campus.

In addition, many of the student rental houses had front porches and large front yards relative to backyards. This latter quality reflected, in part, municipal zoning that allowed backyards to accommodate several off-street parking spaces earmarked for multiple unrelated residents sharing a single home. Thus, within a very concentrated three- or four-block area directly abutting the campus, regular and highly visible displays of alcohol (mis)use at fraternity chapter houses and front yard/front porch parties in "annex" and other student rental houses were very common. Because of the small size of the town, these alcohol-related activities were clearly on display for students, permanent residents, and visitors, including prospective students and their families. This magnification of student drinking likely served to inflate the prevailing student-perceived "drinking norms," while also impacting the type of student attracted to the university. Internal school data show that students on this campus both entered college with, and then sustained, binge drinking rates higher than the national average.

The issue of problematic collegiate alcohol misuse and, in particular, binge drinking, gained national prominence during this period in part due to the pathbreaking 1992–2006 Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS; Wechsler, Davenport, et al., 1994). The research flow from the CAS in turn triggered the 2002 NIAAA task force report *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges* (Task Force of the National Advisory Council, 2002). Jarringly, the NIAAA report noted that alcohol misuse was responsible for the death of over 1,400 college students annually, a statistic that is still regularly updated and reported by the National Institutes of Health (and currently stands at around 1,800; NIAAA, 2019).

The Oxford community indeed already was aware of student alcohol misuse. By the mid-1980s, local concerns about high-risk alcohol consumption and related behavior led to the creation of an Ad Hoc Committee on Community Relations, which in 1986 evolved into a permanent standing committee of the city council called the Student Community Relations Council (SCRC). The SCRC formally brought together university students, members of the city council, and university administrators to "investigate, explore, and discuss any and all matters . . . related to student/community relations'' (Oxford, OH, 1986, Ordinance No. 1897). Importantly, the SCRC was also "expressly authorized and directed to make . . . recommendations to Council . . . determin(ed) to be in the interest of student/community relations" (Oxford, OH, 1986, Ordinance No. 1897).

Roughly a decade later, in 1997, the local Coalition for a Healthy Community—an organization composed of city, school district, university, and local hospital leaders—was established, funded in part by a Federal Drug Free Communities Grant that spanned the years 2000–2010. Like the SCRC, the Coalition as a structure was significant because it very intentionally connected city and university members behind the common goal of studying and responding to a clearly articulated community-wide concern about high-risk alcohol consumption.

Although the SCRC and the Coalition were not created exclusively for the purpose of responding to student alcohol misuse, the Coalition, in particular, made it a focus of their work over this period. The increasing town–gown focus and cooperation on the issue was bolstered not only by the federal grant funding, but by the visible support of high-level university administration. In the late 1990s the university president cochaired a statewide initiative focused on reducing youth alcohol misuse. After three students died in an alcohol-related fire in an off-campus house in 2005, the president used his State of the University address to publicly condemn and challenge student alcohol misuse. At the same time, he named an Alcohol Abuse Prevention Task Force charged with making "bold, forceful, and imaginative recommendations to deal more effectively with (the) complex, chronic and disruptive problem of alcohol abuse" (President's Task Force on Alcohol Abuse Prevention, 2006). The 2006 recommendations of the Alcohol Abuse Prevention Task Force served as the de facto strategic plan for town–gown efforts around alcohol misuse for roughly the next decade.

Over the 1990–2010 period, both the town and the university had clearly identified student alcohol misuse as a major point of concern that, in turn, elevated the overall tension with respect to town–gown relations. Given this declining level of comfort, with respect to the Gavazzi typology, this period can best be described as "conflicted": increasing levels of effort driven largely as a response to increasing levels of discomfort associated with high-risk student alcohol misuse.

Phase 4. 2010s–present: (The Journey Toward) Harmonious

The 2006 Alcohol Task Force report effectively served as a strategic plan for the town–gown work to combat high-risk alcohol consumption, and the Coalition and the SCRC provided two formal community structures helpful in sustaining the momentum and linking the university and the town in these efforts.

