

Town and Gown Relationships for Destination Marketing

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Executive Summary

As with any partners, town and gown relationships can be either cooperative or adversarial working relationships. City governments and neighborhoods either choose to stay at odds with local universities or colleges or, alternatively, develop programs to communicate and develop amicable partnerships. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) in “college towns” are no different. Communication with nearly thirty colleagues revealed that some DMOs are just now establishing relationships with university departments and representatives while others have long established relationships. This paper will reveal five ways how DMOs have collaborated with their local universities to drive visitation to both the campus and community.

Introduction

“Traditional” partners of a DMO typically include hotels, convention centers, sports facilities, attractions, and restaurants. Meanwhile secondary partners may consist of Parks and Recreation departments, arts councils, economic development offices, and/or district associations such as a downtown association. But in some destinations, the university is a key partner. In Norman’s case, two of the largest attractions are university based: the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History and the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. The biggest driver of hotel room nights is University of Oklahoma Football.

Lawrence, Kansas is very similar in that the primary attractions are university based: the KU Natural History Museum, Booth Family Hall of Athletics, Dole Institute of Politics, Spencer Museum of Art, and performances at the Lied Center on the campus of the University of Kansas. (<http://www.VisitLawrence.com>)

East Lansing, Michigan is no different. If not for Michigan State and the Abrams Planetarium, MSU Bug House, MSU Department of Theatre, MSU Museum and Wharton Center for Performing Arts, the community boasts few tourism products. (<http://www.Lansing.org>)

Because the primary attractions or events are university based, it seems obvious that the relationship between the DMO and university should be close – but is it? How do DMOs maintain that “town and gown” relationship and are the best practices to maximize *cooperative* marketing efforts between the DMO and the university?

Town and Gown

Town and gown “are two distinct communities of a university town; *town* being the non-academic population and *gown* metonymically being the university community.” (<http://www.Wikipedia.com>)

In a college town, the relations between “town and gown” are those between the residents of the town and the students and faculty associated with the school, who, in the past, wore academic gowns. Such relations are surprisingly unfriendly or unpleasant. Traffic, parking problems, and deterioration of neighborhoods near a university are circumstances that frequently lead to friction. (<http://Dictionary.Reference.com>)

In 2008, the International Town & Gown Association (ITGA) was established to develop and improve working relationships between town and gown. The ITGA strives to become the primary information resource point for common issues between institutions of higher learning and the communities in which they reside. (<http://www.Clemson.edu>)

For example, the ITGA offers a Power Lunch Series where one can learn “proven, high-impact practices straight from the field,” a conference with sessions on neighbor relations, parking, parties, cooperative planning, and communication, and a certificate program intended to help all stakeholders understand and address complex challenges and processes associated with city and university relationships, as well as identify, foster, and promote the skills necessary for the effective development of collaborative partnerships and alliances throughout college towns. (<http://www.ITGAU.org>)

Many individual communities and universities have formal programs to aid in communication and promote a working relationship. The Murray, Kentucky and Murray State University Town & Gown Partnership activities provide opportunities for dialogue on a variety of quality of life issues between leaders. (<http://www.MurrayState.edu>) Meanwhile, San Diego State University hosts a monthly Town and Gown Luncheon to integrate and engage San Diegans (<http://www.UCSD.edu>) and Western Illinois University even awards the Town & Gown Award annually. It is presented to an individual who has provided exceptional service to WIU and the community of Macomb, Illinois. (<http://www.WIU.edu>)

There are many additional town and gown partnerships between universities and city governments: Hampton, VA and Hampton University (<http://www.HamptonVA.gov>), Whittier, CA and Whittier College (<http://www.WhittierDailyNews.com>), St. Petersburg, FL and the University of South Florida St. Petersburg (<http://www.USFSP.edu>), Milton, MS and Milton Academy (<http://www.milton.edu>), Richmond, VA and University of Richmond (<http://thecollegianur.com>), Auburn, AL and Auburn University (<http://www.Auburn.edu>), Pittsburg, PA and the University of Pittsburg (<http://www.Pitt.edu>).

