

**FINAL REPORT**  
**STUDENT SUMMIT: PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE CELEBRATIONS**  
**HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE**  
**SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2003**

**Introduction and Background**

The University of New Hampshire hosted a first-in-the-nation student summit on responsible celebrations—*Student Summit: Promoting Responsible Celebrations*—September 19, 20, and 21, 2003. Nine colleges and universities from around the country gathered on the Durham campus for two and a half days of intense and honest dialogue among students, college and university administrators, community leaders, and law enforcement.

The summit was organized by UNH students after an April 12, 2003 disturbance in Durham, NH. It followed on the heels of research on celebratory student behavior by the NCAA and OSU. The summit was designed to be part of a greater process, one of many multifaceted efforts needed to quell student disturbances.

Universities attending the UNH-hosted national summit were the University of Massachusetts (UMASS), University of Connecticut (UCONN), University of Rhode Island (URI), Michigan State University (MSU), Ohio State University (OSU), University of Minnesota (U of M), University of Vermont (UVM), and Plymouth State University (PSU). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) also sent a representative.

The results of *Student Summit: Promoting Responsible Celebrations* established a series of short- and long-term goals and next steps that can be taken to quell student disturbances on college campuses and provide more constructive avenues for celebrations and other large student gatherings.

Outcomes from the summit have allowed students and others in each campus community to continue to discuss and effect change on their respective campuses. The summit was an essential jumping-off point for students and other participants.

Particularly, from the students' perspective, the summit was an affirmation that the problem is not unique to any one campus; it is an issue campuses are dealing with across the country.

According to UNH student participants, by learning from what other schools do and don't do, UNH will be able to make an amalgam of successful practices and methods that will lead to an eventual solution. Students believe that the solution is safe behavior, not necessarily the end of celebratory behavior.

As a result of the summit, UNH students said that they were better equipped to work with a variety of campus groups to plan for other "events" during the fall, including the American League play-off games and Halloween.

### **Understanding Causes and Conditions of Campus Disturbances**

The keynote address on the opening night of the summit was given by Dr. Daniel Wann, professor of psychology at Murray State University.

Dr. Wann has studied the psychology of sport fans and spectators since the mid-1980s, with a particular interest in fan identification, spectator violence, and the actions

of parents as spectators at youth sporting events. He has published numerous articles and presented at more than 40 conferences on the topic of sport fans and parental involvement in sports. He is the author of *Sport Psychology* (Prentice Hall, 1997) and *Sport Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators* (Routledge, 2001).

Dr. Wann noted that many disturbances on college campuses are associated with the phenomenon of team identification. More aggressive forms of college sports are correlated with more violent responses to the outcomes of athletic contests. When students, alumni, and others are so invested in the outcome of a contest that their self-esteem is affected, it is more likely there will be aggressive or violent responses. Dr. Wann noted that loyalty to athletic teams can be healthy when the focus is on the team and its members, not when the focus is only on winning and losing.

The role of alcohol consumption is also central to an understanding of aggressive acts. On most weekends and on most college campuses, drinking begins as early as Thursday night and typically starts in the morning on the day of an athletic event. Alcohol impairs judgment, fuels asocial and violent behavior, and reduces inhibitions in the presence of police or other authorities.

While Dr. Wann noted men are more likely to perpetuate aggressive behavior in riots, women also participate in asocial behavior, especially when under the influence of alcohol.

The majority of problems that occur in celebrations are associated with a small minority of students and other visitors to the campus. Universities attract non-students (such as high school students and other young adults) to athletic and social events,

especially in rural areas where these individuals may be looking for excitement. These individuals can contribute significantly to the number of people involved in riots.

According to Dr. Wann, if sanctions or consequences are not present or not enforced, unlawful or threatening behavior will continue.

Perhaps most importantly, Dr. Wann stressed it will take several years to show the results of concentrated efforts to reduce a culture of drinking, partying, and rioting. And, he noted, the fact that we live in a more violent society today does not help to alleviate the problem easily or quickly.