The area within the university most directly responsible for leadership on the alcohol misuse issue—the Division of Student Life—experienced significant high-level leadership turnover during this period, which could have slowed progress on the work. However, the new administrators and staff zeroed in on the problem and coordinated with the President's Office to create, in 2014, a new alcohol-related task force. In his call to action that fall, the president acknowledged some level of university responsibility for and ownership of the negative impact of student alcohol misuse on the community. At the same time, he also emphasized that a successful response to the challenge would require a community-wide effort. This leadership and support from the very highest level of the organization served as a powerful signal to all stakeholders that decisive action was imminent yet would also be grounded in meaningful input from a broad range of stakeholders, including, for example, students, faculty, and staff; the local medical community; K-12 educators; and business owners (landlords and alcohol permit holders in particular).

Consistent with this community-wide approach, the president also called for an external environmental scan, which was executed in fall 2014. Using this analysis as one of its inputs, in spring 2015 the final report of the task force led to the creation of a permanent oversight entity—the Alcohol Coordinating Council (ACC)—to help guide and coordinate the university and town response to the specific task force recommendations and more generally lead the ongoing work of reducing high-risk student alcohol misuse. Rather than using standing subcommittees with broad charges, the ACC opted instead to create task-specific workgroups. Workgroup members were selected based on a connection to the narrow task under consideration, and each workgroup was designed to dissolve after task completion—likely to be replaced by a new workgroup with a different membership and focus. Initially, five workgroups were created, with titles reflecting their tasks/charges: Academic Policy, Education and Prevention, Intervention and Treatment, Off-Campus Partnerships, and Policy and Enforcement. As with the composition of the ACC, all of these workgroups were broadly inclusive, drawing from students, faculty and staff, and community stakeholders. By design, many of the new workgroup members also sat on the Coalition and/or the SCRC, the two other permanent structures with goals largely overlapping those of the new ACC.

Two of the broadest strategies that emerged from the 2015 task force report were to (1) better understand, respond to, and reduce the prevalence of highly visible, deviant

alcohol misuse and (2) increase alternative social activities and general support for those who abstain from or seek to stop or reduce their alcohol use. The ACC workgroups aligned with these strategies and intensified the work by including community partners in their efforts. The ongoing work in this period led to four key results: the creation of formal town–gown teams, policing partnerships, a policy on addressing off-campus house parties, and improved data collection. Although, as we will later note, there was some disconnect between the campus and the town on the amount and/or nature of the effort over this period, the remainder of this section highlights how town–gown effort intensified over this period through these four significant partnerships that helped to both define and advance our work.

Town–Gown Teams

The level of town–gown cooperation over this period was energized by the creation of the ACC and the appointment of important stakeholders to the issue-focused, stakeholder-inclusive workgroups. The city mayor, as well as half of the members of the city council and multiple city employees, had membership on at least one of the ACC workgroups. In turn, university staff members were invited on multiple occasions to update the entire city council on the strategies and progress related to alcohol initiatives. There was also a significant (and somewhat related) increase in university and city staff participation in the International Town Gown Association over this period.

Beginning in 2015, city and university staff began to regularly attend and present at the annual conference of the International Town Gown Association (ITGA)—an organization dedicated to strengthening city–college partnerships. These annual events furthered idea gathering, and town–gown team/relationship building, while helping to create a new esprit de corps that positively and significantly impacted the work for the next few years. In Oxami, the stakeholder participation and increased visibility of the town–gown work, due in part to the active engagement of the dean of students and city mayor, also served to hasten some of the initiatives that required formal city or university endorsement. The ITGA as an organization provided visible validation of an increasingly shared belief that community problems required community responses.

Enthusiasm for the ITGA work motivated those most closely involved in the work to develop a formal structure—explicitly linking the city and the university at the highest levels—that was designed to promote town–gown cooperation on all issues. This core group, which included the mayor, the dean of students, the director of wellness, the city manager, and several other critical city and university staff members, developed an enabling document and philosophical statement to help guide its work. The enabling document was drafted to define the composition and the purpose of the new group; the philosophical statement ("Guiding Concepts") very directly described the spirit and ideals of town–gown cooperation that they hoped would guide the work. The resulting entity—the Town–Gown Initiatives Team (TGIT)—was formally endorsed by the city mayor and the university president by January 2017.

