

**IMPROVING THE**

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# **QUALITY OF LIFE IN BURLINGTON**

CASE HISTORY AT A GLANCE:

**University of Vermont  
and the City of Burlington**

# University of Vermont and the City of Burlington

Within a one-mile radius of the University of Vermont in Burlington there are 22 bars and restaurants and 55 stores selling alcohol. It has been estimated that there is one bar stool or seat for every three residents of Burlington. The state of Vermont has an above-average binge drinking rate and ranks seventh in the nation per capita in drunk-driving deaths. The Northeast in general has high rates of alcohol use, and the majority of UVM students grow up in the Northeast. At UVM, as in society, high-risk drinking is a complex problem defying simple solutions.

The University of Vermont and the city of Burlington were selected as a site in the A Matter of Degree (AMOD) Initiative in 1996. The application centered on alcohol-incident response and prevention, development of a sense of belonging to a community, improved communication and environmental change. The name selected for the project—Coalition to Create a Quality Learning Environment—underscored the project focus on quality-of-life issues for students and community members alike.

**1996** Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's A Matter of Degree grant begins.

**1998** University of Vermont Athletic Department stops accepting alcohol industry advertising and support.

Burlington city council passes a liquor-license enforcement policy in an effort to hold licensees more accountable for overservice and liquor law violations.

Coalition publishes a guide for students and resources for staff and faculty aimed at raising awareness and changing assumptions about the role of alcohol on campus.

**1999** University starts notifying parents about alcohol and drug violations on campus.

City council approves an ordinance allowing city police to send notices to parents when students violate city alcohol laws.

**2000** State law is enacted making first-time possession of alcohol by a minor a civil offense with a mandated referral for screening or treatment.

City council requires responsible-alcohol-service training of all licensees.

City council limits the number of roommates allowed in residential homes as a means to reduce problems with party houses.

Advocacy Initiative begins in the fall.

**2001** Bill to strengthen local control over alcohol outlets is introduced in the state legislature.

Department of Motor Vehicles begins issuing licenses for people younger than 30 with an encoded magnetic strip on the back that contains the person's birth date, height and weight.

University of Vermont is ranked 18 among *Princeton Review's* "Top 20 Party Schools," down from 13 in 2000.

City charter is changed so that mayor becomes a member of the Liquor Control Board.

Responsible-alcohol-service training in the city of Burlington becomes a condition of license renewal.

Under-21 regulations for bars are enacted.

Burlington Nuisance Property Committee addresses problem houses in the residential neighborhoods adjacent to the campus.

**2002** City launches Alternative Justice, a project that allows direct referrals from the Burlington Police Department to the Restorative Justice Panel for first-time criminal and civil offenses.

City of Burlington and University of Vermont issue the "Joint Statement on Student Off-Campus Behavior and Quality of Life Issues."

Advocacy Initiative ends in the fall.

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF STUDENTS AND RESIDENTS

Founded in 1791, the University of Vermont is the fifth-oldest university in New England. Known as UVM for *Universitas Viridis Montis*, Latin for “University of the Green Mountains,” the campus is located atop a hill in Burlington, Vermont’s largest city.

Peter Clavelle has been Burlington’s mayor since 1990. He said that UVM is an “incredible asset to this community. Burlington would not be the dynamic, livable city that it is if it were not for the University of Vermont. The university brings immense cultural, educational and economic benefits to the community. However, a university with a student population of approximately 9,000 students in a community of 40,000 is a large presence.”

Clavelle also said that the university and its students have some negative impact on the city of Burlington. “When you scratch below the surface, much of the negative impact is connected to the use and abuse of alcohol. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s A Matter of Degree [AMOD] project presented an opportunity for Burlington and UVM to work together as a community to address issues of overconsumption, binge drinking and unacceptable student behavior.”

Tom Perras, director of the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs with the Vermont Department of Health since 1993 and a UVM alumnus, says that in the early 1990s UVM, like other universities, was not willing to admit that it had a problem because doing so was bad for recruiting students. He wrote a letter to UVM’s president urging the campus to follow the example of Johnson & Johnson, which, in 1982, responded to the seven deaths related to Tylenol product tampering by quickly acknowledging the problem and taking steps to fix it.

“I said that UVM could market itself as a healthy place for parents to send their children and protect their investment. It could stop being known as a party school. I was very angry about the lack of acknowledgment of the problem. So, when the opportunity presented itself to become involved with the project I was optimistic,” said Perras, who is a lifelong resident of Burlington.

For Perras, a member of the coalition, the university needed to ask itself: Are we going to allow

alcohol advertising at sporting events? What kind of information are we going to give out? What are the penalties going to be? What are we going to allow or not allow in student dorms? How are we doing in freshman orientation about setting the boundaries and expectations? What kind of prevention and treatment services should we have? Do we support recovering students?