### **Defining Cultures: Perspectives of Stakeholders Affected by Campus Disturbances**

With two facilitators, UNH Professor of Communication Sheila McNamee and UNH Assistant Provost Jim Varn, key stakeholders met in role-alike “fish bowls” and talked candidly about their experiences with student disturbances. Stakeholder groups included student leaders, members of Greek organizations, student athletes, other students, law enforcement officials, university administrators and town officials, and student affairs staff. The common themes that emerged were not surprising: among them significant alcohol consumption, a strong police presence, and the phenomenon of using cell phones to call in more revelers. But other, less obvious, themes emerged as well: police and administration officials who felt just as afraid as students felt, or the way in which the anonymity of a large crowd gives students the courage to throw a beer bottle or a rock.

The sections that follow highlight some of the thoughts and feelings shared by each stakeholder group. These comments are not attributed to any one individual in order to protect confidentiality.

### **Student Leaders**

From the perspective of student leaders, it appears that many groups point fingers at each other following a disturbance. Of all students, this group was probably most aware of the impact a disturbance had on town/gown and legislative relations. At the same time, student leaders felt blamed by their respective administrations for the actions of what typically was a very small minority of other students.

Student leaders expressed that they were frustrated with the generalized treatment of all students that resulted after a disturbance, including banning students from certain neighborhoods and the blaming of all students for the actions of a few. In addition, student leaders felt as though they needed to explain the behavior of fellow students, while those students responsible for violent or unlawful behavior blamed their response on other factors, such as police brutality.

Student leaders stated they wanted to do the right thing, but peer pressure made it difficult. They said they are often criticized by other students, including campus media outlets, for trying to articulate guidelines and expectations.

These participants also expressed concern that even if more responsible celebrations are planned, such as events without alcohol, students won't show up. In addition, student leaders questioned if more risk management programming around the issue of alcohol would actually reduce high-risk drinking.

Student leaders condemned students who participated—they have violated the law and should be prosecuted—but believed that the administration should not impose tougher restrictions because it will cause a backlash from students. There must be shared solutions to change the culture, not just efforts aimed at banning the behavior.

### **Student Athletes**

While student athletes recognized they were high-profile representatives of the university, they said it was difficult to be spokespeople for an institution that is known for its campus disturbances. They were disappointed that the front-page coverage after a win or a loss was about the reaction to the game, rather than about the players and the game itself.

Student athletes were held to a higher standard than other students, and they believed everyone ought to have the same accountability. If everyone were held to their standards, they maintained, there wouldn't be so many problems. Responsibility and accountability were key. Parents should be notified when their sons and daughters are arrested or violated a university's alcohol policies, but accountability has to be increased, and new, safer traditions must be developed.

### **Students Who are Members of Fraternities and Sororities**

Members of Greek organizations believed they were always identified as the primary culprits of bad behavior. They believed because they were one of the most widely recognized student groups on campus, they were more often in the spotlight, and

they said this is unfair. They were responsible for their own policing, and they believed they were models in enforcement.

Members of Greek organizations said they were monitoring members more closely than ever before and had better relations with law enforcement. Their message to peers was that the best way to be part of the solution was to not be part of the problem: stay away from a disturbance and don't provide an environment in which people can congregate.

### **Other Students**

Students who may or may not have been part of campus disturbances are troubled that when a "normal student" was in the wrong place at the wrong time, they were condemned as rioters. They were concerned about where to draw the line between healthy school spirit and out-of-control behavior. They knew alcohol played a significant role, but they said alcohol was a part of the college culture.

While many students were part of non-alcoholic programming, they believed it often doesn't matter. Everyone drank, and when students drank too much, there would be trouble. These students were tired of being part of the "few good kids" who were attempting to affect the shift that was necessary to confront this challenge. They want more of their peers to be involved. Their hope was to get a majority of student organizations together to address the problem and bring more students into the discussion.

They worried about how the media portrays students, with little or no attempt to distinguish between good students and those who engaged in unlawful and dangerous

behavior. They were also concerned about the public perception, and how the focus on the behavior would affect their college degree.

### **Student Affairs Representatives**

University staff most closely involved in the social development of students said there must be a strong and recognized relationship between academic affairs and student affairs.

Staff who worked in student affairs believed they had a greater emotional investment in students' lives, and while some students may feel they were intrusive; these staff members also experienced connections with students, which created a heightened sense of student accountability to the community. They believed dramatic changes in programming and reaching out to students was needed, because many past efforts had not succeeded. Alternative weekend programming needs to continue to be supported, and there must be an emphasis on outreach and experiences that connect students to the overall community and their understanding of why they are in higher education. Student affairs representatives further noted the need to distinguish between reacting to events and careful planning for the future. Only the latter approach was deemed to be productive and lead to a sense of shared investment.