Roger L. Kemp, a city manager in numerous communities for more than 25 years, has collected *more than 40 best practice case studies from nearly half the states in American, and discusses current and evolving trends in the relations between educational institutions and cities, towns and other municipalities. Case studies examine current and evolving state-of-the-art practices.*

(<http://www.Amazon.com>) Reviews of his book, however, do not appear that it was written from the perspective of destination marketing.

(<http://www.McFarlandPub.com>)

What follows are perspectives of maintaining or in some cases, developing, a working town and gown relationship between a DMO and the university. Five unique collaborations between DMOs and their local universities are driving and/or increasing visitation both to the campus and community.

Common Findings

Thirty colleagues representing college towns hosting NAIA, NCAA Div. II and NCAA Div. I universities responded to questions inquiring about the following: the quality of the DMO/university relationship, how that relationship is maintained, and unique partnerships the DMO and university have undertaken to market the destination.

Not surprisingly, the relationships ranged from very connected or great to good. Even Austin, Texas' once "non-existent" relationship with the University of Texas has immensely improved since just five years ago. (M. Payne, personal communication, May 28, 2013) Nearly all of the respondents cited university representatives on the Board of Directors as crucial to maintaining, or developing, such relationships. And they are not just on the board, but taking leadership positions. In fact, the person in charge of all public facilities at Missouri State University is the chair of the Springfield (MO) CVB Board of Directors. (T.

Kimberlin, personal communication, May 20, 2013) When I was hired by the Norman CVB, a staff member of the athletic department was the Chair.

In addition, knowing and working with other distinguished representatives of the universities is imperative. Karen Hibbard in Manhattan, KS, for example, mentioned the following primary contacts: the President, Chief of Staff, Athletic Director, Director of Athletic Facilities, Director of Sports Marketing, as well as various coaches. (Personal communication, May 21, 2013)

Keeping up with changes in personnel at the universities additionally proves challenging. Cathy Williams-White in Edmond, OK, emphasized that she maintains strong relations with both presidents' offices (at UCO and OCU) and *that usually helps to keep us in the loop*. (Personal communication, May 21, 2013) Keeping up with administrative changes requires frequent interactions with various university officials. Fayetteville's CVB interacts with UA staff on a weekly, if not daily, occurrence. (M. Clement, personal communication, May 22, 2013)

DMOs are employing students as interns or are able to recruit volunteers for community and/or sport events as relationships are built and maintained. DMOs have even had university classes do research. Most cited research includes attendee surveys and data collection. Patrick Tuttle in Joplin, MO has had students catalog locations for the Missouri Film Office. (Personal communication, May 29, 2013) And, for those destinations whose universities have a Hospitality and/or Restaurant Administration program, the DMO staff works closely with the staff and students from the program. Many tourism professionals regularly speak in classes to provide the local or destination marketing perspective.

A lot of DMOs rent facilities from universities and colleges (primarily for sporting events). In addition, DMOs utilize university staff as sources of speakers / presenters for many groups and conventions held in their destination. DMOs often

partner with the university in providing transportation and welcome baskets for distinguished university guests as well.

Five Collaborations for Destination Marketing

Above and beyond those common practices of DMOs, some offices are collaborating on programs to educate the new visitors to their communities – university students and parents. Meanwhile, universities and DMOs continue to partner on promotions directed towards more traditional visitors and the meetings market. Events are also being developed to drive tourism and in some cases, “brick and mortar” destination development is occurring in partnership between universities and DMOs.

