Editorial

Drake S. Levasheff

Azusa Pacific University, dlevasheff@apu.edu

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Drake S. Levasheff
Director
Orange County Regional Center
Azusa Pacific University

Like many colleagues who work in higher education, I am a regular reader of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and similar industry news sources. Over the past few weeks we have seen stories about one institution's sagging academic reputation, the University of California's statement on tolerance, and a National Labor Relations Board ruling about college athletes' freedom to unionize. Likeminded branch campus administrators perhaps share my interest in much of what is discussed, but my continuing observation is that broader higher education circles fail to address significant items central to branch campus life. In particular, questions related to working-adult students, community relations, and power dynamics between parent and remote campuses escape notice within the broader field.

That is not to say that branch campuses are all the same or share the exact same concerns. Our parent institutions and campuses are incredibly diverse, so we differ in a number of ways.

- PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE: Both publicly supported and private institutions establish locations separate from main campus.

- SIZE: Some serve 150 or fewer students, while others serve 15,000 or more students, with many between the two.

- DEGREE OFFERINGS: Both two- and four-year institutions are represented within our segment.

- LOCATION: Many are co-located on other college campuses; others rent elsewhere or occupy space owned by the parent institution.

- POPULATION SERVED: While a number of our branches serve the sort of two- and four-year student populations main campuses have targeted for the last fifty years or more, many provide education for working adults and other nontraditional students.

Much more could be said about the diversity of branch campuses. Nevertheless, the shared experience of serving at a remote campus embedded in a different community than the parent institution and advocating for our often-overlooked student populations provides significant common ground for the leaders who serve at such campuses. In light of the circumstances that branch campus leaders often share and the dearth of news and research unique to our segment, it is vital that organizations like the National Association of Branch Campus Administrators (NABCA) serve our community and higher education at large by contributing to the collective conversation about

branch campus issues.

This inaugural issue of *Access: The Journal of the National Association of Branch Campus Administrators* is thus presented in light of the evident need for relevant research and because of NABCA's unique position to represent and advocate for this segment within higher education. This first issue of *Access* is headlined by Stephen Gavazzi's article that discusses a survey conducted to investigate the relationship between a university branch campus, a co-located technical college, and their community. Additional articles for this issue are in the works and will be posted on the NABCA website before the end of 2015.

Current efforts by NABCA's Research Committee are a cause for optimism as we look ahead to the 2016 volume of *Access*. In particular, significant work is being done to document and list existing branch campuses in key regions throughout the United States. Once data collection is complete, a survey addressing branch campus characteristics, student services, budget allocations, and supervision/leadership will be sent to a large number of administrators and leaders. We expect these efforts to contribute greatly to our knowledge about branch campuses in the United States and are enthusiastic about bringing this information to the NABCA membership and the higher education community at large in 2016.

For now, we are pleased to offer new research to enlighten the conversation about branch campuses and are enthusiastic about what is to come.

Using Assessment Methods to Advance Campus-to-Campus and Campus-Community Partnerships: Town-Gown Relationships as Yours, Mine and Ours

Stephen M. Gavazzi
The Ohio State University, gavazzi.1@osu.edu

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Stephen M. Gavazzi
Dean and Director
Mansfield Campus
The Ohio State University

ABSTRACT

The regional campus of a large Midwestern university and its co-located technical college partner jointly conducted a community survey in order to gather data on the state of each institution's relationship with the community. An instrument known as the Optimal College Town Assessment (OCTA) was used to gather important information on two primary dimensions of town-gown relationships: effort and comfort. Results indicated that three specific groups of community stakeholders (business owners, leaders of non-profits, and local school district educators) largely perceived their relationships with both institutions in similar ways. The data gathering effort was seen as part of a larger mobilization cycle for advancing campus-community partnerships, and served as the launching point for a joint task force dedicated to economic development planning for the geographic area immediately surrounding the campus.

