

Confronting the Challenges of Studentification in Residential Orono Neighborhoods.



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Introduction

In passing the Morrill Land-Grant Act, the town of Orono became home to Maine's flagship university in 1865. Today, the University of Maine remains the town's largest employer, and serves as an epicenter for attractions among surrounding communities that are overwhelmingly inhabited by faculty and students. From drawing crowds to campus every weekend for athletic events, to the academic programs channeling students to Orono for eight months each year, the town of Orono is tied economically to the university in many ways. However, the constant influx of students into Orono's neighborhoods may be presenting challenges that, in the long-term, will prove unmanageable.

The combination of an institutional mandate to increase university enrollment each year and limited on-campus housing has introduced challenges for both off-campus students and families living in established neighborhoods. The University of Maine has sought to increase first-year enrollment to stave off budgetary shortfalls, with mixed success.¹ Yet limited on-campus housing has led to a process of moving more upperclassmen off campus to provide housing to first-year students only. As a result, more students have been pushed off-campus and into Orono neighborhoods. The increasing presence of these students alongside long-term residents has led to challenges in many Orono neighborhoods.

Moreover, this is happening alongside a longer-term trend whereby single-family homes have been purchased, often by the parents of students, and converted into multi-unit student rentals in residential neighborhoods. This has prompted many to worry that an economic, cultural, and aesthetic "tipping point" could be looming just over the horizon, where the

¹ Nell Gluckman. "Report: University of Maine System Enrollment Down, While Orono and Fort Kent Campuses Buck Trend," *The Bangor Daily News*, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://bangordailynews.com/2014/11/03/education/report-university-of-maine-system-enrollment-down-while-orono-campus-bucks-trend/>.

character of those neighborhoods is irreparably changed and they are no longer attractive destinations for families looking to buy a home. The most recent Orono comprehensive plan reports that the town suffered a 17.2% decline in households with children under the age of 18 from the years 2000-2010, raising concerns about the attractiveness of Orono homes to young families, the viability of school systems, and the growth and vitality of the town.² A growing divide between students and residents in past years has occurred in the context of serious challenges already facing those at the administrative level both within the town and at the University.

Clearly, this issue is large and complex, and though no single actor may be able to fix the issues outright, we can provide some of the necessary information to begin the process. We recognize that students bring an array of attitudes and behavioral patterns that differ from those of the dominant culture, but we want to examine whether proactive approaches aimed towards educating the populace of how to coexist in a college town will help better strengthen the university-community partnership.

The ultimate goal of this project is to help stakeholders begin answering the essential question: What actions can be taken by the University of Maine and the Town of Orono to create a more sustainable and viable housing situation for both students and long-term residents? Moreover, this study seeks to answer what, if any, is the “tipping point” whereby neighborhoods will begin to be negatively affected by the presence of student rentals? We hypothesize that these issues can be better handled when we expand the knowledge and data available to the stakeholders involved. Our project is going to investigate this issues and think creatively and proactively about steps that could be taken to bring the residents and students into more

² Town of Orono. 2014. Comprehensive Plan Update, Volume 1: Inventories and Analysis. Accessed October 15, 2014, http://planning.orono.org/comprehensive_plan_update

productive forms of contact. If we can provide this data to the governing bodies involved and propose actionable solutions that take into account the tangible resources available to key stakeholders, we believe we can positively impact the lives of students and residents both at the university and in the town of Orono.

This study sets out to answer these questions. We begin with a theoretical framework that contextualizes the topic broadly in relation to the existing research, and defines concepts to be used later in the study. We follow this with a formal review of the existing research literature that will lay out key findings of relevant, prior research and further explicate and unpack concepts relevant to the field. Next, a section centered on research methods will detail the exact approaches being taken, the demographics and stakeholders we have surveyed and interviewed, and the steps we have taken to minimize risk to human subjects. We will then move on to present and analyze the findings of our survey and interview data. The close of this report will offer suggestions for what steps taken by the Town of Orono, the University of Maine, and the other relevant stakeholders could provide more positive outcomes in relation to this complex issue.

Theoretical Framework

Conflict between a university and the surrounding residents is neither new nor surprising. In fact, this issue has occurred, presumably, in every college-adjacent town since the advent of higher education. A commentator examining “town-gown” relations in a New England college town once wrote,

Accommodation and assimilation are not totally absent, although whether either process will ever be complete is doubtful. Each side accepts the presence of the other. Occasional joint efforts are carried out with the usual pattern being that of the college group joining

the town group; rarely does the reverse occur.³

He was writing in 1939 about Connecticut State College, what would become the University of Connecticut. The cultural and behavioral divides that often shape college town relations today could be described in much the same way—whether between those with clear links to the university and those without, or between students and long-term residents.

A small subset may simply believe there is too much difference between parties; the younger students and the older adults struggle to coexist amicably in such tight quarters. Those raising a family or enjoying their retirement have different lifestyles than students. They keep different hours, operate in different social circles and have different standards as to the behavior they expect from their neighbors. Students, conversely, are often living on their own for the first time in their lives. Unburdened by parental oversight and juggling a complex set of adult responsibilities they may, even without intending, adopt behaviors that draw them into conflict with their long-term resident neighbors. A defeatist would suggest that there is no solution to the problem as the two groups are simply too different to co-exist in a spirit of shared community.

However, as previously noted, these difficulties crop up within every college town, and those towns continue to not only exist, but flourish, across the country. As a result, we should reject attitudes that simply see the two sides as “oil and water.” Rather, this issue ought to confront us as an interesting challenge, a setting in which we can craft innovative and place-specific solutions to addressing both the challenges of students and long-term residents living side-by-side and of creating neighborhoods that will be attractive to newcomers as well. One of the key questions examined in our research is whether recent issues can be addressed by creating

³ Victor A. Rapport, “Conflict in a New England College Town,” *Social Forces* 17, no. 4 (May 1, 1939): 531–32, doi:10.2307/2570705.

a culture of interactivity through familiarity. Before we can unpack this hypothesis in full, though, we must first work to better understand what has been missing thus far.

As is hopefully obvious by the opening lines above, minorities on each side (residents and students) can sometimes misconstrue the intentions and character of the other side. Those who live permanently within these neighborhoods might view neighbors as nothing more than a nuisance, who create countless issues due to their immaturity and social ineptitude. Some students may think of their neighbors, if they think of them at all, as mawkish and dour authority figures. Obviously neither characterization is fair or entirely true. What is occurring here is a phenomenon as old as human interaction: othering. The age gap and life circumstances that separate the aforementioned parties allow them to create broad generalizations about one another and absent positive interaction, they may perpetuate these understandings. Neither seems to understand that what differentiates one from the other is not so divisive or truly important. And in this setting, there risks being no attitude of cooperation or interaction as each side does not view the other as one to be worked with, but rather a “challenge” or “burden.”