Visitor Education

When students first arrive at a college or university, they tend to know very little about the community they are “visiting” for the next four or five years. Programs like Hornet Connections in Emporia, KS, (S. Rathke, personal communication, May 29, 2013) Red Raider Orientation in Lubbock, TX, (A. Zeintek, personal communication, May 31, 2013) and Preview in Gainesville, FL, (J. Pricher, personal communication, May 28, 2013) seek to speak to students and parents about what there is to see and do in their new community and how to get more information. Visit Lubbock provides buses and step-on guides to take the parents on tours of the city. Since its implementation five years ago, this program has had record attendance each year. Moreover, staff also puts up signs in the dorms during move-in to promote VistiLubbock.com (A. Zeintek, personal communication, May 31, 2013). Meanwhile, Gainesville’s Preview program strives to gather all of the new students’ and parents’ names they can. Those names then go into an e-news database to keep students informed (J. Pricher, personal communication, May 28, 2013).

After focus groups on campus revealed Fort Hays State University students knew little about the community or even where downtown Hays is (three blocks from campus), the Hays CVB created "Core to Campus Kickoff." The event offers free hot dogs and t-shirts, bands and more in downtown Hays. (J. Jordon, personal communication, May 29, 2013)

In a similar effort to increase student visitor education, the Madison CVB staff provides destination training to university of Wisconsin's visitor information staff (D. Morganthaler, personal communication, May 28, 2013) and the Fayetteville CVB is even working with the University of Arkansas on a 'bucket list' for students and visitors titled '100 Things to Do in Fayetteville Before You Graduate' (M. Clement, 2013).

Julie Pingston in Lansing, MI explained that their most connected relationship with the university at this time is with the Office for International Students and Scholars. *The international student population on campus has grown from 6% of the student enrollment in 2000 to over 13% last year, many arriving from Asia. We have worked with them closely on student arrivals, transportation, community welcoming, etc. In the past, we treated international students the same as we treated the US based students. Now, due to the enormous growth, we are working with the international office much more closely as they are bringing family members for extended stays and have a large local spending power.* (Personal communication, May 24, 2013)

The Fort Worth CVB has similarly sought to expand its visitor education apertures as well. For example, TCU's transition to a new athletic conference has encouraged the Fort Worth CVB to create a dedicated landing page on FortWorth.com to promote greater awareness to fans attending sports events in the city. (J. Cychol, personal communication, May 22, 2013)

Promotions Collaboration

While universities market to potential students, DMOs market to potential visitors. One might assume that there would be no need for these two entities to collaborate on promotional programs. However, I found that there are unique promotional collaborations already occurring between DMOs and universities across the nation.

For example, the Conway Chamber produced TV ads on the campus of the University of Central Arkansas that were centered on football. The idea of the ads was, simply stated, "come to Conway for football, stay for food/entertainment." (R. Earls, personal communication, May 28, 2013) Similarly, the Lansing CVB collaborated with Michigan State University on an initiative in which MSU wrapped an Amtrak train in Spartan green graphics and the CVB advertised a "back-to-campus" event to the alumni base in Chicago. And it does not stop there. The CVB staff recognized that the MSU Dairy Store makes ice cream and has been able to work with the Store to create a specialized ice cream flavor for various local and city-wide events. For example, when a student competition was hosted in Lansing, CVB staff worked with the Dairy Store to create an ice cream with pop rocks named after that specific event. (J. Pingston, personal communication, May 24, 2013)

Starting in August 2013, the Official Visitors Guide for Norman (OK) will actually have two covers and serve two purposes. One cover will promote Norman as a whole, while the other cover on the flip side of the guide will be the cover for the University of Oklahoma Campus Visitors Guide. This section will include eighteen pages of content promoting the campus, while the remaining forty-six pages will serve as the community visitors guide.