INTRODUCTION

Increased attention has been paid to campus-community relationships in recent years, as evidenced by the growing number of books and articles on the subject (Fox, 2014; Gumprecht, 2008; Kemp, 2013). This focus on town-gown relationships fits seamlessly with the call for more "engaged institutions" made by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities and the related "classification for community engagement" currently promoted by the Carnegie Foundation. Similar emphasis on campus-community connections has been made through the "regional stewardship" focus of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the "anchor institutions" concept promoted by the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities.

Life on a regional or branch campus, however, often is marked by obscurity and a decided lack of prestige in comparison to the main campus (Krueger, Bebko, & Bird, 2011). This makes the gathering of support from the community an ever more important endeavor, especially when questions arise pertaining to the very existence of that campus (Shaw and Bornhoft, 2011). And as gossom and Pelton (2011) assert, recognizing and acting on community needs is one of the most important leadership traits among senior administrators of regional and branch campuses.

The present paper chronicles the combined activities undertaken by the regional campus of a four-year university and a two-year technical college to better understand the relationship between their institutions and the communities surrounding their shared campus. Interestingly, the co-location of institutions is a fairly typical

circumstance for regional and branch campuses. For example, Bebko and Huffman (2011) reported that more than a third of the institutions responding to their survey of branch campuses were co-located with other two and four year institutions of higher learning.

Within the present paper, a typology for categorizing town-town relationships first is briefly reviewed in conjunction with the description of a measurement tool known as the Optimal College Town Assessment[1] (OCTA; Gavazzi & Fox, 2015). Next, a mobilization cycle for advancing campus-community partnerships is explained as a series of steps that involves awareness raising, coalition building, data gathering, data interpretation and reporting, and evidence-based action planning. The mobilization cycle then becomes the backdrop for describing the use of the OCTA as part of a joint community survey conducted by the regional campus and the technical college.

It should be noted that the awareness raising and coalition building activities contained in this mobilization cycle included particular attention paid to the responses of three specific groups of community stakeholders (business owners, leaders of non-profits, and local school district educators), whose perceptions were compared and contrasted in the data analysis procedures.

These groups were selected in large part because students from the co-located campuses had the greatest likelihood of having contact with stakeholders in these areas as a result of internships, placements, and service learning courses. In turn, the data interpretation and evidence-based action planning activities centered on the formation of a joint task force that was designed to focus on land use issues for

the geographic area immediately surrounding the campus.

CONCEPTUALIZING AND MEASURING TOWN-GOWN RELATIONSHIPS

The metaphor of marriage has been applied specifically to town-gown relationships as far back as Hill (1994), and Bringle and Hatcher (2002) similarly described campus-community partnerships in interpersonal relationship terms. Based on earlier work in the marital research literature, Gavazzi, Fox, and Martin (2014) have asserted that the quality of campus-community exchanges can best be described through the use of two related yet distinct dimensions. The first dimension centers on the level of effort being put into the maintenance of the town-gown relationship, while the second dimension involves the level of comfort that campus and community stakeholders experience with one together in the midst of those interactions. Four types of relationships (see Figure 1) are thought to result from combining the comfort and effort dimensions: harmonious, traditional, conflicted, and devitalized.

- Lower effort, lower comfort
- Higher effort, lower comfort
- Lower effort, higher comfort
- Higher effort, higher comfort

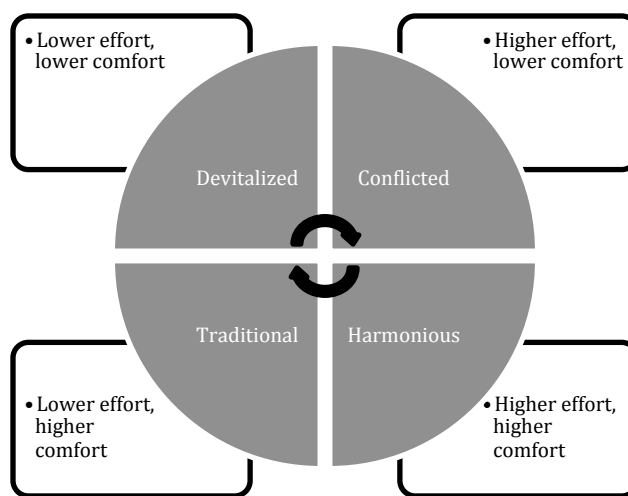Devitalized Conflicted Traditional Harmonious

Figure 1: A Four-Square Typology of Town-Gown Relationships

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[1] For further information about the OCTA and its use in assessing town-gown relationships, please contact the author.