“The coalition brought the multiple dimensions of looking at those problems. That was very important,” said Perras.

According to Rick Culliton, assistant to the vice president for student affairs and project manager for the RWJF grant until 2001, the key word in UVM’s Coalition to Create a Quality Learning Environment is *coalition*. More than anything else, the project is about building a coalition, rather than merely designing and implementing programs that may be cut when the grant money expires and wither away unless they’re actively supported by all the parties involved (*Vermont Quarterly*, Winter 1999).

Judith Ramaley, who served as UVM’s president from 1997 to 2001, put herself at the forefront of dealing with student drinking problems at both the local and national levels. Under her leadership the university shed a long-standing practice of denying the pervasive alcohol problems at UVM. In addition to her support for UVM’s AMOD initiative, she worked with the National Advisory Council subcommittee on college drinking convened by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

David Nestor, UVM’s vice president for student affairs, said that in 1996 at the start of the project there was a lot of finger-pointing between the city and the campus. “We were doing it ourselves. But it was very clear then—and it continues to be clear in too many parts of our community—that this is about college-age kids who are out of control. And UVM had the biggest problem.”

According to Nestor, town-gown relations had been strained for a number of years. As a result, the coalition’s early initiatives focused on the campus community with the idea that “we needed to ‘clean up our own house’ before looking to change the surrounding community.”

By 1998 UVM had strengthened its student alcohol and other drug policy, increased enforcement of policies for the fraternities and sororities located off campus, maintained collaborative law enforcement strategies with the Burlington police and provided information to the Burlington City Council about the impact that the number of bars has on the quality of life. Provisions prohibiting intoxication, drinking games and other dangerous drinking behaviors were added to the student alcohol and other drug policy. A new relationship was created with Greek chapters to outline minimum standards that all chapters must meet in order to be recognized by the university.

### Parental Notification

Changes in the federal Higher Education Act in 1998 allowed universities to notify the parents of underage students about any alcohol and drug violations on campus. After securing approval and buy-in, starting in fall 1999 the Office of Judicial Affairs, with the support of AMOD project staff, began sending letters to parents or guardians when such infractions occurred. Dean Batt, then vice president for student affairs, said that the intent was to “stimulate conversation between students and their families.” In the first year of the new policy, UVM sent 790 letters to students’ parents.

The new policy quickly started paying off, according to Batt. “I see about a 20 percent reduction in alcohol problems on campus because we’ve notified students of the policy,” he said. “I’m getting fan mail from parents. They’re extremely supportive of being notified” (*Rutland Herald*, December 7, 1999).

In addition to parental notification, campus offices, including UVM police, used a more effective reporting mechanism (university violation notices) in an effort to consistently enforce university policies in a timely manner. At the same time that enforcement was stepped up, all campus alcohol and drug offenses were routinely referred to UVM Alcohol and Drug Services for follow-up with appropriate educational or treatment intervention. The cost of these services is borne entirely through fines paid by those students receiving alcohol and drug intervention.

Andrew Flewelling, program manager for the AMOD project since fall 2001, said that these measures helped reinforce consistent communication from the

institution to the general community about UVM’s position on alcohol. “All the policies are in place. The judicial structure is in place both in residence halls and through the student affairs office.”

### Community Environment Becomes a Focus

While much of the coalition’s initial work focused on campus policies, enforcement, intervention and elimination of mixed messages, over the past three years the project has become much more involved in working with the community toward changing the off-campus environment.

Assistant City Attorney Gene Bergman said: “We have a very high density of bars in the downtown area. State law does not allow the city council, which acts as a local liquor control commission, to limit the number of bars in the city of Burlington. Instead it has to engage in an individualized and particular assessment as to whether an establishment should be licensed or not.”

In August 1999, project staff and a steering committee member from the Burlington Police Department agreed to shift resources to focus on providers of alcohol and on stepped-up efforts to enforce the 21-year-old drinking age. Commander Glen Button from the Burlington Police Department modified staffing patterns and committed resources to undercover stings at bars and liquor stores. Undercover stings were used in a more concerted way to confront the illegal purchase and sale of alcohol.

### Environmental Assessment at the Beginning of the Advocacy Initiative—Fall 2000

When the Advocacy Initiative began in Vermont, the project had focused most of its efforts on changing campus alcohol policies. These included increasing enforcement and disciplinary efforts by the UVM Judicial Affairs Office and UVM Police Services and supporting enforcement of city and state laws by the Burlington Police Department. Although enforcement is a key element in the environmental prevention model, the project staff gave little emphasis to community organizing, data collection to support efforts, or media advocacy.