At their worst, such judgmental attitudes can breed a cyclical, self-fulfilling prophecy where each side may internalize and live up to its negative expectations. As Smith writes, increased concentration of university students within more “traditional” neighborhoods, “...reduces the opportunities for positive and mutually beneficial interactions between groups and fuels the segregation of groups based on lifestyle and life-course cleavages, as well as differing levels of economic capital.”⁴ This has important bearing on the attractiveness of neighborhoods to both existing long-term residents and those who would potentially move there, particularly in a non-urban setting. Though we may expect such fractures and divisions within

⁴ Darren Smith, “The Politics of Studentification and ‘(Un)balanced’ Urban Populations: Lessons for Gentrification and Sustainable Communities?,” *Urban Studies* 45, no. 12 (November 1, 2008): 2546, doi:10.1177/0042098008097108.

urban settings, individuals settled in rural settings precisely to avoid these sorts of settings.

Attending to the social and cultural divisions of our neighborhoods can ensure that they remain attractive and vital settings for existing and potential long-term residents, as well as the students who increasingly populate them.

With this overarching framework in mind we should now move forward and consider the more practical terms used in contemporary student-town research, concepts that will be critical when we come to address our issue specifically. First, the idea of *studentification* is presented in a recent study that discusses how and why students choose to live on and off campus, and the impact of studentification on local stakeholders within the community.⁵ Studentification is defined as the displacement of single-family and non-student residents by new student housing. The difference in lifestyles can lead to many quarrels between students and longtime residents, and this can often foster a lack of respect and positive relationships between both parties. Moreover, the study shows that, "...[studentification] puts pressure on the elderly, families with small children, low-income wage-workers and the very poor, because their lifestyles are strikingly different from those of most college and university students."⁶ This issue, of studentification, appears to stem once again from the negative social generalizations occurring between the students and residents.

Another study directly discusses studentification and its impacts on the local community of Bevendean, UK.⁷ Specifically, the idea of *family flight* is discussed, which is a demographic trend occurring in areas where studentification is most acute. Family flight is the tendency of

⁵ Ray Bromley and Robert B. Kent, "Integrating beyond the Campus: Ohio's Urban Public Universities and Neighborhood Revitalisation," *Planning Practice and Research* 21, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 45–78, doi:10.1080/02697450600901517.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Phil Hubbard, "Geographies of Studentification and Purpose-Built Student Accommodation: Leading Separate Lives?," *Environment and Planning A* 41, no. 8 (2009): 1903–23.

families, upon the realization that their communities have changed due to the influx of students moving into their neighborhoods, to move to other areas of town less thoroughly impacted by studentification, or even exit the town altogether. We utilize these ideas and terminology in both our review of the relevant research literature that follows and our own analysis.

In summation, the overarching impulse driving this research is that many of the pre-conceived roles we create for one another can have a dampening effect on our abilities to constructively address them as communities. Addressing long-term challenges to the character of our communities and neighborhoods must be done in an information-rich environment and negative generalizations about members of those communities can limit our efforts to meaningfully address the challenges we face. We move now to a review of relevant past literature examining similar trends in other university and college towns.

Literature Review

The ensuing literature review offers a synthesis of past studies concerning relationships between other towns and their universities, the effects of studentification and family flight, and finally, the overarching effects of studentification on the social, cultural, and economic viability of a college town. Before we move into this thematic review of the literature, we will begin by analyzing the findings of a report provided on a situation analogous to our own.⁸

The conflict and resolution reached in St. Paul, MI, epitomizes some of the pitfalls of a town-gown relationship. St. Paul, beset on all sides by multiple, large universities, instituted a year-long moratorium on student housing created through the conversion of single-family homes, due to the challenges experienced with property values and neighborhood relations in a college town. A municipal report detailing the moratorium states:

⁸ St. Paul Planning Commission, *Student Housing Zoning Study* (St. Paul, MN), accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.stpaul.gov/documentcenter/home/view/20436>.

“The conversion of housing to student occupancy, particularly the conversion of previously owner-occupied single-family and duplex housing, has... had a negative impact on quality of life for many residents.”⁹

The report goes on to detail multiple options that the town of St. Paul could opt for rather than the more drastic, moratorium response. Specifically, they recommend, “... an ordinance which creates an overlay zoning district to limit the density and therefore impact, of student rental housing in low-density residential neighborhoods.”¹⁰ The report contends that this zoning measure would positively impact the rates of student rentals and housing generally in low-density neighborhoods. Moreover, they acknowledge that the core issue here is a lack of housing for students within the university, and urge areas experiencing similar issues to explore other options for providing adequate living accommodations. Keeping in mind this narrowly-tailored, albeit nearly identical, situation, we will now attempt to broaden our understanding of university-town relations through the analysis of studies on “studentification”. We would note first of all that much of the existing research literature is focused on urban areas, and many studies focus on this trend within the UK. In this sense, the applicability of such studies to non-urban settings in the US is somewhat limited. Nevertheless, there are general trends and conclusions that can help inform our own research in this area.

In a study similar to the piece defining studentification cited earlier in this report, data was gathered on the University of Birmingham regarding the opinions of various parties.¹¹ The study identified three major stakeholders and went on to interview representatives of each: accommodation officers (what we might call resident life staff) from the University of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ John Allinson, “Over-Educated, over-Exuberant and over Here? The Impact of Students on Cities,” *Planning Practice & Research* 21, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 79–94, doi:10.1080/02697450600901541.

Birmingham, UK; real estate agents in the neighboring areas; developers of private residences; and a representative guild of students speaking for the student body. When tasked with enumerating the core, negative aspects of studentification, respondents cited the issues of “lifestyle: late nights, noise, etc.,” and “‘indigenous’ (non-student) population driven out”, as the most universal negative aspects of increased student presence in the community. Other, less agreed upon factors included “vacancies in summer months,” “‘student ghetto’ monoculture,” and ‘house prices inflated.’”

The data does well to account for the most significant issues associated with an influx of student homes, and allows us to better understand what issues we are working to ameliorate or avoid outright. The major effect of this trend seems to be economic. When students begin to dominate neighborhoods that were traditionally inhabited by families or the homeowners themselves, tensions rise, and homeowners become worried about what studentification is doing to the value of their property. If property values continue to be negatively affected and long-time residents of a town move elsewhere, it will be increasingly difficult to improve property values. The idea of studentification suggests that local governments most immediately need to stop the spread of student rentals throughout their local communities and provide a solution that strengthens property value rates without displacing their local economies biggest consumers. One important caveat here. In the case of Birmingham, the most significant concern was an *increase* in housing prices rather than a devaluation, as a rapid need for student housing led to significant demand and a concurrent increase in prices. This is likely due to the urban setting in which the university is located and the distinctive features of the UK housing market (where rentals are much more prevalent than home ownership). In the US, often the concerns relate to

devaluation of properties. In either case, residents look to local government to take concrete steps to stabilize the prices of homes in their communities.