### **Law Enforcement**

Law enforcement officers agreed that there were no innocent bystanders in a riot situation. Onlookers contributed to the atmosphere that actually creates anonymity, and therefore perceived protection, for those who engaged in unlawful and violent behavior.

While police understood that the university administration wanted individuals identified, law enforcement officials were focused on crowd control, and not on specific individuals.

Police frequently felt outnumbered and because of the level of noise, found it difficult to call for assistance successfully. No amount of training prepared law enforcement for large civil disorders. There was always the worry that someone would get hurt.

The aggression toward police and fire personnel was shocking. There was even some worry that students would seize guns from police in the middle of a riot.

Police said tactics they must employ—from the use of handcuffs to pepper spray—should not be construed as police brutality. These were the least harmful tools police could use to control individuals in a crowd. “We are most successful when everyone is part of the solution,” they said.

### **University Administrators**

University and college administrators admitted feeling very much like the student leaders: frustrated and afraid and overwhelmed by the size of the problem. They had witnessed these events and understood the role that alcohol played.

There was agreement when one administrator said, “Ten percent of the population is responsible for 90 percent of the problem,” but situations grew quickly out of control because of cell phones and the growing crowd of onlookers. They understood that the situation can get out-of-hand rapidly, and they worried about someone getting seriously hurt.

Administrators believed that students must help define the kind of society they want and aspire to something better.

### **Ideas to Confront and Begin to Prevent the Problem of Campus Disturbances**

Any response must be tailored to the specific location and circumstance of an event; one approach will not solve all problems. Access to alcohol and the amount of alcohol consumed must be controlled, and there must be ways to restrict the presence of spectators. Campus communities can develop communication strategies with the media, law enforcement, and municipal officials to be sure that the nature and size of events are understood and reported objectively.

While there are no quick fixes and solutions will take time to test and fully implement, each campus must reflect the histories and circumstances of their unique campuses. Team identification must be redefined to emphasize the healthy social and athletic aspects of an event, rather than the strong reaction to wins and losses.

Community values must be emphasized that both reward positive social behaviors and reduce acts and symbols associated with aggression. There are multiple forms of alternative programming that attract students away from alcohol and mass events, but programming alone will not be sufficient. All constituencies—including students, academic and student affairs staff, faculty, municipal officials, alumni, law enforcement, landlords, neighborhood associations, and bar owners—must be involved in designing and implementing changes.

In addition, environmental factors cannot be ignored. The degree of disrepair in student apartments and houses, as well as in parts of the campus town, can impact rioting

behavior. The way garbage and recycling are handled at large events (multiple containers and a “clean-as-you-go” approach versus clean it all up at the end, for example) can speak volumes as to what is acceptable in the community.

Clear and concrete processes of accountability for behavior are needed, and these must be applied consistently across groups and over time. Articulating the norms for celebrations, as well as general norms for behavior and alcohol consumption, cannot begin and end at first-year orientation. These norms must be reinforced frequently throughout a student’s undergraduate experience.

### **Outcomes**

Short- and long-term plans include improved communications about expectations for student behavior among campus and community groups and the involvement of diverse groups of people to help bring about the shift in student culture that is needed. Many summit participants concluded they want to organize town/gown groups to continue to discuss community issues.

Other ideas ranged from planning campus celebrations earlier to continuing to work with local businesses to help curb excessive drinking. Participants also expressed a need to better educate the public and strengthen campus codes of student conduct, create interactive Web sites, and develop new programs that will decrease hostilities toward police.

While summit participants were in agreement that students need to be the ones to deliver the message for responsible celebrations to their peers in order to have an impact, they also stressed that faculty need to be an integral part of the discussion.

## **Ideas for the Future**

Near the conclusion of the summit, teams from each university brainstormed ideas on ways to shift student culture. Below is a list of ideas that students believe can make a difference on their individual campuses.

It is important to note that this list reflects a compilation of ideas from all of the schools so that there should be no assumption that any one school will necessarily implement all of these ideas. Additionally, owing to the complexity of this issue, the unique circumstances of each campus, the need to gain buy-in for the various initiatives, and the importance of assessment and refinement for each strategy, it is essential to remember that this effort is not a “quick fix” but one that will take time to solve.