In its first year (academic year 2016–2017) the TGIT planned and executed a statewide town–gown conference that focused on high-risk student alcohol misuse and served to rally multiple state institutions around a common call to action for greater support on that goal from the state government. The group followed this up by sponsoring a community-wide "listening luncheon" at which virtually every existing community organization was invited to share information about its work in order to identify opportunities for collaboration toward common goals.

Policing Partners

Given the nature of law enforcement work, some amount of distancing, rivalry, and mutual posturing is perhaps inevitable when a collegiate police force coexists with a city force, particularly where the city population and school enrollment result in forces of comparable size. Although a shared jurisdiction agreement was in place, prior to this period enforcement activities outside each unit's formally defined area remained rare, as did formal coordination and cooperation. Various leadership changes in the forces may have contributed to a period of warming relationships, and the two chiefs began to meet regularly in 2015. These meetings eventually included the dean of students, and they served to greatly enhance communication and general good will between the two departments. The meetings often

focused on strategies for reducing student alcohol misuse in the community, as well as the related issue of sexual assault and the university's Title IX reporting obligations.

In response to the shared town–gown concern over highly visible alcohol misuse, as well as regular complaints from both businesses and community members about student misbehavior during the daytime hours on Saturdays, joint city–university "Saturday patrols" were increased in the bar-heavy business district close to campus. Although the shared jurisdiction agreement formally allowed for these enhanced joint patrols, the university and city both dedicated additional resources to the patrols. The university's decision to formally commit resources to an area outside its direct oversight was viewed by some as both an overdue recognition of the negative impact of (some) student behavior in the host community and a clear signal of the school's commitment to the town–gown partnership.

Good Neighbor Policy

The town–gown alcohol strategy targeted not only highly visible alcohol misuse in bars, but also large "open" house parties in student rental properties. In the ACC Off-Campus Affairs workgroup, conversations about joint university–city enforcement options took place across multiple forums that included representatives from both police forces as well as the city council. Although ultimately deferring to the city on all matters related to ordinances and/or enforcement, the increasing comfort levels in the town–gown partnership allowed the university to raise questions about whether there were ways to utilize limited community enforcement resources that would better complement and reinforce policy changes that the university had enacted.

Perhaps the most significant output of this work was the "Good Neighbor" policy, aimed at discouraging highly visible, high-risk "open" house parties. In and of itself, the hosting of a house party neither directly violated the school's code of conduct nor state or local law. Although house parties are not, per se, illegal, city police typically responded to problematic house parties through those common symptoms that are in fact illegal (litter, excessive noise, public urination, etc.). Although litter and noise infractions did not directly violate the school's code of conduct, the code did prohibit general "violations of the law." Police citations are matters of public record, and in a small town in particular, these public records were easily obtained and reviewed. The overarching objective of the Good Neighbor policy, as the name implies, was to educate students about being responsible citizens.

Given that the city police had experience with and were intimately familiar with young-adult behavior, litter and noise citations written in response to house parties almost always indicated (mis)behaviors highly unlikely to be practiced in the homes where the students were raised (or in the homes they would occupy after graduation). In light of this, the policy workgroup—working closely with city workers, elected officials, and university students and student leaders—took an education-oriented, three strikes approach to house party violations that explicitly connected the city's and university's notification and sanctioning systems. Under the Good Neighbor policy, the university reviewed all litter and noise violations, and responded to student infractions with increasing communications and sanctions, beginning with a letter to the residents, penned jointly by city and university officials, which clearly articulated the expectation that students would be good neighbors in their communities, followed by a required meeting of house residents with a group of student leaders and town–gown stakeholders. This meeting was essentially an informal, nonconfrontational conversation about community behavioral expectations, and it included an exploration of alternative ways that the residents might achieve their social goals without negatively impacting the community. A third and final citation led to referral to the school's conduct office, which resulted in each student facing one or more university code of conduct violations.

The specific details of the Good Neighbor policy were shaped by the input received from students during the development process, in which students explained that they were more concerned about facing a charge from the university conduct office than a civil violation from the city. The integration of these city and university processes also clearly signaled to students that high-risk alcohol misuse was viewed as a significant community challenge, and one that required a coordinated community-wide,

town–gown response. The adoption of the Good Neighbor policy also sent an important message to the city that the university was aware of, and intended to respond to, unruly and unacceptable student behavior off-campus, leading to the adoption of new city ordinances and enforcement strategies, designed in consultation with university staff.