Some studies have gone further to analyze and enumerate the impacts of studentification on families within impacted neighborhoods, a central concern of our research. Studies regarding “family flight” provide further evidence of the potentially negative impacts that an influx of student housing can have on neighborhoods within college towns.¹² As previously discussed, family flight occurs when long-term residents vacate an area due to an increase in the number of student-residents in their neighborhoods. This trend, in turn, only makes more room for off-campus students. Oftentimes, when these properties become available, landlords capitalize by purchasing the vacated property and expanding their business by offering housing to other students seeking off-campus housing. As more students move off campus, this trend continues, and worsens. The study notes that “[t]he displacement of families from Bevedean by in-coming student populations was felt to be threatening the provision of services for local families, thus embedding ‘family flight’ by lessening the incentive for families to return to the area.”¹³ As students move in and families move out, the trend perpetuates itself in a cycle that can be self-sustaining without policy intervention. When long-time neighbors leave one another because of off-campus student disturbances, residents will likely start a trend of relocation for other families in the neighborhood as well. Clearly, it seems these phenomena, of studentification and family flight, have long-term, potentially negative impacts on the college town. Therefore, we should turn our research toward an analysis of what exactly the economic effects of these trends can be.

¹² Joanna Sage, Darren Smith, and Phil Hubbard, “The Diverse Geographies of Studentification: Living Alongside People Not Like Us,” *Housing Studies* 27, no. 8 (November 1, 2012): 1057–78, doi:10.1080/02673037.2012.728570.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1068.

We will begin with an analysis of studies focused on sustainable student housing markets in areas highly affected by studentification. As this process begins to occur in neighborhoods, the community has two options it can choose to approach the issue: embrace it, or fight it. If the community chooses to embrace the increased student population, there are a multitude of benefits that this increased demographic can provide, which will be discussed the close of this section. While scholarly research specifically focused on this issue is quite scarce, there are some previous studies that allow for a better understanding of some of these impacts on a macro level.

We must first ask, how should this issue be addressed? Scholars who studied these events in the United Kingdom suggest that the best option to confront these questionable pieces of property is by having increased contact with the property-owners or landlords.¹⁴ The suggestion provided by these experts is that the local municipality should report any issues with specific student rental properties to the university or college. These universities or colleges then provide their students with information about rental properties and landlords in the area, excluding the ones who have been particularly troublesome for municipalities and tenants in the past. By doing this, the researchers identify a system of carrots and sticks is created for the landlord, tenant(s), and municipality. The landlord is encouraged to maintain good standing with the town to receive the publicity awarded by the university to potential future tenants- thus alleviating the property-owner or landlord of some of their marketing duties. By doing so, the municipality and university would also be encouraging more watchfulness on the part of the landlord over their tenants, for fear of losing their preferred status in the town.

¹⁴ Julie Rugg, David Rhodes, and Anwen Jones, "Studying a Niche Market: UK Students and the Private Rented Sector," *Housing Studies* 17, no. 2 (March 1, 2002): 289–303, doi:10.1080/02673030220123234.

The researchers also found that this type of program provides an opportunity for both the universities and municipalities to have more direct contact with student renters, many of whom might be entering into a rental agreement for the first times in their lives. Such first-time student renters are often unprepared and do not understand the scope or magnitude of responsibilities they may be undertaking by agreeing to join a neighborhood or small community. This type of program also allows the students to have access to important materials or informational sessions where they can learn how to be a “good neighbor” and realize the challenges that accompany living side-by-side with individuals who may have very different lifestyles, community expectations, and schedules.

As studies from those same experts revealed, “Across the UK, the majority of institutions provided a range of services, the most common being accommodation lists (84 percent) and lists of letting agents (61 percent), lists of approved landlords (37 percent), and tenancy advice services (73 percent).”¹⁵ These findings demonstrate that, when available, significant numbers of stakeholders will take advantage of programs which enrich the information they have about the agreement to which they are entering. Clearly, these results highlight the efficiency of those programs mentioned above in the cases examined.

Examinations of sustainable neighborhoods undergoing studentification also delve into the economic implications the process may have on the surrounding area, particularly with respect to the housing market. There is a complex economic issue faced in college towns across the country, as their major economic contributors are typically gone for at least four of the twelve months of the year. While it can be argued that their economic contributions during the time they are inhabitants of these towns is immense, their transient nature may sometimes do more harm than good, particularly if properties are being modified solely with students in mind.

¹⁵ Ibid., 194.

This is particularly a challenge for small college towns, as opposed to urban areas, as their commerce may resemble a “seasonal economy” where retail business owners and landlords must find ways to survive the lean months in which their number of potential consumers and tenants is dramatically reduced.

However, if the process of studentification is more closely overseen by the proper municipal officials, there can be a significant benefit to the housing market of these areas. One way of doing just that is to mandate or incentivize property renovation to homes that have deteriorated significantly in value over the years. Scholars state that, “regeneration is often most needed in those areas where 'the process of reversing economic, social and physical decay ... [has] reached the point where market forces alone will not suffice.’”¹⁶ Sometimes, regeneration and renovation of older homes is the only way to garner any value from them. This parallels contemporary expectations as much research in this vein shows that students are constantly demanding higher quality housing than the previous generation. If deteriorating or dilapidated off-campus residential homes are being renovated with the desires of students in mind, more students will be attracted to the university and the town. The attractiveness of that neighborhood or area will also increase as there will be fewer “eyesore” properties to decrease the value of the rest of the neighboring homes.

Another potential response to studentification is to draw students out of these neighborhoods and into purpose-built housing. When students were interviewed on their preferred form of housing it seemed that many of their concerns could be satisfied with purpose built housing. Students preferred the space and freedom of a house, but also expressed a desire to

¹⁶ Claire Robinson and Neil Adams, “Unlocking the Potential: The Role of Universities in Pursuing Regeneration and Promoting Sustainable Communities,” *Local Economy* 23, no. 4 (October 28, 2008): 277–89, doi:10.1080/02690940802408003.

live in neighborhoods already populated by students.¹⁷ It was found that students typically did not want to worry about maintaining a home, paying for bills separately, making too much noise, and generally just wanted to be enjoy neighbors with similar lifestyles as their own. It seems as though purpose built housing could be a preferred mode of accommodation for most students, and the appeal of purpose built housing may potentially draw students out of other areas of town where their presence alongside long-term residents may lead to clashes.

Some concerns were also expressed over purpose built student housing. In order for purpose built housing to remain appealing to students, it would have to be built in an already “studently” part of town. Purpose built housing also may increase the density of students within its surrounding neighborhood. This would mean that the surrounding neighborhoods would also become more appealing to students, and would these areas could potentially convert to student housing over time. Such housing must be sited strategically, so as not to simply relocate the disturbances and tensions within existing long-term residential neighborhoods to another part of town.

Other case studies in the UK have looked into students and the issues they cause, or seem to cause.¹⁸ Some have found that many issues caused by students are due to their inexperience in managing a house.¹⁹ Crime is also an issue, not in the sense that students are committing it, but that they attract it. Students can be easy targets of theft because they are less likely to leave their properties locked, and possess multiple expensive and easily portable items (TVs, computers,

¹⁷ Clement Macintyre, “New Models of Student Housing and Their Impact on Local Communities,” *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 25, no. 2 (November 1, 2003): 109–18, doi:10.1080/1360080032000122598.

