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# Campus and Community Leadership in the Spotlight: How University Presidents and City Managers View Town/Gown Relationships

Stephen M. Gavazzi

## Abstract

This paper begins by reviewing literature that underscores the critical role university presidents play in establishing functional campus/community relationships. Using the metaphor of marriage, a conceptual and methodological framework is offered for understanding and assessing the quality of the town/gown interaction. The presentation of a town/gown relationship model based on the twin dimensions of effort and comfort levels sets the stage for the presentation of results from interviews conducted with university presidents and city managers that focused specific attention on their perceptions of town/gown relationship types. More specifically, these leaders were asked to discuss the type of relationship they inherited at the start of their tenure, as well as how the town/gown interactions in which they were immersed had evolved over time. Finally, themes are presented as a set of “Town/Gown Ten Commandments” that highlight the critical role both campus and community leaders play in the development and maintenance of harmonious town/gown relationships.

Calls for more robust connections between universities and their host communities have taken many forms over the years. This has included the encouragement of “engaged institutions” by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (2000), the classification for community engagement supported by the Carnegie Foundation (Driscoll, 2008), the vision of regional stewardship advanced by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (Saltmarsh, O’Meara, Sandmann, Giles, Cowdery, Liang, & Buglione, 2014), and the Innovation & Economic Prosperity Universities Designation developed by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU, 2017).

The engaged university concept long has spawned comparisons between campus/community relationships and the interactions that occur between partners in a marriage (Hill, 1994). Gavazzi (2015c) wrote that “the relationships that exist between institutions of higher learning and the communities that surround them resemble marriages in some striking ways. The relative health of those relationships seems to rest on many of the same factors that create strong marriages” (p. 147). Within such a perspective is an important fundamental truth that applies equally to town/gown relationships and marriages: Higher education leaders ignore their institutional relationship with community stakeholders at their own peril (Gavazzi, 2015a).

Unfortunately, that fact seems to have been lost on many university administrators over the years, leading to many points of friction. For instance, Sungu-Eryilmaz (2009) has discussed the conflict that arises when a university wishes to embark on a new development project that involves property on or near the edge of campus. A different set of examples comes from Fox (2012; 2014), who has described the various difficulties that arise as the result of the university’s mismanagement of off-campus student housing issues, including most prominently student misbehavior in neighborhoods near campus. Taken together, land use and student residential concerns have been portrayed as the most prominent issues on the edge of campus property that inevitably drive a wedge between institutions of higher learning and the communities in which they are embedded (Gavazzi, 2016).

Thus, it is asserted here that higher education leaders should take co-responsibility for engaging their host communities, especially before major problems arise around these “edge/wedge” issues. There is shared accountability here, of course, because town/gown relationships are shaped by the reciprocal interactions of campus and community stakeholders. Therefore, municipal leaders likewise cannot afford to ignore the opportunities and challenges that come with having an institution of higher learning in their midst.

After reviewing previous literature that has underscored the important role that university presidents play in establishing functional campus/

community relationships, this paper offers a conceptual and methodological framework for understanding and assessing the quality of relationships that exist between campuses and communities. Using the metaphor of marriage discussed earlier, this work asserts that the most functional (i.e., harmonious) town/gown relationships are those that have partners who display both high levels of effort and comfort in their interactions with one another. Other relationship types (traditional, conflicted, and devitalized) represent less desirable campus/community interactions that reflect lower levels of effort and/or comfort.

The presentation of this town/gown relationship model sets the stage for the presentation of data culled from interviews with university presidents and city managers that focused specific attention on their perceptions of these town/gown relationship types. Here, these leaders were asked to discuss the type of relationship they inherited at the start of their tenure, as well as how the town/gown interactions in which they were immersed had evolved over time. Out of this information arose a set of themes that are presented as the Town/Gown Ten Commandments, leading to a discussion of the critical role that campus and community leaders can and should play in the development and maintenance of more harmonious town/gown relationships.

### **The Role of the University President in the Community**

Scholarship focused on the role of the university president typically has included at least some mention of their need to attend to community relationships. For instance, in her 2012 book *On Being Presidential: A Guide for College and University Leaders*, Susan Resneck Pierce pointed out that presidential involvement with the local community presents both opportunities and risks. To provide a sense of how potential rewards versus costs can be weighed by university leaders, Pierce posed questions for presidents to ponder when considering initial (or greater) involvement in community partnerships. Interestingly, many of these questions seem lopsided in that they focused attention so heavily on whether campus needs were being met, echoing one of the major criticisms repeatedly lodged against university involvement in the community; that is, you only come to us when you want something for yourself. That said, “improved town/gown relationships”

was present on the list of core issues for presidential deliberation generated by Pierce (p. 172).

