

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments



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CASE STUDY

Strengthening Campus-Community Collaboration: Oregon State University and the City of Corvallis

Background

Founded in 1868, Oregon State University is Oregon's land-grant university—an institution of higher education designated by a state to receive the benefits of the [Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890](#). Oregon State is the only university in Oregon to hold both the acclaimed Carnegie Foundation's top designation for research institutions and a prestigious Community Engagement classification.

Oregon State is located in the town of Corvallis. The University has experienced a 67 percent increase in enrollment since the fall of 2001, when its student body consisted of 18,000 students. In the fall of 2015, Oregon State's enrollment was 30,000+ students who hailed from all 50 states and more than 100 countries.

This significant increase in enrollment has showed signs of negative impact on the town of Corvallis. The annual [Corvallis Citizen Attitude Survey](#) (2011)—a sampling of randomly selected residents' views on topics ranging from housing to economic development to public safety—included a number of comments reflecting frustration over streets crammed with parked cars, townhouses and large apartment complexes sprouting up in formerly quiet blocks, and late-night partying beginning on Thursday each week.

Oregon State and the city of Corvallis have created a strategy to mitigate these negative effects and to engage in campus-community collaboration. Campus-community collaboration is a well-regarded strategy to promote safe, healthy, and conducive learning environments. Collaboration facilitates those [environmental interventions](#) identified by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism as effective measures for preventing alcohol-related harm. Such interventions include restricting alcohol promotions, enforcing underage drinking laws, limiting cheap alcohol availability through sensible alcohol excise tax policy, enacting social host regulations, and facilitating responsible service training.

Collaboration Corvallis

In September 2011, University President Ed Ray, Corvallis Mayor Julie Manning, and other campus and community leaders signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU), pledging to work together to address the negative effects associated with the University's growing enrollment. This agreement led to the formation of [Collaboration Corvallis](#).

As one of its first acts, Collaboration Corvallis held a public meeting to launch the Collaborative in November 2011. More than 140 local residents attended this first public meeting. The residents offered suggestions on how the collaboration could address issues through an approach commonly called "town-and-gown," which might include solutions such as regulating parking districts

surrounding campus, offering financial incentives for students not to have cars, re-zoning near-campus neighborhoods, increasing on-campus housing, and creating requirements for all first- and second-year students to live on campus.

Collaboration Corvallis officially got under way with the City Council's (December 2011) approval of an intergovernmental agreement that mapped out a timeline and shared costs. The agreement described how Oregon State and Corvallis would address three tracks: Neighborhood Parking and Traffic Mitigation, Neighborhood Planning, and Neighborhood Livability.

According to Jonathan Stoll, director of Corvallis Community Relations at Oregon State, the Collaboration Corvallis recommendations led to changes at both the city and the university levels. For example, local property managers agreed to meet monthly to share information and strategize about improving quality of life in the town.

"Attending the Corvallis Rental Property Management Group meetings and regularly connecting with property managers have been critical to strengthening communication and developing collective strategies for educating and engaging our students about tenant responsibilities and expectations," Stoll says.

Although the formal three-year Collaboration Corvallis agreement ended December 2014, joint efforts continue to solve parking and traffic challenges and enhance neighborhood livability both within and beyond the initial impact area. In May 2015, the City and University established the [Community Relations Advisory Group](#), which meets monthly and makes recommendations to both City Council and University administration. In September 2016, the City adopted the [Corvallis Livability Code](#) "to address livability concerns in neighborhoods throughout" the city.

Building Community with Smart Programming and Marketing

The Neighborhood Livability track of the Collaboration Corvallis MOU acknowledged the need for a director of community relations to serve as a liaison who would, among other activities, educate students about [what it entails to be a good neighbor](#). According to Stoll, the goal of hiring a liaison was to provide an off-campus living orientation program to students.

Stoll explains, "Living off-campus comes with increased responsibilities and expectations. We want this otherwise difficult transition [from on- to off-campus residence] to be as smooth as possible for our students by providing education up front about their rights and responsibilities as renters. The idea was born to create an orientation program, which started as the Live Smart Workshop and has evolved into what is now called the [Preferred Renter Program](#)."