The *harmonious relationship* – comprised of higher comfort and higher effort levels – is the most desirable form of town-gown association (and marriage, for that matter), one where campus and community partners are involved in a significant number of activities that are of shared benefit to all parties involved. The *traditional relationship* – a combination of higher comfort and lower effort levels – is thought to be the default state of affairs for most campuses and communities, and the one where higher education and municipal leaders typically ignore each other in the pursuit of separate goals. The *conflicted relationship* – comprised of lower comfort and higher effort levels – is comprised of less than optimal interactions that involve continual friction, but at least the partners are still engaged in a process of trying to work things out. The *devitalized* type – a combination of low comfort and low effort levels – is characterized by disappointment and loss, owing to the fact that this damaged relationship was at some point more vibrant and satisfying.

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, Fox, and Martin (2014). The OCTA was designed to evaluate perceptions of campus-community relationships as the combination of effort and comfort levels, capturing participants' direct personal experiences of these two dimensions as well as their opinions about overall community sensitivities.

A number of results were reported from the pilot use of the OCTA, including the anticipated finding that perceptions of effort and comfort were significantly related to one another. In essence, greater contact between campus and community members was associated with increased satisfaction inside of the town-gown relationship. Also, greater effort and comfort

levels were reported by community members who lived and worked in closer proximity to the campus, underscoring the important role that geographic distance plays in determining relationship quality.

Gavazzi and Fox (2015) also reported findings indicating that perceptions of town-gown relationships varied as a function of specific campus and community roles. For example, reports of perceived comfort levels were highest among business owners, followed by non-profit leaders, and then educators. In addition, community stakeholders consistently reported the greatest amount of effort from and comfort with students in comparison to faculty, staff, and board members. This last finding highlights the great emphasis that should be placed on students as the "tip of the sword" in determining the quality of the town-gown relationship.

THE TOWN-GOWN MOBILIZATION CYCLE

Gavazzi (2015a) discussed the gathering and utilization of evidence-based information on town-gown relationships as part of a "mobilization cycle" as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The Town-Gown Relationship Mobilization Cycle

Data gathering is situated in the middle ground of this process, bookended by preparatory activities on one side and evidence-based application efforts on the other. Stated most simply, there are a number of important accomplishments that must take place both prior to and following such assessment efforts in order to maximally enhance the understanding of town-gown relationships among community stakeholders and campus representatives.

The first phase of the mobilization cycle involves an awareness-raising campaign on the campus and in the community regarding the importance of the town-gown relationship. This is the "burning platform" phase that builds a sense of urgency regarding the need to examine the town-gown relationship. Coalition building – the second phase of the mobilization cycle – identifies the primary campus and community stakeholders who will help recruit participants in the data gathering effort. Decisions need to be made about whose opinions matter most, and then the work of this phase becomes focused on enlisting the assistance of the individuals who serve as "gatekeepers" to those potential participants.

Following the third phase (data gathering) is the fourth phase of data interpretation. Here, information collected on the town-gown relationship is organized, analyzed, and reported in ways that are user-friendly to the intended audiences. The fifth phase of the mobilization cycle – evidence-based action planning – creates opportunities for the results to be applied to immediate and longer term goals and objectives related to the enhancement of the town-gown relationship. The mobilization cycle is part of an iterative process whereby the results of one data gathering effort are seen as creating a snapshot that can be compared and contrasted with campus-community information collected at future time points.