Weill's (2009) description of the president's role in developing positive town/gown interactions seemed a bit more balanced in terms of laying out the costs and benefits for both campus and community. As well, Weill provided case examples that illustrated some of the steps that a president needs to take to more effectively engage community constituents. The steps included actions related to the formation of a stakeholder committee, for example, and the identification of specific goals to be accomplished through the activities undertaken within the partnership.

There are other breadcrumbs that can be followed as we aspire to learn more about how senior university leaders conceptualize the role they play in developing healthy town/gown relationships. One rather significant resource in this regard is a 2006 book entitled *Leadership in Higher Education* that was compiled by Francis Lawrence, the former president of Rutgers University. This book contains material culled from his interviews with 12 university presidents, all of whom were asked to respond to various important questions, including one that requested commentary on the role of the university within the communities that surrounded their campuses.

Virtually every university president interviewed by Lawrence (2006) underscored the importance of town/gown issues in one way or another. One example of a university president's quote included in Lawrence's (2006) book helps illuminate the point that university presidents play a critical role in determining the quality of relationships among campus and community stakeholders. Here, Mary Sue Coleman, former president of both the University of Iowa and the University of Michigan, argued that an ongoing campus/community dialogue was an essential component of the interdependent nature of the town/gown relationship. She is quoted as saying:

We don't always agree because sometimes we have differing needs and differing expectations, but I think the communication is absolutely critical because we are totally dependent on each other. The university is dependent on having a nice city. The town is dependent on us to draw people here (Lawrence, 2006, p. 172).

## Conceptualizing and Measuring the Optimal Town/Gown Relationship

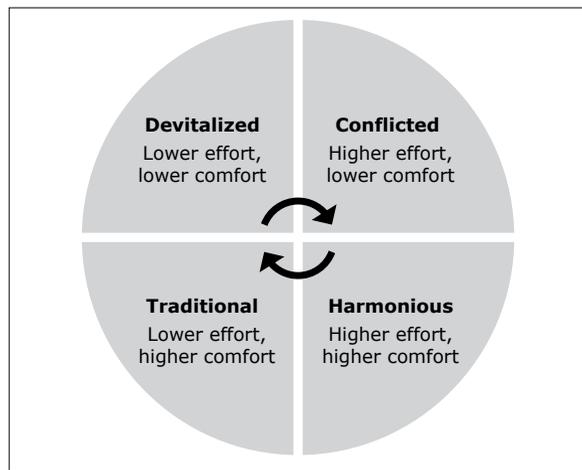
Presently, there is at least one conceptual framework and an associated measurement technology that can provide standardized and longitudinal documentation of the quality of town/gown relationships that can be used to inform campus and community leadership activities. Using the lens of a marital metaphor, Gavazzi, Fox, and Martin (2014) sought to encourage more effective and evidence-based activities designed to promote campus/community partnerships. These authors asserted that two distinct and yet related conceptual dimensions could be used to describe the quality of campus/community exchanges. The first dimension pertains to the level of comfort that higher education personnel and community stakeholders experience inside of their relationship, while the second dimension of this model involves the level of effort required to maintain the present state of the town/gown relationship. By combining the comfort and effort dimensions (see Figure 1), four types of relationships are used to describe the characteristics of campus/community interaction: harmonious, traditional, conflicted, and devitalized.

The harmonious type—relationships consisting of higher comfort levels and higher effort levels—is the most optimal form of town/gown relationship as described by Gavazzi, Fox, and Martin (2014). In marriages, harmonious couples tend to report the highest satisfaction levels, owing in large part to the fact that they contain partners who are working together in ways that define and enhance their relationship with one another. Similarly, harmonious town/gown relationships are defined by the relatively high amount of activity that is directed toward the pursuit of goals that are of shared benefit to the campus and community.

The traditional type—a combination of higher comfort levels and lower effort levels—is thought to be the default “state of affairs” for most campuses and communities according to Gavazzi, Fox, and Martin (2014). While traditional couples report modest satisfaction levels, the partners typically have little contact with one another, and often lead very separate lives. The hallmark of the traditional town/gown relationship is the way that university and community representatives operate in largely autonomous fashion, often ignoring each other as they pursue their own individual goals.