¹⁸ Moira Munro and Mark Livingston, “Student Impacts on Urban Neighbourhoods: Policy Approaches, Discourses and Dilemmas,” *Urban Studies*, September 19, 2011, 0042098011419237, doi:10.1177/0042098011419237. *Student Impacts on Urban Neighbourhoods: Policy Approaches, Discourses and Dilemmas*, Munro, M. Livingston

¹⁹ Hubbard, “Geographies of Studentification and Purpose-Built Student Accommodation.”

phones, entertainment electronics). Students are new to the responsibilities of adulthood, and it seems that simple education may be of some help.

The same case studies show that students are not always the direct cause of “studentification.” Researchers found that many student rented homes are not homes that permanent residents would necessarily want anyways. Some homes are not appealing, family friendly homes, but are ones that only really appeal to students. Some people “have this utopian ideal that if it wasn’t for the students then everything would be fine, but actually because of the housing stock – it’s never going to be an area for middle-class white families, which is what those who moan the most tend to want.”²⁰ Researchers also found that many policy responses to studentification are “motivated by an unfounded negative bias against students.” Policy should not focus on just controlling the amount of students in certain neighborhoods, but should also attempt to correct the fundamental behaviors that are problematic.

Perhaps though, one of the most important points stressed in the research literature is that this is not a problem to be faced solely by communities and their residents. Institutions of higher education have important responsibilities in responding to housing needs and may be better-poised to provide solutions that are attractive to their students, via on-campus housing. By constructing more modern housing, studies from the UK have shown that students will be much more attracted to and likely to attend that university. This also alleviates the town’s burden of having to house as many students in order to accommodate or respond to a university’s growth over time. Also worth noting is that:

“...[s]tudies in North America indicate that student in halls of residence typically have higher GPAs, retain their grades longer, take more credit hours and have a better

²⁰ Munro and Livingston, “Student Impacts on Urban Neighbourhoods,” 1687.

opportunity to form connections with faculty members on campus. They also have an opportunity to be more involved in leadership opportunities on campus.”²¹

In the above quote, we see that universities who wish to achieve important goals such as academic excellence, degree completion, and student retention should be looking to the on-campus housing solutions that facilitate and further these goals for their students.²²

In summation, if there is to be a long-term solution to this issue, studies seem to suggest that a collaborative effort from both the university and the municipality is required to achieve any significant amount of success. The findings of studentification seem to reaffirm the Town of Orono’s concern of a “tipping point”, or a degree of student integration into a neighborhood beyond which point, the cultural and visual aesthetics of the area suffer negatively, with possible negative implications for housing costs. Moreover, studentification has received much negative publicity and there is tangible evidence of its ill-effects. However, a review of the literature suggests that this trend, through careful planning and cooperation among the relevant stakeholders, can be addressed and should not be viewed in solely negative terms. There is a good deal of evidence suggesting that there are key benefits for a town that accommodates and cohabitates peacefully with its university.

Study Design

The primary focus of this study is to provide data and information that will help the town of Orono and the University of Maine respond to the current housing situation and determine a course of action to address the trend of “studentification” facing many Orono neighborhoods presently. We have conducted survey research with both the town and university stakeholders to

²¹ Hazel Christie, Moira Munro, and Heidi Rettig, “Accommodating Students,” *Journal of Youth Studies* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 209–35, doi:10.1080/13676260220134458.

²² Ray Bromley, “On and off Campus: Colleges and Universities as Local Stakeholders,” *Planning Practice and Research* 21, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 1–24, doi:10.1080/02697450600901400.

better understand the current state of studentification within the town, and to assist in formulating the best course of action in response. We provide our own thoughts about how to improve the relations between long-term residents and the students who live among them, and ways that the stakeholders might work to facilitate more productive forms of inter-group contact. In addition, the information/analysis produced addresses directly the town's concern of a tipping point in order to provide a foundation for considering the long-term sustainability of single-family homes within Orono's neighborhoods. Our hope is to help university administrators and the town of Orono produce collaborative and data-driven policies and strategies that not only addresses the concerns of a tipping point, but also proactively address the social and behavioral trends found within our research.

Research Methods

There are many stakeholders who require consideration here, and we have attempted to gather information from as many of them as possible to assess the effect of studentification in Orono. First, and most importantly, are students and Orono residents, who will were electronically surveyed on their perceived relationships with one another to set the groundwork for our research. The University is a stakeholder as well, and we have interviewed numerous administrators and staff on what, if anything, has been done and may be done by the university in the future. to combat this issue. Specifically, we interviewed a diverse group of university administrators and staff, local police, town staff. As noted at the outset, there have been recent shortfalls in the University of Maine System's budget that have directly impacted the University of Maine. The subsequent strategy to grow incoming classes has led to more students seeking off-campus housing intensify the concentration of University of Maine students in the community and their contact with Orono residents. We want to gauge the university's awareness

of these ripple effects, and determine whether they have future plans for supplying more on-campus housing, as some studies within the literature review suggest is the appropriate university response to studentification. If the university can supply more housing, the trends towards studentification could be potentially be abated in Orono family neighborhoods. In short, what the University of Maine does, or is planning to do in the near and medium-term will help us to craft more adequate policy suggestions at the close of our report.

University of Maine students and Orono residents were be asked to participate in roughly fifteen-question survey intended to identify the effects of studentification in Orono. One part of the survey was geared towards our stakeholders' satisfaction of the relationship they have with one another. With this method, we attempted to gauge how satisfied both residents and students are with their relationships with one another, the town, and the University of Maine. Surveys for both groups also collected demographic information related to gender, age, socio-economic status, education, and ethnicity. The survey measures utilized both quantitative measures (such as satisfaction rating using a 5-point likert scale) and qualitative measures (open-ended survey questions in which respondents provide their thoughts and perspectives in a text-box). The qualitative measures, though harder to quantify and represent can add richness and depth to the quantitative results.

For students, on-campus and off-campus students were presented with slightly different survey questions. Off-campus students were asked questions which examined their knowledge of expectations set by other members of the community, knowledge of their rental agreements, perceptions of non-student neighbors, and whether they would have prefer to have stayed on campus for the duration of their experience at the University of Maine. On-campus students were asked similar questions but more geared towards their preparation for moving off-campus. The

questions focused on where they turn for information about off-campus housing options, and in what ways are they being prepared to transition into off-campus communities. For residents, we asked questions which gauge their perceptions of students, knowledge of community contacts in case of disturbances with student neighbors, their overall levels of satisfaction with the character of their neighborhoods, and whether they think the presence of student neighbors in the communities is an issue that had been adequately handled by the town and the university. In both surveys, we examine respondents' perceived relationship with the university, as well as one another. We want to gauge the capacity of this relationship, and find ways all parties could contribute to improve these relationships for the future

From examining other similarly-situated universities, and our meetings with Town Planner Evan Richert and Town Manager Sophie Wilson, we know that one method of addressing sometimes tense relationships between student and long-term residents is through proactive events that aim to establish regular and positive social contact *before* tensions arise. Thus, we asked questions about possibilities for improving the relationship ranging from local get-togethers to "good neighbor" contracts. By asking residents and off-campus students about their openness to these ideas, we can understand the complexity of the relationship and what ultimately would be the most effective way to improve it.