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The coalition membership consisted of a project steering committee of university staff, law enforcement, and professionals from the field of alcohol prevention and treatment. Little effort had been made to include the broader community in the coalition.

Policy strategies for reducing student binge drinking were limited to increased disciplinary actions, enforcement of campus alcohol policies and some actions by the city to improve operating practices of bars. Dennis Alexander, a senior policy strategist with Pan American Services (PAS), worked with project staff on a strategic plan aimed at achieving two policy goals:

- Support increased local control over alcohol licensing and outlet density
- Develop a comprehensive, mandatory and frequent responsible-alcohol-service training for bar owners, managers and employees

Although there was an understanding of the importance of data collection to support policy efforts, there was no concept of how to use that data. The

data available from the Harvard University School of Public Health College Alcohol Study were used in press accounts to criticize the university and the binge drinking rates of its students. Other data from the Burlington Police Department showing that alcohol-related problems had decreased due to heightened enforcement were not effectively used to advocate for more policy change. Consequently most of the media coverage on the binge drinking issue in Burlington was negative, focusing on problems that students caused, with little discussion about possible solutions.

### **Intentional Organizing**

The key challenge at UVM was to broaden the base of support in the community for the project's efforts. This would serve the dual purpose of placing more of the responsibility for the problem and its solutions on the community and deflecting criticism away from the university and its students. The other challenges were to get the media to move away from problem-focused coverage toward addressing policies and changing

community norms—and for UVM to become less concerned with improving only its public relations.

### Advancing Policy Measures

Policy measures advanced in the city of Burlington did have a degree of success. One ongoing issue that the community was grappling with was the so-called

18-and-over nights at local alcohol establishments.

“In the past it was a common practice to bring together legal drinkers and the 18-to 20-year-old group. It inevitably created problems. It also sent out a message to the young people that if they wanted to have a good time, they needed to go where the booze is. But also it put both the owners of the establishments and the servers as well as the city enforcement personnel in a very challenging situation in terms of enforcement. It was very difficult to enforce. Once folks entered the establishment, if they were so determined, they would find access to alcoholic beverages,” said Clavelle.

“Some under-21 events at bars got out of hand. One had 500 people in a bar with a capacity of 290. There were 65 citations for underage

drinking. This underage party was sponsored by a university group or at least by university students.

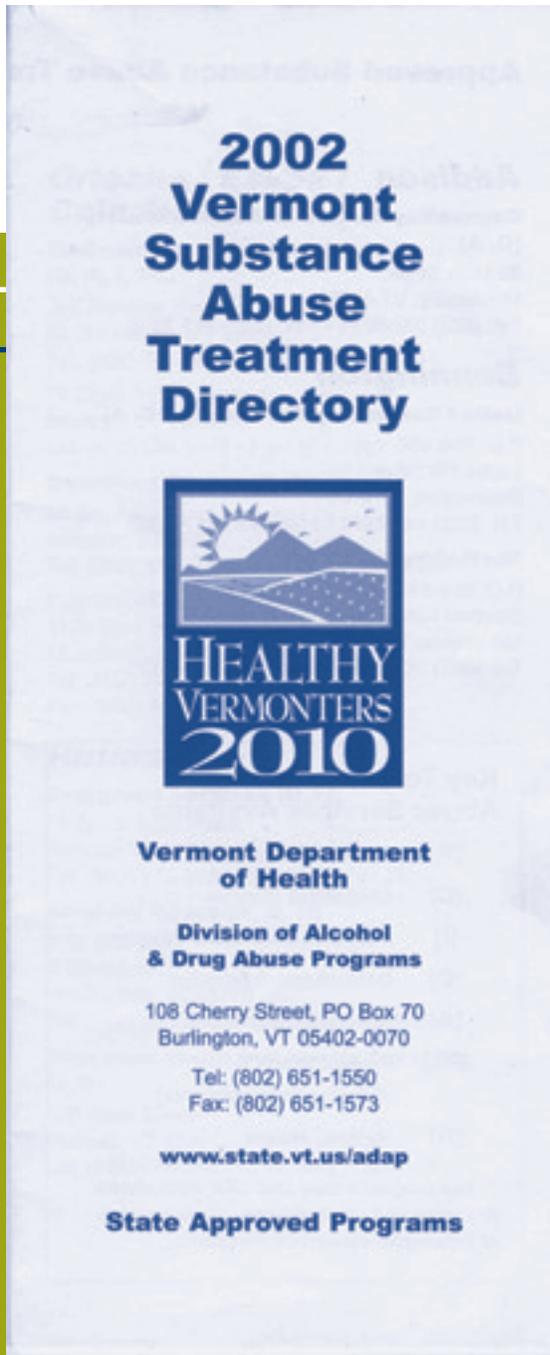
We just happened to stumble upon it. Do we just eliminate these events? Or do we say that if you have people under 21 in your establishment, you can't serve alcohol?” said Bergman.