The conflicted type reflects relationships that are comprised of lower comfort levels and higher effort levels, often as not used to describe less than

**Figure 1.** A 2x2 Typology of Town/Gown Relationships



satisfactory marriages that are defined by persistent fighting between the partners. Lots of energy is expended on issues that seem to be beyond the reach of the partners to resolve. In corresponding fashion, conflicted town/gown relationships are marked by ongoing quarrels, often about chronic issues such as land use (Sungu-Eryilmaz, 2009) and student misbehavior (Fox, 2012) mentioned above.

Finally, the devitalized type—a combination of low comfort levels and low effort levels—was used by Gavazzi, Fox, and Martin (2014) to describe relationships with the least amount of overall satisfaction. In marriages, devitalized couples report high levels of disappointment along with the sense that something was “lost” along the way. This sentiment underlies the notion that all devitalized relationships formerly reflected qualities of the other relationship types. As applied to town/gown associations, some campuses and communities that once were locked in combat simply give up on each other and refuse to communicate at all. Alternatively, a devitalized relationship can come about when hopes of a harmonious relationship are dashed repeatedly by the failure of one or both partners to follow through on promises and assurances.

Gavazzi, Fox, and Martin (2014) provided illustrations of each of the four relationship types through specific case examples from universities and their host communities. At the same time, however, there was explicit recognition of the need to push this area of scholarship beyond theoretical frameworks and toward more measurement-oriented activities. As a result, a tool known as the Optimal College Town Assessment (OCTA) has been developed that provides the field with some initial attempts to standardize the assessment process (Gavazzi, 2015a; 2015b; Gavazzi & Fox, 2015). By directly measuring effort and comfort

levels, the OCTA generates scores that identify patterns of campus/community interactions consistent with one of the four town/gown relationship types. In addition, OCTA scores have been demonstrated to display distance decay effects, such that the dimensions of effort and comfort are rated at their highest levels by community residents who are geographically closest to the campus. Further, specific groupings of town/gown partners also display significant differences—for example, business owners' versus local school district educators' perceptions of university faculty members—underscoring the importance of disaggregating data in order to better understand critical differences between and among campus representatives and community stakeholders.

Taken together, the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data has been portrayed as part of a larger “mobilization cycle” regarding the use of assessment findings in the optimizing of town/gown relationships (Gavazzi, 2015c). 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 (awareness raising; coalition building) and following (data interpretation; evidence-based action planning) such data gathering efforts in order to maximally enhance the understanding of town/gown relationships among community stakeholders and campus representatives.

### **Specifics of the Town/Gown Leadership Study and Data Analysis Procedures**

To generate some initial understanding of the way university leadership impacts the quality of campus/community relationships, four former university presidents and four former city managers were recruited to participate in a confidential interview regarding their town/gown experiences. After obtaining permission to conduct the study through the Institutional Review Board at The Ohio State University, a short description indicating the time length and basic study procedures was emailed to a group of university presidents and city managers whom the author knew professionally through interactions at higher education conferences and leadership trainings. Campus and community leaders who were interested in the study were asked to reply by email directly to the author.

When the response was positive, a telephone interview was set up at the participant's and

author's mutual convenience. Prior to the telephone interview commencing, participants were read a verbal informed consent script that also contained a short description of the study aims and assurances. Next, the interview participants were read the interview questions one at a time, with one version used for the university presidents and one version used for the city managers. Finally, participants were then debriefed regarding the aims of the study.

Content analysis procedures were employed to identify and organize themes that emerged from the transcribed text of all participant responses to the interview questions. The author reviewed the transcribed data in search of systematic patterns of answers to the questions posed to the participants, and then developed a coding scheme along the way as part of this review process. Each answer was typed on a separate piece of paper and then placed in separate piles according to the category of response best reflected within the coding scheme. After all responses were sorted, a constant comparison method of data analysis was employed to compare each answer to all the other answers contained in that category. As will be seen below, the responses were sorted into 10 categories. These categories reflected themes associated with: desire to create partnerships; time spent building relationships; respect; concerns about reciprocity; student issues; alumni awareness; valuation of faculty; historical connectedness; mindfulness of current issues and concerns; and a focus on posterity.