APPLYING THE MOBILIZATION CYCLE: A CASE STUDY

The regional campus of a large Midwestern university (founded in the mid-1960's) and its co-located technical college (built a decade later on the same site) are the focal point of a case study on the application of the mobilization cycle. At the time this article was written, the regional campus served approximately 1,200 students, about 75% of whom attended in a fulltime capacity. In turn, the technical college served around 3,000 mostly part-time students. A shared service agreement bound these two institutions together at the physical facilities level since the technical college was formed. More recently, however, the development of a number of 2+2 programs in conjunction with a series of joint community development activities (one particularly popular example is a combined business and industry internship program) have further strengthened the partnership between the two institutions.

Phase 1: Awareness-Raising

The fact that these particular two and four year institutions were making significant strides toward increased partnerships became one of the compelling reasons for conducting the community survey. In essence, the members of each institution's senior leadership team were interested in gaining a better understanding of the degree to which community stakeholders perceived their relationships with the college and university in similar or different ways. There was a history of disconnectedness (and at times outright hostility) between the two institutions under some previous administrations, so there was some real concern regarding the residual effects of that time period. Therefore, it was felt that there was a lot to be gained by approaching the community as partners on the survey, while at the same time working to establish some baseline understanding of what the town-gown

relationship looked like at present for each institution separately.

As well, there was great importance attached to understanding potential differences in perceptions of the town-gown relationship as a function of the distinct groups of community stakeholders who would be participating in the survey. Both institutions placed significant numbers of students in business and industry internships, in service learning courses that were situated within non-profit agencies, and in local school districts as a function of early child education and teacher preparation programs. Therefore, senior administrative leadership decided very early on to focus special attention on the relationships between the higher education institutions and these three particular groups of community stakeholders.

To get the word out on the survey specifically and the importance of paying attention to the relationships between campus representatives and community members more generally, the assistance of various print and electronic media partners was enlisted by senior leaders from both co-located institutions. This included straightforward public service announcements and advertisements, as well as making senior administrators available for interviews and otherwise supplying content for stories to be generated about both the survey and various town-gown activities that were ongoing.

Phase 2: Coalition Building

As the publicity efforts were set into motion, the senior administrators of both institutions began to meet directly with community leaders. Because there were three separate local governments within a 10 mile radius of the campus, meetings were set with the town managers and city council members of all three entities, as well as with the county commissioners. Face-to-face appointments also were made with the leaders of the three main groups of community stakeholders identified

above: business owners, non-profit leaders, and local school districts. For the sake of efficiency, the Chamber of Commerce and the local economic development group were the points of contact for the business community. Similarly, the local United Way became the touchstone for entry into the non-profit sector. And finally, individual appointments were scheduled with each of the local school district superintendents.

During these meetings, the senior higher education administrators began by reviewing what information was known about current contacts occurring between campus representatives and community members affiliated with each specific group. Next, community leader help was requested in the form of an agreement to use their email lists and various social media outlets to promote the participation of their affiliates in the community survey. Assurances then were given that the groups would have full access to the survey results, as well as the offer to conduct follow-up meetings with their constituents in order to address any and all issues and concerns brought out through the survey.

Phase 3: Data Gathering

A beta version of the web-based Optimal College Town Assessment (OCTA) was employed in the data collection phase of this initiative. The data collection site was opened for a total of two weeks, and a total of 602 community members chose to participate in the survey within this time period. The sample included 50 business owners, 56 non-profit leaders, and 209 educators, as well as 287 community residents who did not self-report an affiliation with any of those three employment groups.

There are a total of 16 items in the core OCTA, evenly divided between questions that assess effort levels and questions that assess comfort levels. In this study, the OCTA items were

asked first about the faculty, staff, students, and board members of the four year institution, and then were repeated for the faculty, staff, students, and board members of the two year technical college. The theoretical range of both effort and comfort levels was 0 to 40, with a score of 20 as the mid-point. Further details about the OCTA items can be found in the Gavazzi and Fox (2015) paper on this scale's development.

Phase 4: Data Interpretation

The mean scores for both the four year (8.97) and two year (9.16) institutions on the effort dimension represented moderately low levels. Additionally, the mean scores for both the four year (28.10) and two year (27.85) institutions on the comfort dimension represented moderately high levels. Taken together, the combination of lower effort and higher comfort placed both the college and university within the traditional town-gown relationship type.