Improved Data

In 2014, both the external review and the Alcohol Task Force report identified the need for better data related to student alcohol use. In response, the school's Division of Student Life developed a new, annual, comprehensive campus health survey, the Student Health Survey, that invited responses from every student to a broad range of questions related to the overlapping areas of alcohol and drug misuse, sexual and interpersonal violence, and mental health challenges. In addition to allowing all undergraduates to complete the survey, faculty members also were invited to partner with the university to enhance response rates by allowing the administration of the survey during class time.

These data allowed the school to better understand and respond to the major challenges to student success posed by the interconnected issues of sexual violence, alcohol and drug misuse, and student mental health. Response rates have been around 25%, and the results over the first 3 years of the survey were consistent with a reduction in student alcohol misuse and, more generally, an improvement in the campus culture related to alcohol use and positive bystander behavior. To those involved in the work, the results were a welcome validation of, using the Gavazzi framework, their high level of effort.

The Optimal College Town Assessment (OCTA) Survey

In addition to the Student Health Survey, in summer 2017 the TGIT received a grant to participate in a multicampus study focused on environmental strategies aimed at reducing high-risk alcohol misuse. A major component of this project was the administration of a modified version of the Optimal College Town Assessment (OCTA) survey. In addition to the core questions measuring town and college perceptions about the effort and comfort in the working relationship, the survey was expanded to include a set of questions about the extent and consequences of student alcohol use/misuse in the town.

Members of the TGIT were enthusiastic about this project for at least two reasons. One, there was a sense that the working relationship was evolving toward harmonious—characterized by high effort and high comfort—and there was a desire to test this hypothesis and document the results. Two, as argued in this article, there was a recognition that the town–gown relationship was unlikely to be static, and a feeling that regular measurement—say, every 3–5 years—could help to identify deviations from the harmonious goal while also providing specific, actionable data to inform the ongoing efforts to maintain a productive relationship.

The successful planning and administration of the OCTA in and of itself seemed to validate the participants' sense that they had achieved or were approaching a harmonious relationship around the town–gown work to reduce high-risk alcohol misuse. There was a unified and consistent call to both university and town stakeholders inviting a range of voices to be heard through survey completion. On the town side, the TGIT communicated with and sent survey links to all of the following stakeholders: members of city council; all city employees; all city police; local business owners (through the Chamber of Commerce); local nonprofits (through the United Way and the university's Office of Community Engagement); members of the faith community (through the local spiritual leaders association); area senior citizens (through a local advocacy group); the local NAACP; the local League of Women Voters; local alcohol permit holders; trustees of the "township" within which the city resides; local public school district teachers and staff; and the Coalition for a Healthy Community and SCRC.

On the university side, the TGIT was able to connect with and encourage responses from each of the following: the President's Executive Cabinet, the Council of Academic Deans, the University Senate, the Student Senate, Greek (IFC/Panhellenic) leadership, student organization presidents, members of the Unclassified Personnel Advisory Council, members of the Classified Personnel Advisory Council, and the Academic Administrators group.

In all, there were over 2,000 responses to

the survey, with comparable numbers from the city (1,301) and the university (1,020). It was not possible to calculate the exact response rate, because in addition to the specific groups mentioned above, in theory every citizen of the town and every student, faculty, or staff member from the university had an opportunity to complete the survey. Still, in a town with about 8,000 permanent residents and a college with about 16,000 students, we viewed the number of responses as a clear sign of interest in the town–gown relationship.

As described, the Phase 4 period, starting in 2010, witnessed an increasing level of town–gown effort around the issue of student high-risk alcohol misuse. In addition to the points raised above, there were several other significant projects and partnerships over this period: the recruitment into the city of a collegiate outpatient recovery center; ongoing communication and negotiation with permit holders and state representatives regarding underage alcohol consumption; and an expansion of the school's infrastructure and a strengthening of the town–gown partnership regarding the prevention of, and response to, sexual and interpersonal violence, an issue closely linked to alcohol misuse.