### **Forty Thousand Feet Up: The Role of University Presidents**

Anonymity was guaranteed to maximize the opportunity for the four presidents emeritus (one had held the title of chancellor due to the specific organization of higher education institutions in that specific state) to speak freely about their experiences. That said, all four participants served as the senior administrators of some of the larger research universities located in quintessential college towns within the United States.

The information-gathering process followed a semi-structured interview format. While a standard set of questions was asked of each university president, each participant was encouraged to take the conversation wherever necessary to generate the fullest possible portrait of the role they played in developing and maintaining campus/community relationships. The full contents of these interviews are reported elsewhere (Gavazzi, 2016). What follows are the aggregated responses of presidents to the two questions that focus attention on

town/gown relationship types, which follow the original question and answer format employed in the interviews.

**Question 1: Using the Optimal College Town Assessment typology as a reference point, what sort of town/gown relationship did you inherit at the start of your presidency?**

Often as not, the presidents used the “traditional” town/gown type to describe the situation they inherited. That is, the relationship between campus and community was relatively low on effort, but at least somewhat higher on comfort levels, mostly due to a lack of interest in making connections between town and gown activities. One former president shared:

I think I inherited something that was less than ideal...there was a kind of benign neglect on the part of the university with the town. I wouldn't say there was an all-out war between the two entities, but it certainly wasn't a relationship that was at the optimal point, despite the fact that there were a lot of things that I saw very soon that could be done between the town and the university that would really help both sides.

Another president stated unequivocally that he had inherited a harmonious relationship:

There was a town/gown committee that was already in place by the time that I arrived. That committee was the formalization of what had already been a very positive relationship between the university and the community.

Further probing questions indicated that some of the relationships might have been labeled more accurately as having contained devitalized and conflicted relationship characteristics. One president described low effort in combination with low comfort (in this case, high suspicion), and went on to describe how much more difficult it was to do something with the discomfort factor.

When there's a tradition of suspicion, it's more difficult to overcome than just low effort. When it's just low effort, you can simply put in greater effort. But when there's a tradition of suspicion, there are always questions. What are you doing that for? Is it really going to benefit us, or is it just for you?

Another example focused more specifically on distrust surrounding student housing issues:

The relationships were pretty good at the start. But there was a little tension around certain issues, like housing, where the university by virtue of previous decisions that had been made was perceived to be unfairly competing with developers and what they were trying to do.

Finally, the term “exploitation” was introduced by one former university president to describe this lack of comfort inside of the town/gown relationship:

There is a tendency on both sides toward exploitation. And maybe this is not unlike the marriage model as well. This is where the city sees the university as a target of opportunity, especially in terms of economic gain. What do I mean by that? Let's take as an example real estate development. Private developers would want that vacant property that was strategically located either within the university campus or adjacent to it. They would want to purchase that land on an anticipatory basis whereby in three to five years the university would need that property and buy it back for a much larger sum. In turn, the university began to be more forward looking and proactive ourselves, so we started buying up property before they could get to it or understanding what we would likely need five or ten years down the road.

None of these comments should be surprising to readers. As noted earlier in this article, these sorts of land use issues are responsible for much of the conflict and stress that develop within town/gown relationships. Of course, the other major culprit is student misbehavior, and this issue also arose in response to this interview question. In the words of one university president: “There was the sense that the university wasn't controlling its students. I think that was a very damaging aspect of the relationship I inherited.”

**Question 2: Again using the Optimal College Town Assessment typology as a reference point, what was the nature of the town/gown relationship when you stepped down as president?**

All the former presidents reported significant movement toward more harmonious relationships by the end of their tenure.

One former president said, “I wouldn’t say that we succeeded in doing everything that we wanted to do, but certainly the relationships and the trust between the university and the town were at a much higher level.”

The one president who claimed that he had inherited a harmonious relationship believed that his main responsibility was simply to maintain the relatively high-quality town/gown interactions that were already occurring:

I would like to say that I turned things around when I became president but that’s simply not true. Anything I contributed was simply baby steps in the direction we were already going. So, there was never anything that I had to fix. It was making sure that we kept the momentum going and never took it for granted. That it was something very precious, and my job was to make sure I didn’t screw it up.