In 2000, AMOD project staff, bar owners and city and state officials formed a Training and Guidelines Work Group to come up with standards and guidelines for the sale and service of alcoholic beverages in Burlington. One of the first issues it tackled was the under-21 events.

Paula Niquette, of the Vermont Department of Liquor Control and a member of the Training and Guidelines Work Group, said: “We invited the bars, UVM and Burlington PD and a few other people from the community to meet and talk this issue out. The bars wanted to keep the 21-and-under nights going. The bars were interested in the money and in keeping the crowd downtown. The city was concerned about the dangers associated with underage drinking. . . . After about eight months of meetings, the group, including the bar owners, agreed on what we thought would work and passed a recommendation packet on to the city council.”

The city council adopted the recommendations, which took a middle ground to mitigate the problem of bars serving under-21 patrons by placing special conditions on entertainment permits for under-21 events. These include minimum staffing requirements to monitor the crowd, no entry after 11 p.m., no re-entry into the event, and registration of the event with the police department.

The Training and Guidelines Work Group was also charged with developing a comprehensive training program for liquor licensees in Burlington that would be in addition to the once-every-three-years training mandated by the state. As a result of the efforts of this group, two trainings were conducted in fall 2000 for Burlington bar owners. In January, under a subcontract with the AMOD project, Marian Novak, director of the San Diego Responsible Hospitality Coalition, conducted training for bar owners and staff that was well attended and well received. Starting in summer 2001 the city started offering a training program that focuses on specific problems in Burlington. The city council requires that all



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cabaret licenses have 50 percent of the establishment's employees go through training. Kitchen and janitorial staff are excluded, but all other employees fall under this provision, including door persons, bouncers and security personnel, who are excluded from the state's training requirements.

Although some improvements have been made in the downtown district, according to Clavelle, problems continue, particularly related to noise. "But I will say that the city's elected officials are paying more attention to the behavior of bars and the management of the liquor-serving establishments," he said.

### Neighborhood Disruption

Not all the town-gown tensions in Burlington are related to the downtown bar scene. Approximately 4,000 students live off campus. According to Bergman, there are issues of noise and house parties in neighborhoods where students have to "coexist with families with children and just regular working people who have to get up in the morning."

In addition neighborhoods are often disrupted by the late-night and early-morning walk-through by students returning to campus after partying downtown. UVM's Flewelling said: "More than anything it's noise, property damage and the physical threats that occur when intoxicated college students interact with residents at three o'clock in the morning. Some neighborhoods have been more of a problem than others have. Just that transportation on foot with ten friends was creating some significant problems, such as slamming on stop signs or breaking things," he said.

In October 2000 the Burlington City Council voted to limit the number of roommates allowed in residential homes. "Councilors hope the law will give residents a weapon in the war against party houses. The measure limits to four the number of unrelated people allowed to live together in residential areas. Families and groups that are functioning like families are exempt. Large homes can have more than four people in them if a special permit is granted" (*Burlington Free Press*, October 17, 2000).

In a joint effort to improve the quality of life for all in the parts of the city where many students live, UVM and Burlington have worked together on the

Noise Task Force and the Good Neighbor Program. The Noise Task Force is a cooperative effort between the Burlington Police Department and UVM police to put officers out on the hill and in the student apartment areas where noisy parties occur, one of the most commonly reported alcohol-related community nuisances. In 1993 UVM students proposed the Good Neighbor Program. During two sessions in the fall and spring, a uniformed BPD officer and a UVM student volunteer to canvas the neighborhoods door-to-door to explain the noise ordinance (among other things), listen to complaints and comments and begin a conversation among the community, the students within the community, the police and the university. It also offers a community phone line to address neighborhood concerns.

Another effort called the Neighborhood Action Project started in 1998 as a collaborative effort among residents, landlords, city government, city police and UVM. It sponsors neighborhood walks as an opportunity for residents to meet students, pass out community resource and city code information and help police patrols keep an eye out for potential problem spots.

In 2002, UVM instituted an Office of Conflict Resolution to deal with student infractions on and off campus. The office offers group conferencing and mediation services to deal with problems such as noise, vandalism and parking disputes. It is dedicated to providing services to the university community on campus and to UVM students and their neighbors off campus. The office grew out of two other programs—the Good Neighbor Program and the Community Support Program, a collaboration between UVM and the Burlington Police Department that deals with student offenses occurring off campus.

Gail Shampnois, who directs city relations for the university and is a community organizer with the AMOD project, said the Office of Conflict Resolution is different from the other programs in that it features more education and prevention components. It follows the principles of "restorative justice" programs, which bring together offenders and harmed parties to seek solutions. Also, as in most such programs, a large

percentage of the offenses tend to involve alcohol or drug use.