Further examination of the effort and comfort scores among the three major stakeholder groups (business owners, non-profit leaders, local educators) was revealing. As depicted in Figure 3, business owners reported the highest amount of effort, followed by non-profit leaders, and then educators. This pattern of results was
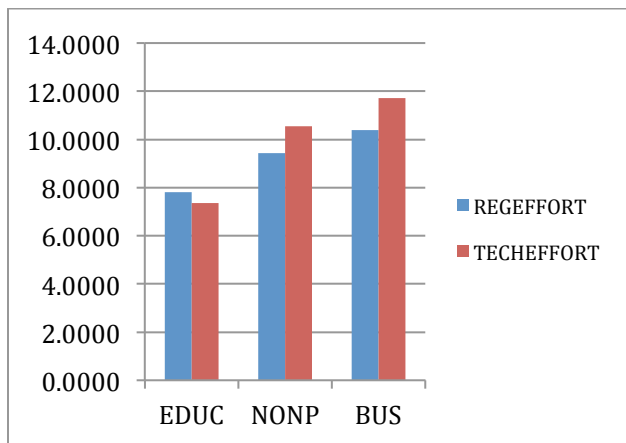
significant for both the two year [F 2, 312) = 16.05, p < .001) and four year [F 2, 312) = 6.18, p < .01) institutions. Post-hoc analyses revealed that the significant results were a function of the difference between the scores of the business owners and the educators. In essence, it seemed to be the case that the co-located partners were doing the best job relating to the business community in comparison to all other stakeholders at the time of the survey.

As depicted in Figure 4, for the comfort dimension the same pattern of results was repeated for the two year institution. Business owners reported the highest amount of comfort, followed by non-profit leaders, and then educators. This pattern of results was significant [F 2, 312) = 5.74, p < .01) and post-hoc analyses again revealed that the significant results were a function of the difference between the scores of the business owners and the educators. Interestingly, there were no significant differences among the three groups on the comfort dimension for the four year institution.
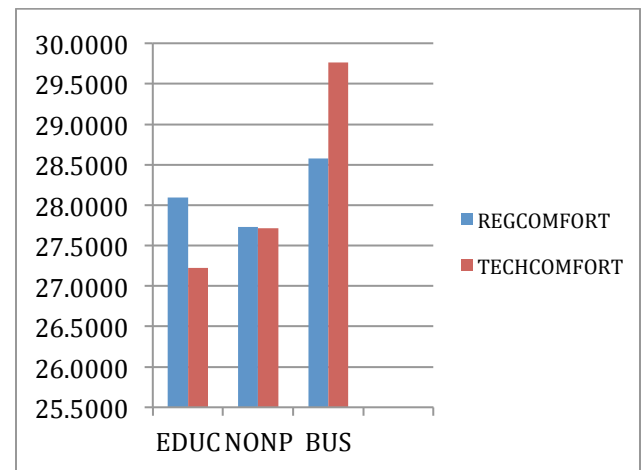

Figure 4: Comfort Levels

Figure 3: Effort Levels

The quantitative data generated through the use of the OCTA was supplemented with qualitative information gathered from a series of open-ended questions at the end of the community

survey. Gavazzi (2015b) has reported on eight themes that emerged from responses to an open-ended question (accompanied by an unlimited text box) that asked: "Do you have any thoughts about what the campus might do in the future to improve relationships with the community?" These themes included:

1. Engage in volunteer activities that increase visibility in the community

2. Live in the community and spend money there

3. Hold more events on campus

4. Expand the number of classes and degrees offered on the campus

5. Connect more with local school districts

6. Generate more publicity about campus news and events

7. Make coursework more affordable and accessible

8. Offer faculty and staff expertise as applied to community needs

In total, these themes reflect action items that can make an important contribution to community member perceptions of greater effort expended by campus representatives to connect with the community. In turn, this sort of increased effort would generate the potential for even greater comfort levels in future encounters.