The Preferred Renter Program provides a \$50 rental deposit credit for off-campus renters who successfully complete the workshop. Renters can complete the workshop online, or at the Office of Student Life's annual [off-campus housing expo](#), which is designed to:

- Educate students on various aspects of off-campus living
- Improve relationship between students and long-term residents
- Improve neighborhood livability
- Create a more habitable and united Corvallis

In addition to email communication, social media postings on the Oregon State's Facebook page, and posters in residence halls, Corvallis Community Relations objectives are advertised on the university's streaming movie service.

"We launched the Preferred Renter workshops at the housing expo. After that, we coordinated workshops in the Memorial Union (MU)," Stoll explains. "We were able to secure interest from two residence assistants and held workshops in two different residential halls. Those were by far our more successful workshops because they ultimately helped advertise our good neighbor objectives. The posters in the residence halls brought a large number of students. The largest workshop had about 40 students compared with workshops in the MU where sometimes we had only one or two students."

Despite the promotion activities, participation in the spring 2015 Preferred Renter workshops was less-than-expected, with only 114 first-year students attending. "It was somewhat challenging," Stoll reflects. "I thought that the \$50 incentive was going to be huge and that students would be lining up out the door to save \$50 off their security deposit. It turned out to not necessarily be the case."

Stoll believes that the relatively low turnout may be a result of timing, as a lot of students had already signed leases. The Preferred Renter workshop now coincides with an annual housing expo at the start of each spring semester, which is better timed for students beginning their fall off-campus housing search.

"We are going to offer the workshops earlier in the academic year and are considering making the materials available online to make them more accessible to students. And we will continue our marketing efforts using typical venues, such as newspaper ads, posters, table tents in dining halls, social media, and email blasts," he describes.

Early Successes

One measure of success in the area of community livability has been a reduction in the number of calls for police and fire services since January 2012, as reported by Corvallis Police Chief Jonathan Sassaman in November 2016¹. Student self-reports of "getting in trouble with the police" as a consequence of drinking fell from 6 to 2.1 percent between 2012 and 2016².

A number of highly effective programs and coalitions on Oregon State's campus have contributed to the reduction of student high-risk drinking (five or more drinks in single setting within last two weeks), which peaked at 45 percent in 2012 and was down to 32.1 percent in 2016. According to Robert Reff, director for advocacy and wellness at Oregon State's Student Health Services³, these programs include, in addition to Collaboration Corvallis, Alcohol.edu, a recovery community, welcome week, and a Corvallis Police Department liaison to fraternities and sororities.

"The University's Corvallis Community Relations initiatives are just getting off the ground, but many changes have already occurred due to Collaboration Corvallis, such as the fact that now students are held accountable for their behavior off campus," explains Stoll. "That wasn't the case three years ago. While the student conduct code held them accountable for off-campus behavior, there wasn't a system in place to check citations in Corvallis against our enrollment database. Part of my job is educating students in the community that Oregon State is now doing this."

¹ *Corvallis Gazette Times*, November 3, 2016, http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/osu-holds-town-hall-on-underage-drinking/article_c786d2bc-11b0-5247-a069-483dd9362ea2.html

² Robert Reff, Oregon State University town hall meeting presentation, November 3, 2016.

³ Reff, *ibid*.

He continues, “We are launching a [community ambassador program](#) where students will ultimately serve as ambassadors of Oregon State. Ultimately, these ambassadors will facilitate the Preferred Renter workshops in resident halls. Since we have a very small staff, it has been challenging to get the word out. This will help us next year.”

The efforts to improve campus health and safety through collaborative efforts continue. For example, during the 2016-2017 academic year, Oregon State/Corvallis became one of seven pilot venues to pursue the [Alcohol Responsibility Program](#) through the International Town & Gown Association in collaboration with the Responsible Retailing Foundation.

Additional Information

For more information on Oregon State’s efforts improving town-and-gown relationships, contact [Jonathan Stoll](#) or consult the [Corvallis Community Relations Web site](#).

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