- Creating community networks between neighbors, faculty, and students
- Conducting a student survey that asks why students riot, and what alternatives are possible
- Providing ongoing messages from students to the university community on the consequences of attending and participating in a riot
- Inviting more student participation in planning campus celebratory events
- Starting to plan earlier
- Continuing to review the culture of alcohol
- Working with both on-campus and off-campus groups to eliminate activities that encourage drinking earlier in the day.
- Continuing to have police play a positive role during spring weekend; with a helpful demeanor rather than an “enforcement” approach

- Making security less formal; policing ourselves more (students and administration officials)
- Examining ways to include responsible alcohol use, with clear policies on what is legal and acceptable
- Encouraging pilot programs
- Creating a “stories” program to hear from students about how they are affected by riots
- Looking at what works on campus, and identifying ways to transfer this to off-campus venues
- Clarifying the code of student conduct and educating off-campus students about its application to them via a poster campaign and newspaper ads
- Organizing a teach-in on campus at the beginning of the spring semester to prevent recurrences of the fall semester disturbances
- Working with town groups who can work with restaurant and bar owners to get them to be more responsible
- Creating weekend programming to keep students on campus, and providing special funds for which student organizations can apply
- Creating an official spring fling committee to maintain traditions over time
- Creating better police relations
- Organizing a first-week celebration with no alcohol for minors
- Breaking the tradition that there is an entitlement to riot
- Creating an office for off-campus students
- Strengthening campus policies on riot behavior

- Developing a “Respecting your Community” poster campaign, with messages on social norms, and positive behavior models
- Building and strengthening community relations coalition

### **UNH Post-Summit**

A group of students—many of whom participated in the summit and more who want change—worked with student affairs staff during the fall semester to talk to students living in residence halls and in off-campus apartments about the consequences of large gatherings run amok.

Another group of students has worked on student programming for the weekends. One residence hall hosted a Halloween party for children in the town of Durham, for example

Although independent of the summit, the 2003-04 UNH academic year also coincides with the regular triennial review of the UNH student code of conduct system. This review process is expected to incorporate what we have learned from both the disturbances and the subsequent processes. Following an April 2003 disturbance, there were immediate changes in the enforcement of the UNH code of conduct; charges which were previously only enforceable on-campus—such as “failure to disperse”—were now also enforceable off-campus.

The summit planning group met in the late fall to discuss next steps. The following key points arose from that discussion:

- A sustained and systematic effort needs to be organized
- To ensure a sustained effort and accountability, we need to create an

administrative home for this initiative; and

- The administrative home needs to be one that keeps students at the center of the initiative while supporting the engagement of many stakeholders.

To realize these goals, President Hart asked the planning group to define the structure and focus for the next phase of this initiative.

The composition of a Steering Committee for Civic Community will take permanent responsibility for developing and monitoring the UNH plan to establish strong and widely understood expectations and norms for civic responsibility and induct new students into these expectations and behaviors.

There will be an outline identifying which UNH offices and groups, as well as which representatives of the broader Durham community, should have an ongoing role working with the Steering Committee to monitor and measure success. The preliminary goal is that the Steering Committee will be housed within the Division of Student and Academic Services (SAS). This is based upon the premise that SAS is charged with both the development of student leadership and community-building initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

The summit was the beginning of a national conversation among students, faculty, administration, law enforcement, and town officials to gain a better understanding of each others' points of view in volatile situations such as the April 12, 2003 disturbance at UNH. It allowed participants to understand the consequences of their actions, the cause and effect.

The primary goal of the summit was met: Each campus group left with ideas to build upon to start the blueprint of a plan for their respective schools.

The issue of student behavior is a challenge that college campuses continue to confront. UNH and the eight other school represented at the September summit will continue to address these challenges in the months ahead. UNH is committed to working on this complex issue so the day will come when the culture has shifted and students are celebrating in a responsible manner while also having fun.

To this end, we will continue to share solutions, problem-solve through the summit list serve, which was created post-summit, and reconvene representatives at some future point to analyze our progress.

### **Other Summit School Updates**

Attending summit schools will add their links to the UNH-hosted student summit Web site for more detailed information on their respective initiatives. These will be posted as we receive them.

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