“I meet with residents and city police officers and other city staff to explore how to address the underlying alcohol issues that we often find when we intervene in conflicts involving noise and vandalism,” Shamnois said.

Restorative justice is a popular method for dealing with low-level crimes and disputes in Burlington. The Community Justice Center there, a project of the city of Burlington, features a program called Restorative Probation. Under this program, offenders, victims and community members are brought together to deal with nonviolent misdemeanor offenses.

### **Progress During the Advocacy Initiative**

The primary focus of the Advocacy Initiative in Burlington was to expand the coalition’s outreach into the community and generate news and opinion pieces to support the project’s policy objectives. The first approach was to expand the coalition by making links with the Vermont Department of Health’s New Directions project. Under a grant from the U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, the health department funded 23 local coalitions to work on preventing and reducing alcohol, tobacco and other drug use among 12- to 17-year-olds. Although it was first thought that these coalitions both understood and employed environmental prevention strategies in their efforts to reduce alcohol and drug use, it became clear to PAS staff that their focus was on individual interventions. PAS, working with UVM staff, provided coalition members with training on the environmental model and on how to present themselves and their issues to the media.

Coalition development improved when the project was reorganized as part of UVM’s process for reapplication of AMOD funding. New staff members were hired, including a new project director and another individual with experience and skills to serve as a liaison to the community. The university felt that the project would be helped by hiring someone with more community experience so that he or she could focus on some of the off-campus issues. The change in project leadership caused some delays, and there

were missed opportunities when a few stories came up in the media. However, the reorganization of the project and new staff opened the door to meetings with neighborhood associations and other residents. A new dialogue began about their concerns related to alcohol use in their neighborhoods by UVM students and how those concerns could be addressed.

### **Advancing Community Relations**

In 2002 the city launched Alternative Justice, a project that allows for direct referrals from the Burlington Police Department to the Restorative Justice Panel for first-time criminal and civil offenses. Importantly, victims must agree for the case to be referred to the project; but when they do, the case can be handled quickly and directly by the community, without ever going to court.

The university’s new president, Daniel Mark Fogel, wanted to underscore UVM’s attention to quality-of-life issues for students and residents alike. (Fogel was formerly provost of Louisiana State University, another AMOD site.) One of the first things he did was join members of the Neighborhood Action Project for a neighborhood walk from midnight to 2 a.m.

According to an article in the UVM publication *The View*, “He was making good on a promise pledged his first week on the job while visiting the student-dense blocks bordered by Pearl, Willard, North and Union Streets. Fogel told residents then that he would return in the ‘wee and perilous’ hours to get a first-hand look at the challenges neighbors face from noise and rowdy behavior.

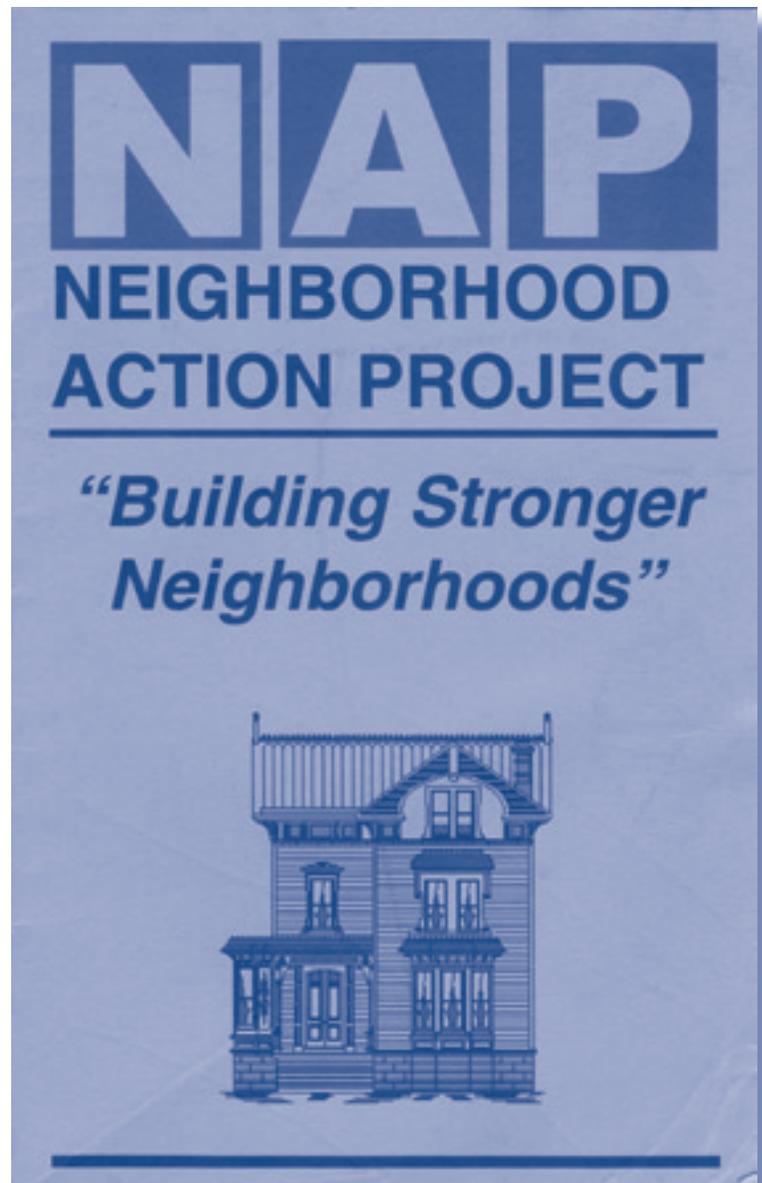
“For Fogel it was an opportunity to see the issues that motivated a recent city/university initiative furthering efforts to protect the quality of life in neighborhoods adjacent to UVM. And as the Neighborhood Walk debriefed in Pomeroy Park at 2:00 a.m., the president’s work still wasn’t done for the day. A UVM Police Services cruiser picked him up for a ride-along to get a look at the on-campus scene during those ‘wee and perilous hours’” (*The View*, September 10, 2002).