The number of years in the position seemed to be related to the degree to which more positive relationships ensued. Essentially, it seemed to be the case that longer presidential terms yielded more harmonious tendencies:

The role of the president is to create trust among a number of constituencies, particularly the faculty and the board of trustees within the university, but also trust within the business community, the immediate residential community, and frankly trust with the political and media networks. Quite honestly, over a number of years I think that’s what we got right. I was lucky in that I became a president fairly early in my career, and I had a relatively long tenure as president. If you have that kind of continuity and longevity, it’s possible to nurture relationships that build trust in a way that you can’t if you have someone in a leadership position maybe three to five years. A new person then comes in and you have to start all over again.

Much of this movement toward improved relationships surrounded the improvement in how campus and community leaders interacted with one another over the years:

As years went on, the collaboration and conversation became much more focused. We started to look at the possibility of consolidating certain services such as fire protection. The university had a fire service alongside one in the community. Eventually we agreed to merge these services into a single, mutually coordinated operation. The same thing happened in terms of police services. We were constantly looking for ways to actively collaborate with one another.

One university president noted that in the end it all came down to giving and receiving respect:

I think the main thing from the university’s standpoint is to be respectful. It’s easy, I think, for the president of a very large university with a multibillion dollar budget to try to look down their nose at the local small town community mayor or town council. Treating them with respect, including them in your orbit, so that at the very least you are telegraphing to them on a fairly regular basis that, yeah, we know you exist, and if you have any issues come talk to me. Or if I have any issues I’ll come talk to you. So I had dinner with these folks, lunch with these folks, and we invited them to all of our social events.

### **The View from the Town**

Four former city managers (also known as city administrators) who had larger comprehensive research universities within their municipal boundaries also agreed to participate in a confidential interview to generate some initial understanding of the impact that municipal leaders have on town/gown relationship quality. As with the presidents, the information gathering process followed a semi-structured interview format, and each participant was encouraged to take the conversation wherever necessary to generate the fullest possible portrait of the role they played in developing and maintaining campus/community relationships.

**Question 1: Using the Optimal College Town Assessment typology as a reference point, what type of town/gown relationship did you inherit when you first started as a city manager?**

One of the city managers reported that he had inherited a harmonious relationship from his predecessor, while the remaining three individuals reported as having walked into town/gown relationships that were more traditional by nature. Here is an excerpt of what the one city manager said about the harmonious relationship he inherited:

There was already a strong relationship between the campus and the community by the time I arrived. What helped to really catapult this relationship to become even better was my appointment to the president's cabinet as the city representative. I learned a lot sitting on that cabinet, and I think that they in turn learned a lot about how to consider the community around them when major decisions needed to be made.

In turn, an example is provided here about the traditional relationship that another city manager described as inheriting:

The university president and I started at about the same time. He was into building the university endowment, into expanding the international reach of the university, building relationships with his board of trustees, with donors, all that stuff. So, we were not on the center of his radar screen. We were on his radar screen, but it was out on the periphery somewhere. And the university had just abandoned a largely symbolic initiative where they had consciously created touch points between the university and city administrations. That initiative subsequently had been described to me as an elaborate opportunity to talk problems to death. It never really captured the attention of university leadership, and it just kind of went away right before I came. It seemed to die a death of natural causes.

The third city manager had described difficulties within the municipality that had to be dealt with prior to dealing with town/gown issues:

Twenty years ago, I don't know if I was brave or stupid. I stepped into a situation where our governing body was the conflicted relationship. Almost every vote was a 4-3 vote, and I thought I had to fix

that before I fixed anything else. We had a tough first year, with seven governing members who were hardheaded to the point that there was a lack of civility in our meetings. We spent that first year getting those members to act like a governing body. I basically told that group that we could not hope to have good external relationships with the university if we could not get along together inside of our own building.

**Question 2: Again using the Optimal College Town Assessment typology as a reference point, how have you witnessed changes in effort and comfort levels over the years you have served as a city manager?**

All the city managers reported witnessing changes in the characteristics of the town/gown relationships across time. The one city manager with experience in multiple college town settings said this:

In all three instances, no matter how good the interactions were already, I saw movement toward more harmonious relationships. All three improved not only their relationships with each other, but also their understanding that the relationships had to improve. The competition these universities are facing for both faculty and students is driving this willingness to cooperate with towns. No student or faculty moves to a university any more thinking, "Hey, I'll live my whole life inside these walls." So, students and faculty members are going to be shopping for communities that have a high quality of life. Not to mention the shrinking financial resources. Universities now have to use an economy of scale with their surrounding communities to lower their infrastructure costs while improving the quality of life.

