

The Off-Campus Environment Approaches for Reducing Alcohol and Other Drug Problems

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 College students who choose to live off campus are experiencing a new level of freedom, but also new responsibilities as residents in the community. For many students, moving into independent housing can be an important part of their growth and development.

Unfortunately, students often keep late hours, and their everyday comings and goings may disturb neighbors who are trying to work, sleep, or just enjoy a quiet evening at home. When alcohol is served, house parties can easily get out of control, leading to large crowds, blocked driveways, litter, excessive noise, public intoxication, public urination, and vandalism. At their most extreme, student parties can explode into full-scale riots, with students throwing bottles, setting fires, and overturning cars.

With mounting frustration, neighborhood residents call the police to take action, putting a strain on local law enforcement agencies and distracting them from other police work. Residents also turn to campus officials, demanding that they do something about “their students” but having little understanding that there are limits on what those officials legally can do. And, for their part, many campus officials do not know what their options are or what the law will and will not allow.

These problems have been compounded in recent years as some institutions of higher education expand their undergraduate enrollment without providing sufficient on-campus housing.

A Prevention Approach

Addressing the off-campus environment is a natural extension of campus-based alcohol and other drug abuse (AOD) prevention work. Required here, as on campus, is a comprehensive approach that features environmental management strategies designed to change the environment in which students make decisions about their AOD use. Ideally, a coalition of campus and community officials, students, and local residents can come together to analyze problems in the neighborhoods and then develop and execute a comprehensive strategic plan to improve community life.

In that spirit, this publication introduces a broad range of strategies for addressing AOD-related problems off campus. These strategies are varied, as the choice of an effective and appropriate strategy will depend on the circumstances and resources of the particular campus and community. All strategies, however, call for reliable information about the AOD problem, open communications and partnership between the campus and the community, and the development and consistent enforcement of sound policies. As campus officials continue to implement and experiment with these and similar ideas, they will need evaluation studies to show which ones hold the greatest promise.

Are Colleges Potentially Liable for Student Conduct off Campus?

Court cases have made clear that campus administrators have an obligation to manage their campus environment, identifying and responding to disorderly or dangerous conduct and making reasonable efforts to mitigate foreseeable danger.¹ The institution's responsibility extends off campus, when students are engaged in activities that can reasonably be viewed as related to the “college experience.”² In a seminal case, for example, the court ruled against the University of Nebraska, based on the foreseeability of danger arising from prior incidents in a fraternity near campus [*Knoll v. Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska*, 601 N.W. 2d 757 (Neb. 1999)].

Opening Lines of Communication

Campus and town officials, neighborhood associations, and other community groups need to establish open lines of communication to identify, discuss, and resolve neighborhood concerns. One option is to hire a campus-community liaison, with joint funding by the college and the municipality. The city of Fort Collins and Colorado State University formed a University-City Liaison Committee in 1997 and then hired a full-time community liaison

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coordinator in 2001. The coordinator has worked to address the concerns of both residents (noise, parking, neighborhood appearance) and students (minimal affordable off-campus housing, feeling unwelcome in the community).

Another option is a telephone hotline. After joining with the city of Albany to form the Committee on University and Community Relations, the University at Albany, State University of New York, created a telephone hotline for community residents to register complaints about student misconduct off campus, such as alcohol misuse, noise, litter, and public urination. The director of the Office of Personal Safety and Off-Campus Affairs personally answers every call. Follow-up communication with the Albany Police Department allows the director to provide a coordinated response. The hotline helps the university to monitor off-campus alcohol and safety issues and bring problems to the task force. The number and type of incoming hotline calls also provide measures by which to gauge progress in addressing neighborhood residents' concerns.³

Other communities have set up regular public gatherings at which campus and town officials, as well as residents and students, can air complaints. In 2000, the town of Narragansett and the University of Rhode Island (URI) formed the Narragansett-URI Coalition to provide a monthly forum for dialogue on how to improve the quality of life for both permanent residents and URI students, with a particular focus on reducing underage drinking, alcohol-impaired driving, and party-related disturbances. Regular attendees include community leaders, law enforcement officials, neighborhood association representatives, residents, property owners, realtors, tavern and package store owners, URI administrators, researchers, and students. The coalition later formed subcommittees that could meet more frequently to work on specific issues, such as environmental factors contributing to underage drinking.

Over time, this type of forum can evolve into a fully functioning coalition that develops and implements evidence-based prevention strategies.