On August 23, 2002, the city of Burlington and the University of Vermont issued the “Joint Statement on Student Off-Campus Behavior and Quality-of-Life Issues.” This statement outlined nine new initiatives

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to be launched in the Fall 2002 semester, “all designed to tackle our mutual problems directly and expeditiously.” They are:

- “In close cooperation with the mayor and with Burlington police, the university will expand its follow-up program to include an immediate contact with every student receiving a quality-of-life–related citation, rather than waiting for that violation to be adjudicated. UVM will place students on notice that administrators are aware that a violation has been issued and that university disciplinary action may follow.
- To make sure that this policy of early intervention is as effective as it can be, the city will improve its police protocols to provide UVM with the information it needs to hold students accountable for their behavior.
- Once citations are adjudicated UVM will initiate disciplinary action when appropriate within its code of student conduct. The outcomes of a disciplinary proceeding may range from a warning letter to dismissal from the university. This represents an unprecedented level of university commitment to taking institutional action directed toward off-campus student behavior.
- The city will strengthen its Noise Ordinance, increasing fines, particularly for violations involving noisy house parties.
- The university will also use other means at its disposal to deal with problem behavior, including early and direct intervention with ‘problem houses’ by university officials in cooperation with city officials and notification of parents for student



alcohol- and drug-related violations, under protocols of federal student privacy law.

- All UVM students will receive a direct communication from the university president notifying them of their responsibilities both on and off campus and outlining the serious consequences of problem behaviors.
- On a pilot basis for the fall semester, UVM’s Campus Area Transportation System will provide a service between campus and downtown Burlington until 2:30 a.m. on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights in an effort to reduce late-night student foot traffic through neighborhoods.
- For the first time, police officers from the university and the city will work in concert—via joint

patrols—to address student off-campus behavior issues, with Burlington police issuing citations if necessary. The teams will patrol targeted neighborhoods on high-activity nights, especially in early fall and late spring.

- The city will file public nuisance actions in Chittenden Superior Court against landlords and tenants when notices and tickets fail to stop disruptive behavior or blighted conditions.”

The joint statement concludes by saying: “The quality of life in Burlington is important not only to city residents, but to the University of Vermont as well. UVM students are positive aspects to the community, and the vast majority are good and productive citizens. As in most university towns, though, conflicts inevitably arise. The steps outlined today represent effective strategies for addressing chronic problems, and both Mayor Clavelle and President Fogel look forward to working closely with city officials, local residents and students to improve and strengthen this vibrant community.”

### **Communications and Media Advocacy**

Enrique Corredera, director of university communications, has been involved with the AMOD project in one way or another since the beginning. He says that media have an important role to play in furthering the work of the Coalition to Create a Quality Learning Environment.

“Media coverage has a big impact on people’s perceptions of the problem. The biggest accomplishment of this project is that we have, to some extent, successfully changed the primary perception of student alcohol problems. When we started, the media’s perspective was [that] the university and UVM students have a binge drinking problem and that it is up to the university to solve that problem. They saw it as something that was fairly well contained on campus. The project’s philosophy and approach and work over time with media has resulted in a much better understanding today that this is a much larger, more complex problem involving many other players than previously thought.