One city manager reported vacillating movement toward and away from a more conflicted relationship as the result of the rising influence of neighborhood associations, seen as a direct response to complaints about student behavior:

I would even go as far as to say that, depending on the issue at hand, the relationship can move right now between

harmonious and conflicted. We have days and months where it's very harmonious and other times where it is very conflicted. It depends on the issue and what's going on at the time.

Another city manager noted that the trend toward greater interaction between the city and the university came as the result of more intense focus on student housing, which meant that the relationship moved from traditional to harmonious only after a period of conflict had been resolved around off-campus residential issues:

We were in a more traditional relationship pre-2008, when things were relatively calm and stable. This was during the growth curve of high school graduates, so universities had choices and lots of resources. And for us, the city had a long history of accepting the plight—the blight—of off-campus housing. We hadn't yet reached the point where we said “Hey wait a minute, maybe we don't have to accept this as a fait accompli. We can do some things to keep single family neighborhoods together, to keep students from living in squalor.” I'd like to take some credit for challenging those things. We got the attention of the university in the midst of some riots that were happening in some off-campus student residential areas. Eventually they realized it was in their best interest to clean this up.

Still another city manager noted that the change in town/gown relationships came as the direct result of the changeover in university presidents:

When I wished to interact with the previous president, I was told that I had to make an appointment. That president's executive assistant would give me the choice of two or three days in the upcoming week or so. When the new president took over, he came to me, to my office, and said that he understood that there may have been some problems in getting together with the previous president. We talked for a while, and then he took out his business card, and with a pen he wrote his personal cell phone on the back of the card, telling me that I should feel free to call him anytime. I

only had to use that phone number once in fourteen years of doing business with him, but it sure felt good to have that number in my hands.

### **The Ten Commandments of Town/Gown Relationships**

As reported previously by Gavazzi (2016), it is very clear that the relative health of a town/gown relationship is the direct result of actions taken by both campus and community leaders. In fact, there was so much agreement in these interviews about 10 specific issues that Gavazzi (2016) decided to label them the Ten Commandments of Town/Gown Relationships. These Ten Commandments (see Table 1) can be broken into three subsets of directives. Taken together, the first four commandments serve as investment advice regarding the time and attention that campus and community leaders must give to building and sustaining their relationships with one another. Making town/gown relationships a high priority, setting aside the appropriate amount of time to nurture these associations, treating your partners with the utmost

**Table 1.** The Ten Commandments of Town/Gown Relationships

- |   |
|---|
| <p><b>Commandment #1:</b> Thou shall give high priority to efforts that build more harmonious relationships between campus and community members.</p> <p><b>Commandment #2:</b> Thou shall not miscalculate the time involved in developing and maintaining harmonious campus-community relationships.</p> <p><b>Commandment #3:</b> Thou shall honor your campus and community partners.</p> <p><b>Commandment #4:</b> Thou shall seek win-win outcomes wherever and whenever possible in campus-community interactions.</p> <p><b>Commandment #5:</b> Thou shall remember that students are the most important point of connection between campus and community.</p> <p><b>Commandment #6:</b> Thou shall know the power of your alumni, especially those living in communities immediately surrounding the campus.</p> <p><b>Commandment #7:</b> Thou shall respect the notion that faculty members represent the face of both campus and community.</p> <p><b>Commandment #8:</b> Thou shall appreciate the history of the campus-community relationship you inherited.</p> <p><b>Commandment #9:</b> Thou shall continuously assess the present state of the relationship between campus and community representatives.</p> <p><b>Commandment #10:</b> Thou shall leave the campus-community relationship in better shape than you found it.</p> |
|---|

respect, and seeking win-win outcomes wherever and whenever possible become the hallmarks of these relationship investment-oriented commandments.

The next three commandments focus on the central cast of characters outside of leadership circles that have the greatest impact on campus/community interaction. Institutions of higher learning exist for the primary purpose of educating students, and those students—for better and for worse—are the principal group that members of the community will interact with or otherwise get to know. Faculty members, in turn, are the individuals who are responsible for teaching those classes and conducting those research studies that provide the vehicles for students to gain their first entry points into the community. And, of course, those members of the community who are alumni—and especially those who have risen to positions of leadership within the community—represent the group of citizens who have the greatest potential to impact the quality of the town/gown relationship.