Forming a coalition is a frequently recommended prevention strategy,⁴ and there is good information available on what contributes to a coalition's success.⁵ Some elements of effective and productive coalitions include support from the college's top leadership, a coalition leader with strong community organizing skills,⁶ and a willingness for the college and the community to find common ground. In some cases, campus administrators without a coalition structure can form action-oriented partnerships with individual community agencies to implement new programs and policies to address students' off-campus behavior.



Student Education

Many students look forward to living off campus, seeing it as an opportunity to enjoy expanded freedoms outside university control but sometimes forgetting that other neighborhood residents have rights, too. In response, campus officials have begun to educate students regarding their responsibilities as good neighbors as they transition into off-campus housing.

One option is to distribute a printed guide for students living off campus that includes information about how to get along with their neighbors and avoid trouble with the police. Boston College's *Guide to Off-Campus Student Living* states, "Unhappy neighbors can make your off-campus experience difficult, so making an early attempt to establish good relations is in your best interest." The guide also stresses that Boston police have a "zero tolerance" policy regarding loud parties and underage drinking, noting that enforcement is particularly aggressive during the first six to eight weeks of the academic year.

Another way to tell students about off-campus living is to distribute a "welcome packet" at the beginning of the academic year that includes brochures, flyers, or giveaway items with key messages. As part of its Neighborhoods Engaging with Students program, officials at Western Washington University (WWU) contact major landlords in the WWU area for permission to hang educational "door knockers" with information on how to be a good neighbor, and the

Bellingham Police Department's Party Patrol assigns eight or nine officers to respond to calls reporting loud parties.

In 2007, URI launched a workshop program titled "Living Large Off Campus." The program's first goal, introduced under the theme of "mutual respect," is to teach students how to get along with their neighbors. Among other safety issues, the workshop reviews Rhode Island's social host law, which holds hosts liable for the actions of underage drinkers or legal-age guests who become intoxicated. It also offers extensive guidelines for responsible beverage service, plus tips for avoiding problems with neighbors—for example, notifying neighbors ahead of time about a party and when it will end; urging them to call about excessive noise or other problems; keeping the party indoors and leaving the windows closed as much as possible; making sure that guests do not park illegally; and monitoring noise levels by walking outside around the house.



Building Student-Near Neighbor Connections

To facilitate better relations, some colleges and universities have collaborated with neighborhood associations to plan block parties, yard sales, food drives, and other events that encourage neighbors, including students, to socialize and get to know one another. URI officials, for example, have worked through the Narragansett-URI Coalition to sponsor an annual "spring cleanup" weekend.

In 2003, in the wake of several student riots, the Ohio State University (OSU) launched its Community Ambassador Program, which is funded by local landlords, businesses, and community groups. Students chosen to become a community ambassador receive a \$100 monthly stipend in return for agreeing to hold neighborhood meetings, talk with neighbors, publicize community events, and serve as a resource for other students living on their street. They also attend monthly meetings with Off-Campus Student Services staff to discuss their progress. Each year, police officers have met with the ambassadors to educate them about party issues and neighborhood crime.

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Community Mediation Programs

Sometimes students and their neighbors cannot work out disputes on their own. To address this concern, some colleges and towns offer mediation, a voluntary process in which parties to a dispute meet together with a trained and impartial mediator to work on a mutually satisfactory agreement. The mediator listens to both sides, guiding the parties in clarifying the issues, identifying areas of agreement, developing possible solutions, and coming to terms in a written agreement.

As noted, the city of Fort Collins and Colorado State University (CSU) jointly fund a community liaison coordinator who works to improve relations between students and long-term city residents. Through the Community Mediation Program, which is available free of charge, volunteer mediators work with the disputing parties to address complaints about noise and other nuisances, landlord-tenant disagreements, and clashes over common areas. The process is informal, but the final agreement, drafted and enforced by those who sign it, is considered binding. According to CSU officials, the parties reach agreements in approximately 85 percent of the cases brought before the program.



Working With Landlords

Landlords have a vested interest in reducing problems arising from student alcohol and other drug use but need training and assistance from campus and community officials on how best to address those problems. Campus officials can help reduce off-campus problems by inviting landlords and property managers to join a campus and community coalition; introducing them to local programs and policies designed to reduce alcohol-related disturbances; and outlining specific strategies for managing their properties and maintaining better control of their renters.

A long-standing program in the city of Bellingham, where WWU is located, is the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program (CFMHP). The CFMHP has three phases that landlords and property managers must complete for

certification. Phase 1 is an eight-hour seminar that introduces a comprehensive approach to reduce crime and improve quality of life in rentals. Topics include promoting a sense of community, crisis resolution, warning signs of drug activity, and working with the police. Phase 2 is a security inspection and assessment. Phase 3 requires that property owners and managers with more than 10 rental units host two community meetings per year, with a focus on promoting community and addressing safety and security issues. Owners and managers of properties with fewer than 10 units are encouraged to promote Block Watch meetings with their residents. The CFMHP also promotes a lease addendum by which tenants agree not to engage in or facilitate any criminal activity, including illegal activity involving controlled substances, nor to engage in any breach of the lease agreement that jeopardizes the health, safety, or welfare of the landlord or other tenants or involves serious property damage.