In the aggregate, these disparate successful initiatives seemed to suggest a harmonious period of town–gown relations, characterized by high effort which, in a positive feedback loop of sorts, may have been both facilitated by and helpful in building high comfort. Interestingly, the actual OCTA survey results did not fully support this conclusion. The OCTA maps survey responses into individual scores across the effort and comfort dimensions of the town–gown relationship. Through these scores, based upon whether effort and comfort are perceived as high or low, each respondent then falls into one of the four mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories in the Gavazzi typology: conflicted, devitalized, traditional, or harmonious.

Overall, most (over 80%) of the respondents to the OCTA survey indicated (through their survey answers) that they perceived high comfort in the town–gown relationship. In total, 33.5% also perceived high effort (harmonious category), and 47.3% viewed the relationship as traditional (low effort with high comfort). Of the roughly 20% who viewed the relationship as having low comfort, 2.4% viewed the relationship as conflicted (high effort), and 16.7% felt effort was low (devitalized).

Interestingly, the most common perception of the town–gown relationship among city respondents was harmonious (44%), followed by traditional (30.7%). Compared to the university perceptions of the relationship (25.6% harmonious, 60% traditional), the results suggested that the university may feel more comfortable with the relationship while also perceiving less effort. Indeed, individual evaluation of the two factors in the Gavazzi typology may very well be correlated. Although we do not seek to explain the town–gown impression discrepancy here, conversations among those closely involved in the work as well as responses to specific questions on the survey suggested the following as a possible explanation. On average, survey respondents from the university may in fact have dedicated less effort than their survey-completing counterparts from the city, and, as a result, appropriately report less effort. Moreover, this lower level of actual/perceived effort may in fact derive in part from the perception of high comfort in the relationship, which might reduce the perceived need for high effort.

Given the small size of the town relative to the university, and the degree to which a broad set of stakeholders in the town were involved in the work (as described above), a greater proportion of those responding from the city may in fact have been directly involved in or knowledgeable of the level of town–gown work/effort. This level of awareness would then explain the higher harmonious (high effort as well as high comfort) score. It is precisely results such as these from the OCTA that have the capacity to fuel important conversations and inform the work of town–gown teams everywhere.

Thus, although the broader community responses to the survey tended to view the town–gown relationship (traditional) differently from those closely involved in the work (harmonious), the most common perception from those responding from the town also was harmonious. Given that perceptions often lag reality, we might expect the high effort levels to be more widely recognized on future surveys, which might then more closely align the city and university perception with those most closely involved in the work. At a minimum, the town–gown relationship clearly was moving toward harmonious over this period, with

high comfort and significant effort.

Epilogue

Despite the successful town–gown partnership described in the Phase 4 years, shortly after the administration and processing of the OCTA, multiple staff transitions led to what some may characterize as a decline in the enthusiasm and activism that had been building over much of a decade, highlighting the inherently fragile nature of town–gown relationships. For example, the leadership dynamic of the TGIT group changed when, in the same year, the dean of students and the city mayor both left their positions. Simultaneously, new tensions developed between the city and the university, including some university building projects that tested the nature of community trust. These new frictions often had (lack of) communication at their core, highlighting the importance of the second principle outlined in the TGIT *Guiding Concepts* document:

> We commit to becoming an international model for how excellent communication and thoughtful partnership can improve an entire community, with goals that are well defined and effectively communicated, and actions that are considerate of the entire community (City of Oxford/Miami University Town Gown Initiatives Team, 2016, p. 3).

Regarding the focal point issue of our study, although the first 3 years of the annual health survey suggested movement in the desired direction, certain highly visible aspects of the student drinking problem remained. Examples of the problem include trash around the churches close to campus on Sunday mornings; open drunkenness on Saturdays in the uptown business district due to the persistence of (legal) daytime drink specials; vandalism to businesses in close proximity to the student bar district; and the taxing of community resources (EMS) related to student overconsumption. Thus, the issue of substance misuse clearly represented one of the core "edge and wedge" issues that create campus–community friction—that is, events that occur on the edge of the boundary between the campus and community that generate wedges between otherwise harmonious partners.

Conclusion and Lessons Learned

After a long period of shifting enrollments, important changes in law, and changing town demographics, beginning around 2010 an enhanced town–gown effort that focused on combating student alcohol misuse resulted in the development of a broader and deeper set of relationships between increasingly well-placed staff members from the city and the university. These productive relationships, in turn, enhanced town–gown comfort levels, and the increasing levels of effort and comfort spawned a partnership that secured a grant enabling the local administration of the Optimal College Town Assessment (OCTA) survey. The grant itself was grounded in the larger objective of reducing high-risk alcohol consumption in college communities, which was the central (but not exclusive) focus that had brought the town and university together over this period.