The final three commandments focus attention on the past, present, and future of town/gown relationships. Those campus and community leaders who do not understand the history of campus/community interaction surely are doomed to repeat it. Likewise, those same leaders who are not using standardized measurement tools to assess the quality of their present town/gown relationships are destined to forever play a guessing game (and one that often as not will generate misleading information). And finally, the most effective university administrators and municipal authorities are those individuals who plan for a future that does not require their physical presence to maintain the work they have accomplished.

### **Bringing it All Together: Town/Gown Theory, Data, and Interpretation of Results**

The twin dimensions of effort and comfort are embedded in a 2X2 theoretical model that hypothesizes four distinct types of town/gown relationships: harmonious, traditional, conflicted, and devitalized (Gavazzi, Fox, & Martin, 2014). In turn, there is quantitative evidence that supports the measurement of campus/community characteristics as a function of those twin dimensions (Gavazzi & Fox, 2015). Left unanswered to this point, however, had been the degree to which the combination of effort and comfort could serve as a useful heuristic tool for the description of more personalized, and hence qualitative, descriptions of town/gown relationship quality. To this end, the

present study has generated some important initial indications that the theoretical dimensions of effort and comfort resonated powerfully with the campus and municipal administrators who had agreed to take part in the interviews.

It should be noted that the presidents and town managers recruited for this study were well-known as advocates for strong campus/community relationships. Thus, it was likely their responses to the interview questions were going to be skewed in a positive direction. And by and large, these leaders did in fact tend to portray their town/gown experiences in more optimistic ways, especially when discussing the results of their diligent exertions to make things work. Hence, higher effort and higher comfort levels seemed to be the rule rather than the exception for the campuses and municipalities associated with the study participants.

That said, these same leaders clearly understood what university and community life looked like when effort and comfort levels fell away from some adequate level of relationship functioning. Witness for instance the use of the terms “suspicion” and “exploitation” in descriptions provided by some of the university presidents. Equally important, the comments of the city managers lent themselves to an acute sensitivity regarding the ephemeral nature of good town/gown relationships, especially when leadership changes were experienced.

Notably, the responses given by university presidents and city managers to questions about effort and comfort levels also displayed some remarkably consistent themes. So much so, in fact, that their comments were rather straightforwardly classifiable into the 10 initial categories created to sort the data: desire to create partnerships; time spent building relationships; respect; concerns about reciprocity; student issues; alumni awareness; valuation of faculty; historical connectedness; mindfulness of current issues and concerns; and a focus on posterity. The illustrative value of describing these categories as a set of commandments was determined only later, and then only because of the recurring reactions of several higher education colleagues who were familiar with the results.<sup>1</sup>

These initial qualitative findings were instrumental in pressing forward to further investigate the perceptions of university presidents regarding the value of actively pursuing more optimal campus/community relationships. Interviews

<sup>1</sup> One colleague was West Virginia University President E. Gordon Gee, who was the first to remark that “it sure looks like you’ve compiled a complete set of town-gown commandments here.”

conducted with 27 presidents and chancellors of land-grant institutions examined the relative strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the ability of these universities to meet the needs of the communities they were designed to serve (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). To a person, these land-grant leaders reported that the establishment and maintenance of more harmonious relationships with community stakeholders was a vital component of their university's mission. In fact, many of the university presidents pointed to these community engagement efforts as the very activities that can help lay the foundation for restoring the American public's confidence in its public institutions of higher learning. As of late, public trust in our universities has been deteriorating in a remarkable manner, especially among those individuals whose political affiliations are more right-leaning (Pew Research Center, 2017).

### **Application of Findings**

While the applicability of this work to activities aimed at enhancing town/gown relationships would seem to be far-ranging, there are two areas that would seem to warrant more immediate attention within the confines of the present article. First, there is the subject of how the Town/Gown Ten Commandments can be framed as suggested talking points for building more optimal campus/community associations. Second, and equally important, is the applicability of these directives in more pedagogically driven efforts to better understand the inner workings of town/gown relationships.

For starters, it is believed that the decrees offered here can be used as a convenient framework for discussions among leaders of universities and municipalities about the nature of their current town/gown relationships, as well as to provide guidance and direction about specific issues they must incorporate into their relationship-building process. Here, these leaders might ask themselves such questions as: Are you willing and able to commit to expending the relatively large amount of energy necessary for building and sustaining relationships with one another? Are you able to concentrate especially on the roles played by students, faculty members, and alumni who reside in the community? And finally, can you do all of this within a context that demands a simultaneous focus on the past, present, and future of the town/gown relationships in which you are involved?