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Landlord Disciplinary Record Check

UMass students who have lived on campus for four continuous semesters are permitted to live off campus but must agree to sign a form to have their disciplinary records released by the university to area landlords. UMass will report the number of violations the student has had and the student's eligibility for on-campus housing. The university receives approximately 5,000 record check requests each academic year.

Other municipalities have moved to hold landlords more accountable. In Milwaukee, Wis., home to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and several other colleges and universities, the police department and the city's Department of Neighborhood Services (DNS) jointly operate the Chronic Nuisance Property Reduction

Program. The program is triggered when there have been three or more calls to police that have led to at least 25 nuisance violations for public drinking, disorderly conduct, excessive noise, littering, loitering, and other illegal conduct. In the event that the owner does not know how to handle the problem, the police refer the owner to the DNS's Landlord Training Program, a free five-hour class on how to reduce illegal and destructive activity on rental property. Under certain conditions, specified in a city ordinance, the owner can be billed for the costs of future enforcement actions.

Keeping Track of Landlords

Mandated registration of rental property with up-to-date contact information on property helps city officials to investigate complaints and enforce remedies. In Lincoln, Neb., the police call landlords as soon as a large, unruly party is discovered at their property, no matter how late the hour. The landlords then receive a follow-up letter to document the incident in the event of future prosecution for maintaining a disorderly house. Police Chief Tom Casady reports that most landlords respond quickly and appropriately, adding, "They are generally quite eager to stay off my speed dial."



New Laws and Ordinances

Consistent with the environmental management approach, several college towns have acted to control off-campus problems by passing and enforcing new ordinances designed to deter illegal and dangerous alcohol consumption and maintain neighborhood civility.

The Unruly Gathering Ordinance passed by the city of Tucson, where the University of Arizona is located, states that loud or unruly gatherings are unlawful and constitute a civil infraction. Specifically, the ordinance states, "It shall be a public nuisance to conduct a gathering of five or more persons on any private property . . . in a manner which causes

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a disturbance of the quiet enjoyment of private or public property by any person or persons.” Disturbances include but are not limited to excessive noise or traffic, obstruction of public streets by crowds or vehicles, drinking in public, service of alcohol to minors or consumption of alcohol by minors, fighting, disturbing the peace, and littering.

When there is a violation, police post a visible red tag on the premises, which states that an unruly gathering occurred, notes the violation date, and warns that a repeat offense within a 180-day period will result in further penalties. Individuals to be held responsible include persons who organized or sponsored the gathering; the occupant, tenant, or owner of the residence, if in attendance at the gathering; and any person at the gathering who engaged in conduct that caused the gathering to be unruly. Each person found to be responsible incurs a minimum, mandatory fine of \$100. Subsequent violations within the 180-day period result in escalating fines, up to a maximum of \$1,500 for a third or subsequent violation. The University of Arizona notifies its students that “red tag” violations may show up on their permanent academic record.

Working through a campus and community coalition, Washington State University helped shape a new noise regulation for the city of Pullman. In response to a resident complaint, police have the discretion to issue a notice of infraction. If police are unable to identify the person who is responsible for the noise, then the owner, a tenant, or an officer of the living group or association residing on the premises will be issued the notice of infraction, whether or not that individual was at the premises at the time of the incident. A first violation results in a \$100 fine. Subsequent violations require a mandatory court appearance; if found guilty, the violator will be fined no less than \$500. Another city ordinance states that property is to be “properly maintained for both sanitary and visual reasons. Indoor furnishings, such as couches, are not allowed to be left outdoors in a residential zone.”

Social host liability laws are another option. In most states, either by statute or case law, party hosts can be held responsible if an

underage drinker at a party is harmed or causes harm to another person. Servers who physically furnish the alcohol face liability but so too does any person who organizes, hosts, or supports the event at which alcohol is made available.⁷ In its model social host liability statute, the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) recommends that a civil fee be imposed against both social hosts and landowners, including landlords, to recover response costs when law enforcement, fire, or other emergency services respond on multiple occasions to the scene of a loud or unruly party at which alcoholic beverages are served to or consumed by minors. PIRE also recommends providing the option of imposing criminal penalties under certain circumstances.⁸



Extending Campus Jurisdiction to Off-Campus Behavior

Many colleges and universities have extended jurisdiction of their student disciplinary code to include off-campus behavior. Boston College’s policy is broadly stated: “Students may be charged by the University for misconduct that occurs off campus if they are in violation of local, state, or federal laws and if their offense materially or adversely affects their suitability as [members] of the Boston College community and violates the University code of conduct.” Other institutions have a more limited policy. URI, for example, will only assume jurisdiction when the student offender has been repeatedly arrested or cited or if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the student poses a threat to the safety of self or others.