“Our focus on an environmental approach is really paying off and it’s really registering. People are beginning to see now that there are connections where

they didn’t see connections before. For example, there is an industry that has a significant role to play in the behaviors that heretofore were previously thought to be self-contained problems. Over time, we managed to increase awareness that there are other components to this problem and that a solution is going to require some level of involvement from all key players,” Corredera said.

But it wasn’t always that way. Mayor Clavelle said that despite a fair amount of media coverage about alcohol issues, “a few years back, there was a so-called student riot that got a lot of attention. When a particular bar gets shut down or there is an enforcement action, that gets the attention. What doesn’t get the attention—and what I think is important—is an ongoing message about how overconsumption of alcohol affects the quality of life for all of us in this community. There needs to be more focus on both personal and community health issues. We need to change the culture. I think we are making some inroads but it’s a long haul.”

Corredera said that he couldn’t blame the media for the time it’s taken them to focus on the broader environmental factors affecting student drinking. “From the beginning, the project looked at this problem from an environmental perspective. But even for us as an institution it took a while to really begin to get it. It’s a unique approach that doesn’t click with people immediately. It’s harder to wrap your arms around it when it’s all sorts of factors that directly and indirectly influence drinking behaviors among the student population.”

According to Corredera, the key ingredients for changing the media’s perception of the problem were patience and diligence. “We recognized early on that it was not going to be possible to change that perception overnight. Our best hope was to give ourselves some time, but to be very deliberate and very consistent over the years, hitting people with the same set of messages. It’s sort of planting the seeds and nurturing them. In every interaction with the media we looked for story angles that would give us the opportunity to highlight the role that one of these other players had with this issue. We did it story by story.”

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## DO YOU WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

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about your ward Neighborhood Planning Assembly, or to be put on the mailing list to receive monthly meeting announcements and agendas, call Burlington's Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO) at 802.865.7144, Room 32 City Hall, Burlington, VT 05401. TTY # 802.865.7142

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### ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT:

- Parks, open space, playgrounds and traffic calming?
- Parking and traffic in the City?
- Noise, crime, and police protection?
- The condition of streets & sidewalks?
- Waterfront development?
- Recycling and environmental issues?
- University and college expansion?



This information is available in alternative formats upon request. All meetings are accessible to people with disabilities.



**CITY OF BURLINGTON**  
7 WARDS

### DO YOU KNOW WHAT AN NPA IS?



That communications strategy was helped by the Advocacy Initiative of the AMOD National Program Office at the American Medical Association. For example, in August 2001 the AMA held a press conference to announce the findings of a parent survey that found that 95 percent of parents believe that binge drinking is a serious threat to their children and 85 percent say that easy access to alcohol contributes to too much drinking. All the AMOD sites received early notification about this national press event. With help from PAS, UVM put together a local version of the news to highlight the survey results for local media.

“We used it as an opportunity to fold in background information about our project and highlighted some of the progress on campus thanks to UVM’s participation in this project. We distributed a local version of the press release to local media and followed up with phone calls. The media focused primarily on the local story, using the national survey as the peg,” said Corredera.

The *Burlington Free Press* (August 30, 2001) reported:

“University of Vermont officials say they and the

community are fighting binge drinking on campus, including the following efforts:

- Since 1995–96, campus judicial cases decreased by 30 percent while alcohol and drug interventions and suspensions have increased.
- The UVM athletic department removed alcohol industry sponsorship from its sports events media guide.
- Substance-free campus housing has been expanded.
- Alcohol education courses were expanded to address all alcohol and drug violations on campus.
- UVM notifies parents of students involved in drug and alcohol incidents. The university sent out 700 notices in 1999–2000, the first year of the program.
- The Burlington City Council approved an ordinance allowing city police to send notices to parents when students violate city alcohol laws.”

Although there has been progress in getting the message out about the environmental approach to addressing alcohol problems, UVM’s Nestor said, “Unlike the enforcement and judicial measures, that message hasn’t gotten into the fabric of our communications structure. The communication piece

is critical for getting support for environmental strategies.”

In addition to communication strategies aimed at the broader media, according to Nestor, UVM is going to spend much more time communicating with this youth audience. Flewelling says that the message to students “needs to be simply ‘We care about your health and safety. Here are some ways to help you.’”

In his convocation as UVM’s president in September 2002, Fogel said: “Please don’t ever put me in the position I was in one August morning just five years ago of interrupting my morning exercise at 5:30 a.m. to take a call from the dean of students informing me that a student had died of alcohol poisoning. Had his friends intervened sooner, before he passed out or afterward, he would have made it. Please take good care of yourselves and of each other. Seek to elevate the value of moderation and good sense. Expect high levels of citizenship from yourselves and each other. Expect yourselves to respect our neighbors, the good people of Burlington. Respect their property and their right to a night’s sleep.”