With respect to our central focus of managing and mitigating high-risk alcohol consumption, our reflection on our experience of this process generated what we believe to be the most important lessons learned that may help other communities facing similar challenges:

1. *Acknowledge the problem.* University recognition of the impact of off-campus student behavior on the community is the essential first step (and, as educators, it is our duty to recognize and respond).
2. *Size probably matters.* In large towns, problematic behaviors may be sufficiently dispersed so as to be much less of an issue. We believe that the peculiar geography of Oxford greatly magnified the issue of misuse, but at the same time presented a very visible target for a coordinated response.
3. *Students must drive change.* This is not a battle between the university and students; it is a community battle against inappropriate behavior, and thus any successful intervention must be developed with student help and leadership. Although we recognize that students and permanent residents, overall, likely have different goals and behaviors, most students are, and all should want to be, good citizens.
4. *It takes a community.* The work on an issue this big cannot be the respon-

sibility of a single university office. Specialized university offices are essential to the work, of course, both from a leadership and a "compliance" perspective. However, such offices often are funded with an eye toward "maintenance," so they may lack not the talent or drive but rather the resources for the types of innovations that are required for a project of this scale (DeJong, 2016). And, as is the theme of our reflection, student leadership and a town–gown coalition are essential for many other reasons.

5. *It takes champions.* Related to the point above, highly visible (and vocal) champions from both the town and the university are essential. Although positional or titular cachet is neither necessary nor sufficient to make a champion, it certainly serves to amplify one's call to action.

6. *Road trips help*. The best practices, role models, and opportunities to connect provided by International Town Gown Association (or other similar organizations) can be an important accelerant for a strong town–gown partnership. Road trips can make better partners.

7. *Build to last.* Developing a permanent infrastructure is essential, because office personnel and champions will come and go. In fact, this may be the most essential requirement for long-run success. The permanence of a strong infrastructure can help keep the work moving forward in light of inevitable staff changes, and it can also provide a form of memory/history, which—as we hope we have demonstrated here—can be so important to the work.

8. *Use the dashboard.* Data are essential, and victories are small. However, even small victories, when the stakes can be so large, justify the efforts. As a related point, you cannot become discouraged by highly visible individual incidents, and you should not rush to celebrate one-year movements in the data. And, as with most critical functions, there is a deep performance recognition asymmetry: There are few or no pats on the back for successes, but often very quick reprimands for failures. With respect to data, tools such as the OCTA can play a big role.

9. *The road goes on forever.* The goal of the work should not be to "solve a problem." The goal of the work should be to build a better community. And success along that broader dimension will pay dividends far beyond any progress made on the single issue of mitigating the negative effects of high-risk alcohol misuse.

Although not the only town–gown issue receiving attention over the period of our study, the shared goal of reducing alcohol misuse became a powerful force for building a town–gown partnership. Interestingly, this focus on alcohol misuse was grounded, in part, in the desire to reduce the town–gown tension that student (mis)behavior had been creating in an increasingly student-dense residential neighborhood abutting campus. The effort–comfort dimensions of the Gavazzi typology provided those involved in the work with a very useful framework for evaluating the quality of the town–gown relationship. Although we have attempted to retrospectively evaluate the evolution of the town–gown relationship within the Gavazzi typology, our efforts were necessarily speculative and inferential. Thus, one huge appeal of the OCTA is that it provided a way to consistently quantify at least some important dimensions of the town–gown relationship *as well as its evolution over time.* Likewise, it provided an important target—the harmonious ideal—that can presumably help drive productive conversations and shape the actual work accomplished by town–gown partnerships.

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Mike Curme, Department of Economics, Miami University, 800 E. High Street, Oxford, OH 45056. Email: curmema@miamioh.edu

About the Authors

Michael Curme *is professor emeritus of economics at Miami University.*

Kate Rousmaniere *is a professor of educational leadership at Miami University, Ohio, and former mayor of the City of Oxford Ohio.*

Stephen M. Gavazzi *is a professor of human development and family studies in the College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University.*

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