Successful police chiefs quickly understand the nuances of their community and how that equates to delivering police services—or they may find themselves the ex-chief! Every community is unique, and how that uniqueness is converted to policing services by police department management often determines the success of the agency. Combine these existing challenges with two police agencies operating within one community and the environment becomes even more complicated. This is the routine status for a university or college police agency and their host community department!

Durham, New Hampshire, is the location of the state’s largest public institution, the University of New Hampshire (UNH). The policing environment in Durham is very much driven by the academic schedule and a significant population of young persons who are testing their limits while being away from home for the first time!

The combination of a smaller rural community and the demographics of a university student population present unique policing demands for both the University of New Hampshire Police Department (UNHPD) as well as the Durham Police Department (DPD). For the community department, it requires balancing the expectations of permanent residents with the annual, temporary influx of young people from September through May. With 3,200 incoming freshman realizing independence from their parents and/or guardians for the first time, they socialize with classmates and challenge the boundaries of legal issues, particularly underage drinking. This experimentation with alcohol dominates the social scene in Durham, creating significant challenges for the public safety entities that both have significant on-campus and off-campus student housing complexes.

Against this backdrop, the relationship between the two agencies has not always been seamless. While both police agencies are very similar in composition with approximately 20 sworn police officers, all of whom must be certified by the New Hampshire Police Standards and Training Council, the atmosphere was occasionally toxic and counterproductive to mutual success. Complicating these conditions were political discussions, exclusively from the town, that there should be discussion regarding consolidating the two agencies with town oversight. Trying to stay out of the political crosshairs often dominated both chiefs’ time and detracted from the true mission of providing professional police services to our mutual constituents.

Everyone recognized that things needed to change, and through numerous coffees, lunches, and other conversations, by 2016 these apprehensions are a distant memory as the two chiefs work diligently to have a candid and routine dialogue, formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), and recognition that if one agency succeeds, both do!

From this foundation of mutual respect and trust arose a number of realities that while the missions of the two agencies may deviate in subtleties such as Clery, Title IX,
and FERPA, which are all foreign to Durham’s chief, these were critically important policies to the university police chief. Additional discoveries of mutual challenges created increased opportunities to cooperate where appropriate, such as:

- The development and implementation of a comprehensive MOU that provided authority for both police agencies operating within the community. This was one of the most significant steps that served to eliminate potential conflicts before they arose and established expectations for all police operations.

- Joint bicycle patrols in the downtown Durham business area, the site of many off-campus student rentals. Coupled with several alcohol establishments and those selling food late into the night, the community was expressing its unhappiness with disruptive students. The visibility of agency personnel patrolling together is a subtle but important attribute to the students, community, and staff from both agencies.

- Letters to the parents of all persons arrested by either department, who are under the age of 21, are sent within days of the arrest. The DPD started this initiative with the realization that smaller agencies routinely create relationships with the parents when they live within the community. With an intelligent, diverse, and mobile student population, and a strong desire to eliminate recidivism, notifying parents of an arrest allows them to be engaged early on and has reaped positive benefits. The UNHPD joined the initiative, creating the consistency desired from two police departments functioning in the same community.

- DPD provides weekly arrest logs to the UNH administration. They, in turn, require that the dean of each college in which the arrested student is enrolled have a face-to-face meeting about the arrest.

- “Weekend Walkers” is a program created by the university whereby UNH administration members, wearing highly visible jackets, traverse the downtown area, interacting with students, ensuring they are safe, and offering guidance when their behavior is questionable.

- Both agencies are CALEA accredited, with the UNHPD also having received accredited status with IACLEA. The accreditation process has enriched the services of both agencies and provided a number of policy enhancements pertaining to unusual occurrences, such as celebratory riots, contacting foreign consular representatives regarding students attending UNH on visas, as well as preparing for presidential visits. The process has ensured that both agencies are operating from the same procedures and respond similarly.

- UNH and Durham police routinely co-host trainings, not only for their staff but they also invite area agencies to the training. With modern classroom space, the UNH police take advantage of academic year breaks and schedule training in the empty classrooms. These opportunities serve to enhance both agencies’ capacity to deliver services to their mutual community.

- UNH and Durham police routinely collaborate on major special event management. UNH has the largest outdoor football stadium and the second largest indoor arena in the state. As a first-in-the-nation presidential primary state, the community is ground zero for high profile political visits from sitting presidents to nationally televised candidate debates. Additionally, with the success of New England professional sports, celebratory activities have become the norm. When 2004 arrived, professional sports were on the mind of many living in the region. In February 2017, the New England Patriots won the Super Bowl and after a tremendously exciting American League Championship and World Series, the ultimate Red Sox victory that was 80 years in the making sent the community into an extremely tense and anxious period hopeful that the tide of disruptive behavior had turned. Student leaders in bright yellow shirts walked the downtown with university officials. Police, highly visible but without riot gear, were instructed to interact in a positive, friendly, and tempered manner. When the New England teams won, there was euphoria and excitement but no takeover of streets and no destruction of property.

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police chief was challenged by his Town Council regarding the expense of his strategy whereby every student was physically arrested, he turned to UNH sociologist Dr. Donna Perkins for assistance. The chief’s premise was that if a physical arrest were made in front of a group of students, their observing the arrest would deter them from engaging in the behavior. Ultimately the research project proved the hypothesis correct and the study was published in IACP’s Police Chief magazine.

http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=3978&issue_id=122015

Another opportunity emerged when the Durham Town Council asked their police chief the reason for trading in police vehicles and when the optimum time for doing so occurred. Again, while a university environment can, on occasion, challenge both agencies, opportunities exist where there are students seeking real-life experiences and police departments that require research but lack financial resources. Seizing this opportunity, a Quantitative Decision Making class was engaged to conduct a project on that question. In the aftermath, the Town Council received solid guidance on vehicle purchases and when to sell, at no cost to the town.

Additionally, the police department was able to interact with students in a positive atmosphere.

On a daily basis the UNH and Durham Police Departments coordinate efforts or intersect on a host of topics. Both CEOs have embraced the concept of collaboration, recognizing that each organization succeeds together. However, the key to our success remains good communication, solid respect, and trust as well as a community that is supportive of our law enforcement professionals.

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