We also explored how familiar off-campus students are with their rental agreements, and how actively their landlords participate in the upkeep of their properties. Orono residents have complained about noise disturbances, poor waste removal, parking, and other issues that have occurred in these "problem neighborhoods." If we can begin to understand the dynamic between tenants and property owners in the town, we can decide what is necessary to make both more accountable for the day-to-day happenings at their residences. This information helped us

understand whether or not students understand the expectations set by the university, the community and local law enforcement for living off-campus. It is also crucial in determining what can be done to resolve disturbances and grievances between students and residents, which could potentially be creating “family flight” in Orono and negatively impacting the character of neighborhoods in the eyes of residents. These types of responses risk providing us information that does not adequately reflect the overall population due to selection bias. Those who have had exceptionally negative experiences may have been particularly inclined to respond, and this could make our sample less representative of the population as a whole.

Promotion of surveys and recruitment of respondent pool involved a variety of strategies to increase overall response rates. The survey was announced to residents on the Orono town website, and through the quarterly publication *The Orono Observer*. With support from the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center, we also sent a postcard announcing the survey roughly 1650 Orono property-owners. To recruit students, we sent out numerous announcements via the campus “FirstClass” messaging system, engaged in some direct emailing through the University of Maine Honors College, and also promoted the survey through social media pages on Facebook and through Twitter. For both groups, we incentivized participation and completion of the survey by giving participants the opportunity to enter a drawing for one of multiple \$25 gift cards to Verve, a local restaurant. None of the survey respondents identifying information provided for the drawing was linked to their substantive survey responses.

We launched the survey in late February and collected data for over a month until the end of March. The survey was anonymous, with the only identifying factor within the survey being whether or not the participant is a student or an Orono resident and some basic demographic questions. The survey was administered through an online survey platform known as Qualtrics.

Qualtrics is a survey design and analysis software that we will be using to conduct our research. It is offered through the University of Maine to students, faculty, and other staff for surveying, data analysis, and other research purposes.

An Overview and Analysis of the Findings

The following summary of findings will bring to the fore key trends that provide significant information regarding the trend of studentification identified above. It is important to note that the data presented here is not a scientific sample, may be subject to selection bias (certain types of respondents are more likely than other to respond), and that these results, while telling, are not absolutely representative of the larger population. To begin, we will turn to the demographic information.

Demographic Findings

In total, there were 447 respondents to the survey. Of the respondent pool, 144 (32%) respondents identified as a resident of the town of Orono that is neither a student nor an employee; 63 (14%) indicated that they were a resident of the town of Orono that is employed at the university; 197 (44%) respondents identified themselves as students at the university. Of those 197, 44 students (23%) were living on-campus, 90 (47%) were living off-campus, and 44 (23%) in another community (e.g., Old Town, Bangor). The remaining 43 (10%) respondents identified as “Other”, and were asked to further specify. In specifying, 42 of the 43 indicated that though they were not directly affiliated with the university, they were connected to it indirectly (e.g., a spouse or significant other is employed there, they are retired from working there).

Of particular importance in our findings was the large number of individuals not connected to the university in any way. This seems to be a positive indication that even those not affiliated with the school are still very receptive and willing to communicate in meaningful ways

about municipal policy issues and matters affecting the relationship between the university and the town. Such a willingness seems to bode well for future work on this issue undertaken by both the town of Orono and the University of Maine.

In addition, the originally small pool of respondents (14%) who indicated having ties to the university apart from being enrolled or working there is actually sizably larger. Nearly all those who responded “Other” were in some way connected to the school, even more so if one considers those who own property that they rent to students (landlords). Therefore, we can conclude that the number of residents who are not enrolled at the university, but are in some way associated with it, is closer to 23-24%. This shows us that the number of residents both associated with and independent of the university are split fairly evenly within the town. That is, the university and the town are not separate entities, and both have significant ties to one another. This ought to incentivize both stakeholders to work together, as both are demonstrably affected by these housing issues.

With these numbers in mind, we must now turn to those actual issues. We have posited above that many of these issues may be combatted better through communication, education, and proactive “soft policy” measures designed to create and reinforce positive inter-group relations rather than through the passing of strict regulations. Within the data below we have found various indicators that this original orientation towards how to address the issue is more or less sound. Additionally, we have seen little support in the data for the feared “tipping point,” which suggests that the issues confronted by Orono neighborhoods are a function of more complex factors than simply student density within individual areas. In actuality, what we see is diversity and complexity within both students and long-term residents. With regard to students it is more

likely, in fact, that problem neighborhoods a function of a few “bad eggs,” rather than the overall density of students, as will be evidenced below.

In what follows, we will address in summary the general findings of the study. We will turn to neighborhood satisfaction of residents broadly, and then address their satisfaction specifically as related to the density of students in their neighborhood. The results of those comparisons will aid us in seeing that the issue is not, in fact, the prevalence of student rentals within resident neighborhoods. Through the use of further data comparison we will analyze the quality of the management of student housing, and infer from that the importance of active landlords. Finally, we will turn to students’ perceptions of themselves, and show that they are more likely in need of proper education on the subject of off-campus living, rather than “hard policy” changes and moratoriums.

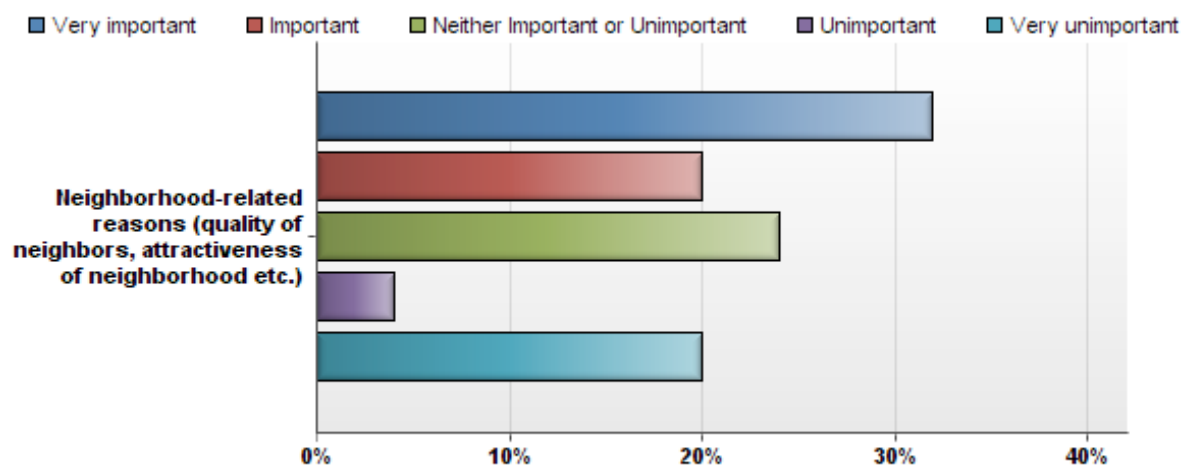
Neighborhood Satisfaction

When respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the neighborhood in which they live, we received of 182 “satisfied” or “very satisfied” responses (83%). Of the remaining, 16 (7%) indicated that they found themselves “neutral” on the subject, and only 14 (6%) identified themselves as “unsatisfied.” This data seems to suggest that the issues linked to studentification in neighborhoods are not as widespread as vocal minority might make it seem. In fact, the overwhelming majority are at least satisfied with their current living arrangements.