### **Project Assessment at the End of the Advocacy Initiative—Summer 2002**

The key success resulting from the technical assistance provided through the Advocacy Initiative was a shift in focus from campus policies addressing student behavior to more of a focus on community outreach as a means to identify related problems and solutions. Three factors contributed to this shift:

- Continued emphasis on reaching out and involving community members in the project
- Reorganization of the project at the time of grant reapplication to include a staff person responsible for community outreach
- Hiring of new staff along with the reapplication

In terms of community readiness, the project has moved from recognizing that there were local problems and that something should be done about them to the stage where environmental prevention work in the community has begun. Staff and key coalition members are in place. There is general knowledge about the principles of policy-based

environmental prevention and the need to support the efforts with data. With an overall strategy for addressing the binge drinking problem now in place and an elevated level of community awareness and discussion of the issue, UVM and Burlington are well positioned to engage in a policy-based environmental prevention campaign.

### **Components of Technical Assistance Provided During the Advocacy Initiative**

PAS provided the coalition with the following:

- Assistance in developing a strategic plan to support identified policy objectives
- Development of a plan to engage the broader community and establish community support for policy objectives
- Training and workshops on environmental prevention, media advocacy, working within a political system, spokesperson training, and message development
- Hands-on assistance in working with local media to maximize use of the national parent survey in 2001, which ensured that local project information and data were released to local Burlington media
- Development of materials for a news event regarding a city council vote to allow alcohol in Town Hall City Park; this included a press release, talking points for speakers, a visual information board, and a news advisory (unfortunately the event was called off at the last minute but the preparation helped give coalition members some experience in how to prepare for such an activity)
- Recommendations on media campaigns to support the policy objectives of responsible-alcohol-service training
- Identification of media opportunities and the drafting of op-eds and letters to the editor

### **Impact**

The coalition’s efforts have had an impact on community policies, as shown in the following observations from key participants:

The key success resulting from the technical assistance provided through the Advocacy Initiative was a shift in focus from campus policies addressing student behavior to more of a focus on community outreach as a means to identify related problems and solutions.

Assistant City Attorney Bergman said, “We have seen a dramatic decrease in the number of incidents downtown, which I believe is directly attributable to the multitude of initiatives that we have put forward. One of the things that we have done in general is to say, ‘You can come down in Burlington and have a good time but you can’t go run amuck. We will not allow that.’ There is a police presence. Our police officers go into bars and count patrons and monitor for underage drinking and they cite people. I prosecute bars.”

Marty Mathison, co-owner of Rasputin’s Bar, a popular nightclub on certain nights for college-age people, agrees that progress has occurred when it comes to downtown. He was involved in the Training and Guidelines Work Group that made recommendations to the city council on responsible-alcohol-service training and under-21 event guidelines. “Through that, we have taken some very large steps in preventing some problems,” he said.

According to Mayor Clavelle, Burlington and UVM have taken big steps in the right direction, especially when it comes to holding all citizens, including students, accountable for their actions. “It’s a monumental shift when the university really says that it’s prepared to hold students accountable for off-campus behavior. That has not always been the case. UVM has made that statement publicly and is implementing methods and protocols and holding students accountable.”

In addition, there is general agreement that since the AMOD project began there has been a much higher level of collaboration and coordination of city and university efforts. “Meetings take place on a regular basis where open and frank discussions take place. And town-gown relations in this city are as good as they have been in recent history,” said Nestor.

Clavelle agrees. “This project is well positioned to truly make a difference in terms of town-gown relations, particularly as they relate to the drinking habits of college students.”

UVM has seen decreases in alcohol-related judicial cases despite increased enforcement levels that often catch more infractions. It has also seen decreases in problems related to student binge drinking, especially

in the so-called secondary effects of alcohol use that students report. Fewer students reported having their sleep or study interrupted, having their property damaged or having been insulted by someone who had been drinking.

### Key Learnings

- Broad-based support, which includes various sectors of the community, is needed for an issue to have an impact in the media and on policy-makers and to deflect criticism away from any one supporter of the issue.
- It is difficult to do community organizing only in reaction to individual incidents unless networks of supporters are mobilized and readily available.
- Community organizing skills are a prerequisite for project staff to develop an effective coalition that includes community members. They are also required to move the project’s focus from campus policies and enforcement to include community policies.
- Staff and coalition members need to quickly respond to a media story or local issue even if someone else raised it. Once an opportunity to capitalize on a story is missed, it is often too late to develop a plan, especially when the story has focused on perspectives that are not helpful to the cause (for example, when the story focuses on blaming someone instead of promoting the solutions).