

Leading Practices for Town and Gown Relations

Town-gown relations is an increasingly important area of study, looking at how officials in communities and schools relate to one another, and how they work with residents and students to resolve issues before they become problems. There are also mutually advantageous opportunities to work together on joint projects and programs.

Everyone benefits – public and school officials, as well as residents and students – when proactive town-gown practices are used. A national literature search I conducted in this field revealed numerous leading practices. Case studies came from joint projects and programs being undertaken by local governments and schools throughout the United States and Canada.

Leading Practices

Here is a list of the evolving and dynamic leading practices for town-gown relations:

- Adjunct faculty members and class speakers can come from the local government in which the school is located.
- The local government can provide internships for students, who might apply for entry-level jobs in future years.
- Students can seek career mentors and advisors who come from the adjunct faculty members, as well as the speakers for the school's program who are employed by the local government.
- One university formed a program advisory committee consisting of primarily adjunct professors – from many of the cities located around the

university – who could also provide internships, serve as mentors, and advise students on their future public service career options and opportunities.

- Some local governments even provide free rooms and space for a local college or university to hold courses for a public administration program. While mostly employees enroll in these programs, they are frequently also open to the public.
- Some local governments and school officials jointly form town-gown advisory committees that consist of public and school officials, along with representatives of the residents and students. These groups typically discuss local concerns and resolve them before they become community issues and problems.
- Members of these advisory groups, by design, usually consist of representatives from existing community, neighbourhood, business, and student groups and associations.
- Other major issues of concern that town-gown officials can jointly work on include mutual transit projects, joint parking facilities, community parks in the campus area, and possible local government bikeways and walkways located in the campus neighbourhood. Town-gown advisory committees are a great way to examine and discuss the issues associated with such projects.
- Joint town-gown advisory committees typically review and discuss community concerns before they become city-wide issues and problems, and make joint recommendations to

their respective public and school officials. Their recommendations are typically advisory in nature.

- Town-gown officials work together to seek funds from other orders of government for both separate and joint projects and programs, especially when they are mutually advantageous.

Mutually Advantageous Opportunities

There are multiple opportunities for communities and the colleges and universities located within them to jointly participate in these mutually advantageous town-gown programs and projects. These positive practices, which are rapidly evolving, reflect joint efforts where everyone benefits, including residents, students, and public and school officials who consider and approve recommendations.

In the past, town-gown officials have had misunderstandings based on different loyalties and priorities, and the fact that they have separate governing bodies. Over the years, few mutual discussions were held between public and school officials or with residents



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and students. Times are changing now, however, and town-gown officials are increasingly working together for the benefit of the groups they represent.

Town-gown officials recognize the positive impacts that the academic community has on their local government and the value of the public services provided to the campus by the government. These benefits include joint employment opportunities; payments for services; mutual city-school projects, programs, and services; and a knowledge of the other revenues and taxes generated by all schools located within a local government's boundaries.

Here is how these evolving town-gown programs and services are a benefit:

- Residents are educated to realize the economic benefits provided by their schools and students are educated to realize the public service benefits provided by their community.
- Public officials can benefit from the solutions jointly resolved by residents and students working together, and school officials can benefit from the solutions jointly resolved by students and residents working together.
- The governing bodies of the local governments and schools jointly benefit by their residents and students working to resolve mutual concerns before they become community issues and problems.

- Such community and school issues and problems frequently go away because of these joint participatory efforts.

Evolving Field of Study

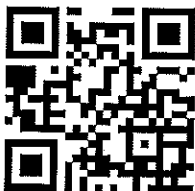
This field is dynamic, and additional leading practices will no doubt be analyzed, approved, initiated, and reported on during the coming years. Many colleges and universities are working with their respective municipal governments on these practices since they are mutually advantageous. This is especially true in North America, where both Canada and the United States have shown themselves to be leaders in these international town-gown best practices. MW

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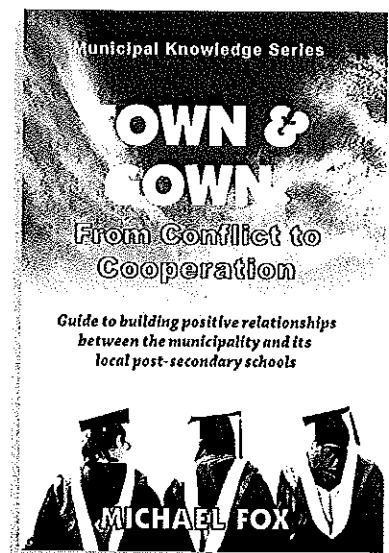
Universities and colleges are certainly a significant asset to their communities, yet they present a unique set of planning and community development considerations and challenges, and an increasing number of threats and negative perceptions about off-campus behaviour – especially in those near-campus neighbourhoods where students tend to concentrate. The issue is even more pressing today as university and college enrolments continue to expand, particularly in North America's larger urban centres.

The Town and Gown concept is an ideal model for identifying and dealing with these community concerns. Working with student residents, both municipal and campus representatives can move the issues of resident rights and responsibilities, inappropriate behaviour, as well as adequate and safe housing, towards an overall community vision and a climate of civility for all.



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Author Michael Fox has been working in the field of post-secondary teaching, research and administration for over 30 years. His teaching and research have focused on university-community relations, community planning, and municipal affairs, including a wide range of consultation work on municipal strategic planning processes, town and gown relations committee work, housing issues, and small town economic development and sustainability projects.



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CONTENTS

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MUNICIPAL WORLD – CANADA'S MUNICIPAL MAGAZINE

volume 125, number 5

A TALE OF TWO GREEN CITIES

How Bristol and Copenhagen are working to make life better for the people who live there. 5

TAKING LEARNING OUT OF THE CLASSROOM ... AND INTO CITY HALL

Students in Kingston, Ontario are taking over city hall – and engaging with the topic of local government in a thorough, holistic way that goes far beyond the scope of the typical field trip. 9

HOW CITIES ARE BECOMING SMARTER

What can Canada's cities, its officials, and its residents, learn from the British approach to building smarter cities? 13

THE SERIOUS GAME OF TACTICAL URBANISM

A desire for high-quality built environments and an increasing frustration with "red tape" has spurred a growing trend of DIY citizen interventions in public spaces. 15

MENTAL HEALTH: A GROWING CHALLENGE FOR POLICE AND COMMUNITIES

Addressing the increasing interaction between individuals with mental health issues and the police is a pressing need for municipalities. 17

CHANGE IS "IN THE AIR"

Smoke-free building policies may soon put a stop to lighting up in multi-unit housing. 19

FOOD SECURITY (PART 4)

Municipalities can assist and encourage the success of the local agri-food sector – and increase food security – by removing unnecessary policy barriers. 21

P3S – DELIVERING OUR INFRASTRUCTURE LEGACY

A look at some current municipal projects and government funding engagements shows P3s are increasingly being used as a funding option for emerging intelligent and smart communities. 23

LEADING PRACTICES FOR TOWN AND GOWN RELATIONS

Town and gown relations is an increasingly important area of study, helping officials in communities and schools to work with residents and students to resolve issues – before they become problems. 25

ORMISTON V. ICBC

Yet another case for recognizing paved shoulders as lanes of travel for cyclists? 27

THE REGULARS

Coming Events	12, 39
Editor's Corner	3
From the Archives	8
Governance Zone.....	31
Management Zone	33
Environmental Zone.....	35
The Reading Room.....	37

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