Elsewhere, we inquired whether or not non-student residents are likely to move out of their Orono homes in the near future. Of the 217 resident respondents, 23 respondents signaled they were planning to move at some point within the next 10 years. Those 23 residents were then asked to indicate what factors were most important in their decision. The options available included family-related, work-related, housing-related, and neighborhood-related issues. There

was also a fifth option, where respondents could enter additional qualitative data if they felt a different reason was driving their desire to leave. Those indicating “other” cited reasons ranging from high taxes to climate to availability of land for farming. Two significant findings were found here surrounding how residents responded to both neighborhood-related reasons (quality of neighbors, attractiveness of neighborhood, etc.) and housing-related reasons (quality of home/apartment, more affordable housing, etc.).

Fig. 1: Factors Driving Family Flight



Of the 23 respondents likely to move, over 50% cited neighborhood-related reasons as either “important” or “very important” in their decision to move. Neighborhood-related reasons were more important than any other factor here. Such data seems to align with the theory of family flight introduced above (an increasing loss of non-student residents precipitated by differences in cultures between residents and students). Because of the influx of students in some neighborhoods, there is an ever growing chance that of those incoming students a few will behave poorly, and the disturbances that those few cause lead directly to long-time residents seeing these behaviors as both a nuisance and a disruption to their everyday. Qualitative data suggests that the lack of cohesive relationships between students and long-term residents may be

intensifying their poor perceptions of each other, leading some residents to find it easier to leave the area than to continue putting up with these behaviors in their neighborhoods. However, it is not students alone who are to blame for this trend.

Approximately 46% of respondents to this question cited housing-related reasons, including quality and affordability of homes and apartments in Orono as an important factor in their decision to leave. This is an area where we must be mindful that selection bias may be at play, where those who are disgruntled enough to pursue leaving the area would be very likely to participate in a survey that may allow them to vent their discontent. Up to this point, much of our thinking surrounding this issue centered on neighborhood/neighbor issues and their influence on residents' quality of life. While neighborhood-related reasons are the main factor residents in our sample are leaving, it is clear that the quality and affordability of homes and apartments in Orono is also an important factor that is influencing residents to leave.

We must keep in mind, however, that this finding is only indicative of the 23 respondents looking to leave, and not the entire sample of our 217 resident respondents. In a different question in this survey, over 80% of the entire sample of resident respondents signaled that they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the neighborhoods in which they live, and that they had had overwhelming positive experiences with their student neighbors. Because the majority of our respondents are at least satisfied with their neighborhoods and only a small percentage are looking to leave, we can hypothesize that these issues are only occurring in "problem areas" of Orono neighborhoods where there could potentially be a large density of students, or perhaps a subset of those students who are causing disturbances at the rate that leads to negative perceptions of studentification. While some of these issues are due to student behaviors, we also examine the lack of upkeep of student rental properties by property owners as

a potential factor a bit later in the discussion. Because our community partners are interested in resident retention, a richer understanding of this issue is necessary in our policy recommendations. Firstly, however, we turn to data directly related to the issue of student density within resident neighborhoods.

Student Density within Resident Neighborhoods

We cannot simply look at individual preferences or trends, as many responses in this vein seem to contradict themselves (for instance, a majority of residents simultaneously saying that they have positive interactions with students while also stating that student behavior is a serious problem). To uncover clearer information we have used an analysis strategy known as “cross-tabulation,” where the answers to two different questions are compared, to attempt to assess positive or negative relationships between different variables. Below, we have cross-tabulated the responses residents gave on two questions: first, “On the street that you live, approximately how many properties have homes or apartments that are rented to students?” and second, “What is the overall satisfaction with the neighborhood in which you live?” The data of the respondents is represented in the chart on the following page. There were 217 total respondents to these questions. Of the total respondents, only 1 responded with either “Not sure” or “Prefer not to answer.”

To simplify this comparison, we collapsed the five point categorical variables into two subsets. Thus, we transformed a 5-point scale into two groups: high-density (3 or more student rentals in one’s neighborhood) and low-density (0-3 students student rentals in one’s neighborhood). We did the same with the five-point scale for satisfaction, collapsing the separate categories of satisfied or very satisfied into a single category, and doing the same for

those who were dissatisfied. This gave us a sample of respondents who were *at least* satisfied or unsatisfied with the quality of the neighborhood.

Fig. 2: Student-Home-Density and Neighborhood Satisfaction

	Very Satisfied, Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied, Very Satisfied	Not sure, Prefer not to Answer
0 to 1, 2 to 3	78	1	5	0
3 to 5, 5 or more	83	13	14	1
Unsure, Prefer not to answer	20	2	0	0

Cross Tabulation: Questions “On the street that you live, approximately how many properties have homes or apartments that are rented to students?” and “What is the overall satisfaction with the neighborhood in which you live?”

As can be seen from the data above, there is no tangible relationship between those who are at least unsatisfied and those who live in high-density student neighborhoods. Only 14 out of the 111 high-density respondents were unsatisfied (roughly 11%), while 83 were satisfied. In contrast, 5 residents out of 84 living in low-density neighborhoods expressed some measure of dissatisfaction (approximately 6%). The difference between respondents living in high and low-density neighborhoods is negligible. Equally noteworthy, there are 181 respondents who were at least satisfied with the quality of the neighborhood they lived in, with only 19 total respondents who are unsatisfied. Thus we can say that dissatisfaction, as expressed in one’s satisfaction with their neighborhood, is not substantially higher in high-student-density neighborhoods than it is in low-student-density neighborhoods.

From these findings we can say two things. First, this results challenge the idea that there may exist a “tipping-point” within neighborhoods in relation to the number of student rentals, whereby greater numbers of student rentals will have an increasingly detrimental impact on the quality of a neighborhood and those residents' satisfaction levels. We see here that data does not

support the idea that there exists some sort of specific quantity of student rentals that, when reached, will lead to rising levels of dissatisfaction with one's neighborhood.