In turn, the answers to these sorts of questions can be used to trigger discussions about how any

shortfalls and challenges that were forecast in advance by presidents and municipal leaders (or identified subsequently through observation of various town/gown interactions) can be overcome through the stepped-up involvement of other campus and community partners. For example, if the president finds that she or he is not able to make regular meetings devoted to town/gown issues (an extremely common issue), who can attend that has enough decision-making authority to not impede the group's progress in dealing with ongoing matters? And relatedly, in what other ways can that president's presence be felt by community partners in a manner that would display the high level of commitment and respect demanded by the first four Town/Gown Commandments?

By extension, there also would seem to be additional applicability in the context of framing pedagogical efforts that are aimed at better understanding campus/community relationships. Here, the three main "buckets" of commandments—leadership issues, intentional inclusion of campus/community stakeholders, and a simultaneous awareness of history and posterity—would seem to provide a sound organizational structure for the delivery of coursework and trainings on town/gown relationships. In fact, your author has done exactly that, having developed an undergraduate course that uses the book containing the Town/Gown Ten Commandments (Gavazzi, 2011) alongside the Fox (2012) book that more systematically covers the municipal perspective on these issues. A more advanced course designed for graduate students uses both of those previously mentioned books alongside a compendium of refereed journal articles and book chapters on town/gown subject matter.

For both the undergraduate and graduate sections of this course, the semester is divided into three main component parts that follow the tripartite framework suggested by the commandment groupings. Leadership issues are dealt with initially, thus setting the stage for all that is to come for the students. This is by design, not only because these commandments appear first in the list, but also to underscore the fact that leaders set the tone for all that occurs inside of town/gown relationships. While that would seem to be self-evident, the latest books on higher education leadership continue to provide reminders about the "important but little understood" role that campus leaders play in terms of the health and well-being of the community (Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Gee, 2018).

Intentional inclusion of campus and community stakeholders represents the second

pillar of the course's tripartite framework, and this section begins with the impact students have on town/gown relationships. Again, there is an organizational effect here in terms of where the student-oriented commandment is found ordinarily. However, students do seem to have a more pronounced effect on campus/community interactions, both for better and for worse. Therefore, there is more than a little self-reflection that can be sparked during this portion of the course. Discussions of the impact that faculty and alumni have on town/gown relationships are rounded out with consideration given to the disaggregation of community stakeholders into constituency groups that include, but are not limited to, business owners, local school district personnel, clergy, elected officials, and neighborhood associations.

The final component of this tripartite framework—focusing on the past, present, and future of town/gown relationships—is meant to convey to students the impact that time has on this subject matter. On the one hand, longevity in relationships seems to matter a great deal. The longer you are part of a campus and community, especially as a leader, the more opportunities you will have to make a difference (and typically, but not always, a positive one). On the other hand, there also is a cohort effect. Sometimes, the things that worked for one generation do not translate well to subsequent generations. Therefore, ongoing qualitative and quantitative assessment activities are asserted as a “gold standard” for determining town/gown relationship quality over time.

## Conclusion

In addition to previous literature that highlighted the impact university presidents have on town/gown relationships, the interview data analyzed in the present paper provides additional evidence regarding the critical role that both campus and community leaders play in establishing more harmonious partnerships. Simply put, it takes great effort from both sets of partners to create the higher level of comfort necessary for the relationship to remain functional over time.

Some caveats are in order here. The presidents and city managers who participated in the interviews contained in this paper were connected to larger research universities located in quintessential college towns within the United States. Therefore, at present the generalizability of the Town/Gown Ten Commandments is not known. It is likely that more urbanized municipalities and/or

smaller sized university settings that place less emphasis on research at the very least represent some important demographic considerations for further analysis.

In addition, it is important to emphasize that town/gown relationships are not static, but rather reflect a dynamic process that evolves over time. Presidents move on, and mayors and city council members step aside or otherwise lose elections to new community representatives. As a result, different decisions are made that expand or contract the university's immediate impact on the community, and vice versa.

In closing, it seems safe to say that the marital metaphor seems to apply particularly well to the town/gown relationship, excepting of course the notion that, unlike partners in a marriage, campuses and communities cannot get a divorce from one another. This fact alone should provide university and municipal leaders with ever more reason to pause and reflect on the privileges and responsibilities related to the positions they hold at present, as well as the impact their actions will have on town/gown relationships for years to come.

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