These and other results were shared in a variety of ways with the campus and community approximately one month after the survey was conducted. This included the dissemination of a written report, a town hall meeting (with PowerPoint slides that subsequently were shared via email), and a series of interviews granted to local media representatives that were turned into print and broadcast stories.

Phase 5: Evidence-Based Action Planning

The significantly higher effort and comfort scores reported by business owners became a rallying point regarding the planning for next steps in the process of enhancing town-gown relationships. In combination with the extremely popular business and industry internship program mentioned earlier, emerging partnerships between the campus and private developers of land immediately adjacent to campus necessitated an intensification of activities with the business community.

Collectively, these land use projects all contributed to the creation of a "campus district." Precious little attention had been paid to the properties near the campus over the years; that is, until a brand-new off-campus student housing complex was built. The housing initiative in and of itself was a substantial test of the resolve of the campus and community partners to work together. Most specifically, there were a variety of infrastructure issues that had to be tackled, including most notably sewer connections that crossed municipal boundaries. Fortunately, the good will in evidence through the community survey data was borne out and the utility issues were resolved fairly quickly, allowing the building construction to move forward.

The fact that upwards of 500 new residential students would soon be living in one concentrated area immediately adjacent to the campus entrance provided all the incentive that was needed for other development projects to be placed on the drawing board. To allay fears that retail projects would spring up in a haphazard manner, the campus lent its internal resources to a systematic planning process for the district. This included the adoption of the entire county by students in an upper level undergraduate city and regional planning course, an economic development plan drawn up by MBA students, and ongoing informal consultation given by

professional planners from the university's main campus.

Out of these activities arose a Campus District Collaboration Group, attended by government officials from the two municipalities within the geographic area defined by the district, the county commissioners' office, the regional planning office, the chamber of commerce, the local economic and community development group, and the senior leaders from the two and four year institutions. To date, outcomes from this group include a joint mission statement, a zoning overlay, and an initial draft of a 65-acre walkable community that includes both residential and retail opportunities.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In retrospect, a survey such as the one reported here was long overdue for both the campus and the community described in the case study. Far too many opportunities to highlight the importance of the town-gown relationship had been squandered over the years. As a result, there was little consensus among stakeholders regarding the quality of the current interactions among campus representatives and community members, and even less agreement on what needed to be done in the way of improving things.

Of course, you have to start somewhere, so the implementation of the mobilization cycle created a baseline of qualitative and quantitative information that can be compared and contrasted with data gathered at future time points. This data gathering strategy takes the guesswork out of evaluating whether or not actions taken to improve community member perceptions of effort are effective, and whether or not comfort levels are increased, stay the same, or are negatively impacted in some manner.

The case study reported above focused heavily on the findings as they related to the business community. This was due to the fact that this specific group of community stakeholders had reported the greatest amount of effort and comfort levels with the campus. It should be noted that activities simultaneously were launched to improve the quality of campus interactions with non-profit agencies and local school districts. However, the recent emphasis on institutions of higher education becoming more "business friendly" through greater attention to workforce development issues underscores the need for campus administrators to accurately gauge the perceptions of business and industry leaders in particular.

The marital metaphor is brought back into the viewfinder to make a closing point. In writing about town-gown relationships, Gavazzi and Fox (2015) stated the following:

> What if you had a marriage that was arranged by others, which could not be ended, but that you had to make work regardless of how you felt about your partner? That, in a nutshell, is the relationship between a college campus and the community that surrounds it. The vows that state "for better or for worse, in sickness and in health," and so on, need never be said out loud between these partners. They are an applied fact of life for any city or town containing an institution of higher education in its midst. As the college or university goes, so goes the community, and the opposite is just as true.

Arranged marriages are largely unheard of in contemporary Western culture, but historically they often served the important purpose of uniting the financial futures of the families being brought together by the couple's betrothal. In a similar manner, the economic futures of campus and community are completely intertwined, without any real

prospects of divorce proceedings. Therefore, leaders of higher education institutions and municipalities alike would do well to bring town-gown relationships to the front and center of any discussion about planning for a better tomorrow.

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