Another scenario that may be useful to consider in terms of these findings is the “bad egg” theory, which would support the idea that it is not the *quantity* of student homes, but rather the *quality* of individual residents, which dictate neighborhood satisfaction rates. In this case, dissatisfaction could arise whether there were five student rental properties in a neighborhood or only one. To that end, it becomes much more difficult to say that there needs to be some sort of restriction on the number of student homes permitted in one neighborhood or street, or regulations placed upon the proximity of student homes to one another. It would be impossible to control the quality or satisfaction within that neighborhood when only considering the quantity of student homes and a neighborhood with one particularly problematic student rental property could have tangible, negative consequences for all residents. What may be possible, however, are restrictions or proactive strategies to control or encourage standardization in the quality of those student homes.

Quality of Student Homes and their Impact on Student Behavior

Below, we have cross tabulated the results of the responses residents gave to two questions. The first question is, “In your opinion, how well-maintained are the student rental properties in your neighborhood?” The second question is, “To what extent do you agree with the following statement- the behavior of students in my neighborhood is a problem?” The data of the respondents is represented in the chart below. There were 210 total respondents to these questions. Of the respondents, 35 responded to the question surrounding maintenance with either “N/A (not sure if rental properties are in my neighborhood)” or “Prefer not to answer”. 45

respondents answered “Indifferent”, “Prefer not to answer”, or “Not sure” to the question surrounding student behavior in their community.

Once again, we collapsed categories on the data to simplify the comparison. As before, we collapsed respondents who selected “Strongly agree” with those who selected “Agree” and “Strongly disagree” with those who selected “Disagree” to the question surrounding student behavior. This gave us a sample of respondents who *at least* agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Fig. 3: Maintenance of Student Rental Properties and Student Behavior in Communities

	Above average compared to other properties in my area	Average compared to other properties in my area	Below average compared to other properties in my area	N/A, Prefer not to answer
Strongly Disagree, Disagree	8	41	24	15
Indifferent, Prefer not to answer or unsure	0	19	12	14
Agree, Strongly Agree	6	23	42	6

Questions “*In your opinion, how well-maintained are the student rental properties in your neighborhood?*” and “*To what extent do you agree with the following statement- the behavior of students in my neighborhood is a problem?*”

The data above shows clearly that 78 of the 210 total respondents to the question surrounding property maintenance of student rental properties stated that the student rental properties were “Below average compared to other properties in my area”. Conversely, only 14 respondents said maintenance of student rental properties in their neighborhood was “Above average compared to other properties in my area”, while 83 felt that their level of maintenance was “Average compared to other properties in my area”.

These findings also indicated that of the 77 total respondents who agreed that student behavior was a problem within their community, 42 of them also felt that student rental property

maintenance in their area was below average. Conversely, of the 88 who disagreed that student behavior was a problem within their neighborhood, 41 of them also felt that student rental property maintenance in their area was at least average and 8 felt it was above average. In light of this, we can state with some confidence that there is a correlation between poor or subpar upkeep of student homes and perceptions of negative or problematic behavior on the part of those student tenants.

Once again, a few important insights can be teased out here. Firstly, the quality of maintenance and upkeep for student rental properties is obviously a serious issue for the respondents of our survey. If 78 out of 210 (or roughly a third) of respondents are saying that student rental properties in Orono neighborhoods are below average, this issue needs to be addressed. Many students, as will be shown below, do not know what their options are, or what they ought to expect. They are novices when it comes to living on their own. Moreover, if the qualitative data is reliable, many student renters have had negative experiences with landlords who feel as though they have little obligation to provide services to student renters as they view those students as more or less helpless. As our interviews with University of Maine officials have shown us, quality of student rental properties is one of the major concerns from the university's standpoint. This data definitely lends significant credibility to those concerns. It suggests that student renters are living in sub-standard environments and some landlords may be well aware of this.

Also worth noting is that there appears to be a relationship between the quality of maintenance in student homes, and resident perceptions of the behavior of students within those homes. Unfortunately for this question, it does not lay out clearly what “the behavior of students” means for respondents. It could mean any number of things for our respondents:

traditional college stereotypes of parties and late night activities that can be detrimental to a small community, or it could mean much more specific behavior (e.g., inconveniently parked vehicles, unkempt yards/lawns, knocked-over trash barrels). Some of these issues may be addressed by stricter enforcement of municipal codes already in place or other more innovative ways to ensure compliance, while others may necessitate new codes being put into place. It is unfortunate that this study does not discern between the two definitions, though these results still provide us with useful information moving forward.

Also noteworthy is the possibility that property maintenance is related to perceptions of student behavior. This could mean that respondents interpreted the question as asking whether their lack of maintenance translated into them exhibiting negative behavior as neighbors. This would be quite understandable if the respondents believed the student residents were supposed to be responsible for property maintenance, instead of their landlords. This could also be a microcosmic indicator of a much larger issue: poor landlord maintenance of student rental properties. That is, if students who would otherwise behave well under normal circumstances (e.g., an active landlord who continues upkeep and inspections of property) do not have a sense that their landlord is taking an active role in the safety and maintenance of their property, it will be reflected in their behavior. Perhaps they will not care for the property with diligence or care that they might otherwise exhibit with a more attentive and meticulous landlord. Or they will feel as though they can get away with exhibiting disruptive or negative behavior that has negative impacts on their neighbors.

So far we have dealt mainly with residents and their opinions of their neighbors and their neighborhoods. However, it is still necessary to discuss students' perceptions of their own

behavior, as well as their knowledge of off-campus living. In so doing, we may find more ways to prevent the bad egg scenario.

Self-Perception of Students and their Behavior

We also asked undergraduate students living on-campus in the town of Orono to provide their opinion on a series of statements in terms of “To what extent do you agree with the following statements?” (see figure 4). Assuming our respondent pool is indicative of trends in our larger population, we can take away a few things from the data. A sizeable population of on-campus students (roughly 55% of our respondent pool) agrees that they are knowledgeable of off-campus housing options that exist. What is equally noteworthy is that only 37% of respondents agree that their resident assistant (RA) can provide them with information regarding off-campus student housing. A staggering 47% of student respondents expressed that they are unaware with the specifics of signing a lease agreement. In connection with that question, 46% of respondents would prefer not to live on campus in the future. Lastly, an overwhelming percentage of students strongly agree that they know what a good neighbor entails and the responsibilities that come with living on your own.

What this suggests, then, is that on-campus students have disproportionate confidence (one might even say hubris) regarding their capacity to live on their own, as well as a certain level of ignorance regarding what resources are out there. They overestimate the information that RAs possess (evidenced below), and while admitting they do not know how to sign a lease, believe they are knowledgeable of how it is they may go about living on their own. Finally, nearly half (46%) indicate they’d like to live off-campus in the future, so clearly the issues of hubris must be addressed. We see, then, that the expectations of students, both of what off-

campus living entails and what education and informational services the university offers, are skewed in such a way that may directly lead to negative experiences and disruptive behavior.