Group Sales Collaboration

It is not just the leisure market that DMOs are targeting through university collaboration. Some tourism staffs even work through the various deans and department heads which allows them to additionally solicit meeting and convention business. Kelley Barbrey in Columbia, SC explains, *"our University of South Carolina liaisons, as well as our liaisons at other colleges and universities, have been very willing to work with our staff to bring regional and national conferences to the area. We have fostered pride in the city they currently call home and want to encourage them to show it off to their peers in their specific field of study."*

Columbia's initiatives for groups marketing include:

- Developing a strong database of faculty, staff and administration at USC and other colleges on a variety of levels. The sales staff works closely with deans, department heads, other faculty and various contacts within the University system to educate them on the benefits of hosting a meeting or convention in Columbia, SC.
- Periodically dropping information and promotional items by our contacts' offices.
- Hosting contacts for lunch or dinner meetings to discuss specific pieces of business.
- Hosting or attending group meetings/meals with "clusters" of individuals that focus on a similar topic of study.
- Facilitating a lunch meeting with administrative liaisons from six different colleges and universities about two times per year.

(K. Barbrey, personal communication, May 20, 2013)

The Fort Worth CVB, too, is attempting to deepen their relationships with TCU department heads and faculty members and encouraging them to help to solicit organization meetings of educational associations and professional societies

to which they may belong. John Cychol, FCDME, CTA, and Vice President of Meeting Sales, admits it has not been as effective as he would like. (Personal communication, May 22, 2013)

The Fayetteville CVB University Marketing Manager oversees assisting the UA with bringing in various non-sporting events such as a large academic robotics competition and an archaeology conference. (M. Clements, personal communication, May 22, 2013) Meanwhile, the Madison CVB staff travels with the UW Alumni Association two to three times per year to alumni events in key markets. Staff uses these meetings to drum up alumni who may be able to help bring conventions to Madison. However, Deb Archer, CDME, President, shared that they have decided the investment was not paying off. (Personal communication, June 4, 2013)

Event Development

If one cannot attract a conference or meeting to the community, then create a traffic generator. Numerous DMOs are beginning to do this with the help of the university. For example, the Stillwater CVB worked with Oklahoma State University and community partners to create the Legends Weekend. The event centered around the Orange and White Spring Football Game and offered more than a dozen events including the Stillwater Arts Festival, a road race, OSU softball and baseball, a library book sale, musical and stage performances, the Botanic Garden at OSU Open House, the Day of the Young Child Around the World, and much more! Initiated and coordinated by the CVB, the collaboration was named Best New Event and Best Collaboration at the RedBud Awards – the state-wide tourism awards. (C. Morrison, personal communication, May 28, 2013)

Freshman Family Weekend in Bloomington, IN is different from traditional Parents Weekends in that it happens earlier in the fall and is just for freshmen.

Visit Bloomington promotes the weekend at summer orientation and in the fall, as well. They host a tailgate party for freshmen students and their families at a non-Big 10 football game which usually books around 2,000 room nights and helps the football program sell an additional 1,000-plus tickets to a game. (M. McAfee, personal communication, May 30, 2013)

Joshua Schamberger in Iowa City shared that there are a number of collaborations the CVB has led with the University of Iowa that “has made the university look very good on the town and gown front.” Some of the bigger events include Herky on Parade – a massive public art project that involved the UI mascot, securing the UNESCO City of Literature designation; FRY Fest – a Celebration of All-that-is-Hawkeye – a “ridiculous massive marketing strategy/festival that turned an opening non-conference game weekend into a citywide hotel two to three night sellout”; and granGABLE – a big organized bike ride centered around the Hawks and wrestling legend Dan Gable. (Personal communication, June 4, 2013)

Destination Development

Infrastructure projects that are deemed beneficial to enhancing the community as a destination and the university are additionally being pursued. Fayetteville awarded a \$500,000 grant to UA to assist in the construction of a new performing arts venue on campus. When completed, the center will hold an estimated 200+ events per year [also bringing in sizeable tax revenue] (M. Clement, personal communication, May 22, 2013). The National Teachers Hall of Fame in Emporia, Kansas, was yet another partnership between the University, the ESU Alumni Association, the City of Emporia, the School District, and the Chamber of Commerce/CVB. (J. McKenna, personal communication, May, 29, 2013) The Bryan/College Station CVB helped pass an increase in hotel occupancy tax to help fund the renovations of their football stadium – Kyle Field. (S. Overby, personal communication, June 5, 2013)