This type of policy can be enforced only if local law enforcement agencies are willing to arrest and cite students when responding to complaints about house parties or other disturbances. After extending jurisdiction, campus officials should broadly announce that they want students held fully accountable for their off-campus conduct, a policy that may not have been fully communicated in the past. Neighborhood residents also need to be told about this policy, so that if the police response proves to be inadequate, complaints can be

taken to the police chief or precinct captain rather than to campus administrators.

For an expanded jurisdiction policy to be successful, procedures are needed to ensure good communication between law enforcement and college officials. One option is for the police department to fax copies of student arrest reports and citations to the college.

Wake Forest University in North Carolina takes its policy one step further by enforcing a detailed set of housing policies for students who live in single-family dwellings off campus. Students who want to live off campus must apply annually to the Office of Residence Life and Housing. Several factors dictate whether students gain approval to live in a single-family dwelling off campus. First, the university can reject applicants based on their disciplinary records, residence hall history, or previous experience residing off campus. Second, the university denies requests that would violate a city ordinance stating that no more than four individuals not related by blood, adoption, or marriage may live together in a single-family dwelling. Third, the university has the right to disapprove a residence based upon a pattern of problems caused by former residents of the house.

Wake Forest students must have their prospective landlord review and sign an agreement to abide by the university’s policies, which are listed on a Web site. Especially important is the Landlord and Student’s Agreement, which is binding on both the student tenants and landlords. Key terms of that agreement include the following: (1) Upon reasonable notice, the premises will be made available for inspection by university officials. (2) Residents may not create a “community disturbance,” which includes excessive noise, large crowds, excessive vehicular traffic and parking, and profane or vulgar signs, language, gestures, or other conduct. (3) All activities on the premises, including upkeep, “must be consistent with the residential character of the neighborhood and in accordance with standards of decency and decorum expected of Wake Forest students.” Violations may automatically make a student ineligible to live in single-family housing;

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other university disciplinary proceedings, including suspension, also may apply.

Targeted Enforcement Strategies

Student misconduct off campus can be deterred when local law enforcement agencies strictly enforce town ordinances and regulations and students are informed about those efforts.

Surveys revealed that off-campus parties are the top venue for heavy drinking by students attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). In response, UNL's NU Directions project collaborated with the Lincoln Police Department to launch Party Patrol, a targeted enforcement program designed to locate and respond to large parties. With an annual budget of \$10,000, the Party Patrol frequently deploys a group of six officers and one sergeant on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. Typically, plainclothes officers enter a party to determine if any violations are occurring—for example, the collection of cover charges or entrance fees, which constitutes sale of alcohol without a license; minors in possession of alcohol; procurement of alcohol for minors; or maintenance of a disorderly house.

If violations are observed, the Party Patrol disperses the party, seizes any physical evidence, such as cash or kegs, detains violators, issues citations, and arrests or cites the individuals hosting the party. The police address habitual disturbances by making personal contact with landlords. Publicity through the news media is a key part of the strategy. Police host a Monday briefing after each weekend detail, which is covered by the local and campus news media. With this program, complaints from residents in two particularly hard-hit neighborhoods declined by approximately one-third.

URI launched a campus media campaign called "RhodeMap to Safety" to inform students about targeted law enforcement efforts on campus and in the nearby towns. Armed with a survey showing that 83 percent of URI students favored tougher enforcement of the state's drinking and driving laws, URI's Common Ground project held a news conference to announce the awarding of grants to local

and campus police departments to cover overtime costs for extra police patrols. The campaign also utilized several campus-based media channels to reinforce this message. Common Ground positioned the campaign as a response to student concerns about drunk driving, which contributed to students' favorable view of it.⁹

Cooperating Tavern Programs

Students drinking in off-campus bars, taverns, and restaurants are another major source of off-campus problems, including alcohol-impaired driving. Retail alcohol outlets in college communities are notorious for using low-priced promotions to lure in students, failing to check IDs, and over-serving their customers.¹⁰