Baylor has made investments in downtown Waco that has revitalized that part of town. They purchased two office towers and put the BU logo on the top and also worked with the City on several housing projects on and near the campus that are not just open to Baylor students. According to Liz Taylor, Director of the Waco CVB, the most monumental feat involved the purchase an abandoned tire complex and its transformation into the Baylor Research & Innovation Consortium which has brought innovative technological opportunities to the community and served as a catalyst and connection to Texas State Technical College. "It really shows they have spread out from their area which used to be known as the 'Baylor bubble'," explains Taylor. (Personal communication, May 29, 2013)

In Iowa City, UI has partnered to develop the Self Supported Municipal Improvement District (a Business Improvement District). The SSMID is an effort to bring more attention to the downtown arts/culture/retail/dining options instead of the "dollar-you-call-it" bar specials. The university gives approximately \$100,000 a year for the District. (J. Schamberger, personal communication, June 4, 2013)

It is not just brick-and-mortar attraction development either. A downtown historical walking tour was developed in Fayetteville that features QR codes and brings vintage photos and stories of thirty-one various sites and buildings in downtown Fayetteville to visitors' mobile devices. The tour was completed in partnership with the UA, who supplied nearly all of the photos free of charge from their Special Collections division. (M. Clement, 2013)

Conclusion

Conventional wisdom suggests that town and gown relationships are most often strained. However the ITGA continues to strive to build relationships and educate, while DMOs are collaborating with universities to drive travel, tourism and economic development to their communities. This paper has outlined a number of action items for such collaboration. As with most business ventures, they start with relationships – the most critical of which are:

- President's office. Discuss your interests and goals. How could he/she "open doors for you"? Be mindful that the President could have another goal in mind, however, if you work on his/her goal first, he/she may have more willingness to promote and assist with the DMO's project(s).
- Recruitment office. Can the community's information provided by the DMO be included in the recruitment packages? As students begin their schooling and parents are introduced to the school, how can the DMO be a part of the orientation process?
- Athletics department. Can the DMO recruit events that could utilize the university fields and/or facilities? Can the DMO assist in recruiting regional or national championships or simply help service championships that are already coming to the community? You can also discuss clustering community events with athletic events on campus.
- Deans and Department Heads. Would they be open to communications to university staff soliciting meetings and conventions? Being experts in their fields Deans, department heads, and professors are probably speaking at conferences that could be attracted to the community.

As you approach these introductory meetings, keep in mind a few pieces of advice:

1. Jayne Deluce in Champaign, IL stresses that the key to best practices with a university is not to walk in with your hand out ready,

thinking they “owe you”, instead, work with the numerous departments to better educate them on the importance of driving economic development through tourism. It is also important to understand the university’s priorities in order to see how the CVB can help them reach their goals. (Personal communication, May 29, 2013)

2. “The university is so much its own entity that sometimes they do not see the need to be with the community, however, when they need the community to help with the accomplishment of their goals, that story changes.” (L. Taylor, 2013)

3. Joshua Schamburger, of Iowa City, states that it is also essential that the DMO be viewed as improving quality-of-life not just increasing tourist heads-in-beds. In other words, the CVB should be focused on residents and tourism/quality of life infrastructures instead of just landing some state association conference. Schamburger explains, “we have worked very hard over the past twelve to thirteen years to have the CVB be seen as synonymous with quality of life. The UI, Chamber, and ICAD (our community ED arm) all know very well how critical local quality of life is to growth. We have made a point to take the lead on building community through quality of life, i.e., festivals, special events, trails, public transit. If it in anyway involves the quality of life infrastructure, we are likely running point.” (2013)

It truly is “all about relationships.” Karen Hibbard in Manhattan, KS concludes “KSU needs to have a great community with plenty of amenities that make fans/alumni want to come back. By working together-making the town/gown relationship a solid one – you will be successful.” (2013)

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