In 1995, facing angry complaints from the community, the Albany Committee on University and Community Relations developed a cooperating tavern program, working with the Empire State Restaurant and Tavern Association and the owners of 14 local bars and restaurants in off-campus student neighborhoods. Under a voluntary signed agreement, the owners agreed that their advertising and on-site signage would ask patrons to be respectful of neighborhood residents and to behave responsibly when leaving the premises. Other provisions call for the following:

- (1) Avoiding any advertisements that use language, illustrations, or low-priced promotions that would serve to encourage irresponsible alcohol use;

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Preventing Riots

The possibility of college students participating in "celebratory riots" or other civil disturbances poses a significant challenge for both campus and community officials. Two publications provide recommendations on how to head off and respond to this type of civil disorder:

- *Managing Major Public Events: A Planning Guide for Municipal Officials, Law Enforcement, Community Leaders, Organizers, and Promoters* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Community Relations Service, 2000). This document is available online at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crs/pubs/majorevents.htm>.
- *Report on the Sportsmanship and Fan Behavior Summit* (Indianapolis, Ind.: National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2003). This 16-page report, which includes a case study of the Ohio State University, is available online at <http://www.ncaa.org/sportsmanship/sportsmanshipFanBehavior/report.pdf>.

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- (2) Notifying patrons of the age 21 law and the requirement to show a valid ID before being served alcohol;
- (3) Promoting nonalcoholic beverage specials.

Tavern owners post a “Cooperating Tavern” sign to indicate that they have signed the agreement. Committee members monitor on- and off-campus advertising and work with the owners to revise unsuitable ads to meet the program’s guidelines

URI’s Cooperating Tavern program emphasizes responsible beverage service (RBS), which includes checking age identification of customers who appear under age 30, identifying fake IDs and turning them over to police, and refusing alcohol service to underage or intoxicated customers. URI positioned the program as a response to a newly passed Rhode Island law that requires retailers to have new employees attend a certified RBS training program within 60 days of being hired. Owners can also send their employees to receive additional training on how to conduct a proper ID check. As part of its “RhodeMap to Safety” campaign, URI has used paid ads in local newspapers and the URI student newspaper, plus other media channels, to congratulate the owners who signed the agreement. As a reminder to the public, especially students, the advertising also outlined the major components of RBS being practiced by local alcohol retailers.

Conclusion

The presence of a college or university in a community can greatly enrich the lives of long-term residents, intellectually, culturally, and financially. But students who live, work, and play in nearby neighborhoods can sometimes create enormous problems, putting a strain on campus and community relations and compromising the health and safety of all residents not just of students.

In response, college administrators must view student alcohol and other drug problems as a community problem, not just a campus problem. If campus officials accept responsibility for addressing off-campus problems, they

will find able and willing partners in the community who are eager to search for workable solutions, collaborating in a spirit of mutual respect. The program and policy options described in this publication are a good place to start that discussion.

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 **Resources****Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS)**

U.S. Department of Education
<http://www.ed.gov/osdfs>; 202-260-3954

OSDFS supports efforts to create safe schools, respond to crises, prevent alcohol and other drug abuse, ensure the health and well-being of students, and teach students good character and citizenship. The agency provides financial assistance for drug abuse and violence prevention programs and activities that promote the health and well-being of students in elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education.

The U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention

<http://www.higheredcenter.org>; 1-800-676-1730; TDD Relay-friendly, Dial 711

The Higher Education Center offers an integrated array of services to help campuses and communities come together to identify problems; assess needs; and plan, implement, and evaluate alcohol and other drug abuse and violence prevention programs. Services include training; technical assistance; publications; support for the Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues; and evaluation activities. The Higher Education Center's publications are free and can be downloaded from its Web site.

The Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues

<http://www.thenetwork.ws>; see Web site for telephone contacts by region

The Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues (Network) is a national consortium of colleges and universities formed to promote healthy campus environments by addressing issues related to alcohol and other drugs. Developed in 1987 by the U.S. Department of Education, the Network comprises member institutions that voluntarily agree to work toward a set of standards aimed at reducing AOD problems at colleges and universities. It has approximately 1,600 members nationwide.



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Our Mission

The mission of the U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention is to assist institutions of higher education in developing, implementing, and evaluating alcohol, other drug, and violence prevention policies and programs that will foster students' academic and social development and promote campus and community safety.

How We Can Help

The U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center offers an integrated array of services to help people at colleges and universities adopt effective AOD prevention strategies:

- Training and professional development activities
- Resources, referrals, and consultations
- Publication and dissemination of prevention materials
- Support for The Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues
- Assessment, evaluation, and analysis activities

Get in Touch

Additional information can be obtained by contacting:

**The Higher Education Center for
Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention**

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