Fig. 4: Self-Perception of Students

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer
I am knowledgeable of my off-campus housing options.	4.7%	23.3%	14.0%	30.2%	25.6%	2.3%
I am knowledgeable on the specifics of signing a lease agreement.	4.7%	41.9%	23.3%	18.6%	9.3%	2.3%
My resident assistant (RA) can provide me with valuable information regarding off-campus student housing options.	4.7%	18.6%	34.9%	30.2%	7.0%	4.7%
I would prefer to live on-campus in the future.	29.5%	15.9%	20.5%	13.6%	20.5%	0.0%
I know what being a good neighbor entails.	0.0%	0.0%	4.7%	25.6%	62.8%	7.0%
I understand the responsibilities that come with living on my own (without a parent or legal guardian).	0.0%	0.0%	4.7%	27.9%	58.1%	9.3%

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

The following data represents off-campus students responses regarding their experience with their RAs in the past.

Fig 5: Off-Campus Students and Past Experience with Resident Assistants

	Undergraduate student living off-campus in Orono
Strongly Disagree, Disagree	72%
Neither Agree nor Disagree, Prefer not to answer	24%
Agree, Strongly Agree	4%

Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statement?-"My resident assistant (RA) can provide me with valuable information regarding off-campus student housing options."

The most notable aspect of these results are that 66 (roughly 72%) of respondents selected either "Strongly Disagree", or "Disagree" to the question of whether or not their resident assistant was capable of providing them information regarding living on one's own. Equally notable, though, is the fact that only about 4 of the respondents actually "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." There is also a large portion of respondents (roughly 24%) selecting the "Neither Agree or Disagree" option.

To add to this, we also found that 43% of students claimed to not be knowledgeable about the specifics of signing a lease agreement. With the lack of education taking place at the university before students move off campus for good, we speculate that this could be a contributor to the disturbances and problematic behavior that residents have claimed to be experiencing in this survey, and which has informed the broader public debate over students in the community for years. Students seem to be unknowledgeable with the responsibilities that come with a lease agreement as well as unprepared to live in a residential neighborhood alongside non-student, long-term residents.

If only 4% of the more experienced respondents to the survey feel as though their RAs provided them with information or educational resources, and over 40% of respondents who had

not yet moved off campus expected this information to be available, we can infer that this is an expectation that is not being met. Moreover, we can expect to see a largely underprepared student group moving off campus until a greater effort to meet this need is made. This obviously spells trouble for the surrounding communities because these students could potentially be jumping head first into a neighborhood without any prior knowledge or understanding of what living on their own entails, or what obligations they now have as neighbors.

In terms of moving forward, it is clear that this is one area that the University of Maine should play an active role in addressing. Through our interviews, we heard from multiple university officials that there were certain policies and programs in place that used to provide these services. Moreover, each official with whom we spoke seemed interested in reinvigorating those programs. Through reactivating those policies and engaging RAs with students prior to their journeys off-campus we could see a quick improvement in addressing some of these housing issues. This, in a sense, is the “low-hanging fruit” of this complex community challenge.

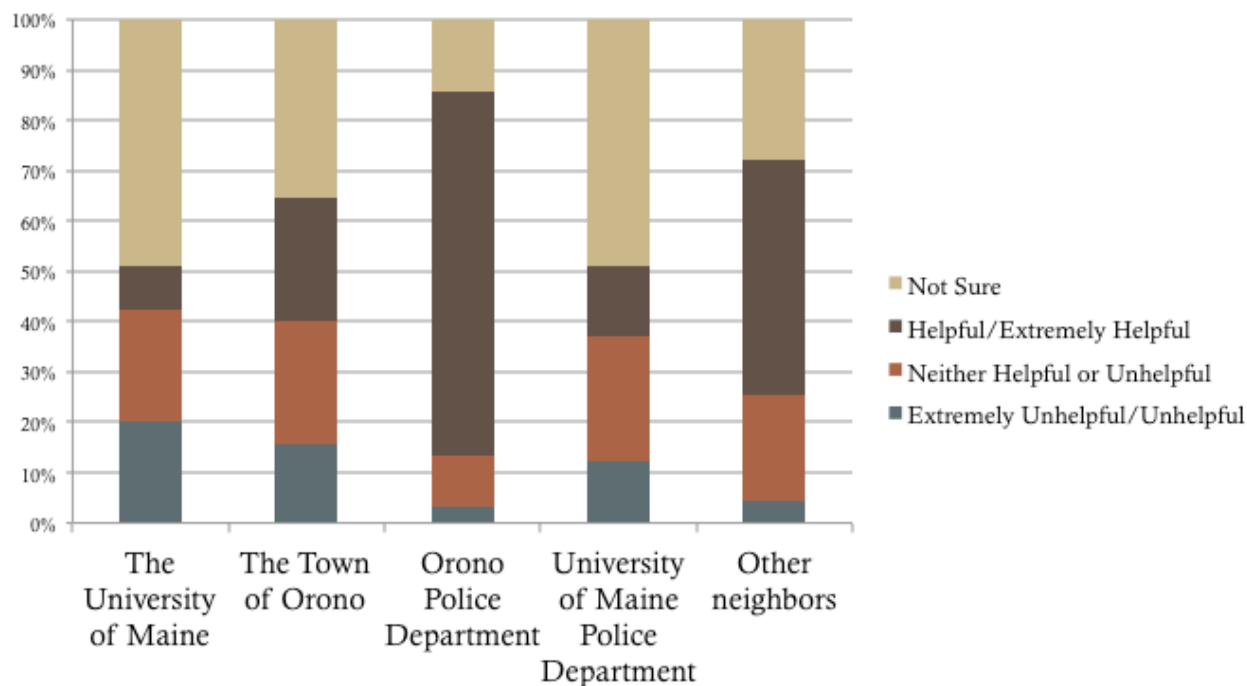
Having now addressed both resident and student attitudes surrounding themselves and each other, we now lastly turn to perceptions of agencies and entities within the town. Specifically, we will address the data surrounding individuals and their confidence in various organizations when dealing with neighborhood conflicts.

Conflict Resolution within Neighborhoods

The data below highlights what resources Orono residents feel are most helpful when dealing with student related disturbances. The majority of responses in most fields (except for “Orono Police Department” and “Other Neighbors”) selected “not sure.” This indicates a high degree of ambivalence that residents hold in who to turn to the event of a student-related disturbance. It may be that some of the frustration toward student related disturbances may be

because residents feel like they do not have resources available to them to deal with a disturbance.

Fig. 6: Resident Perceptions of Who To Contact About Student Disturbances



Question: *To what extent do you consider the following resources helpful to turn to in the event of a disturbance with a student neighbor?*

The data suggest that the Orono Police Department is perceived as the most helpful to citizens in the event of student disturbances with 72% of residents rating them as either “extremely helpful” or “helpful”. This indicates that residents do, at least, have some resource available to them in dealing with student disturbances. However, this translates to a higher strain on the Orono Police Department. If residents only feel comfortable contacting the police for student disturbances that means the Town is forced to allocate more law enforcement resources to combating student disturbances. This, in turn, means that less police are available to deal with other problems while a student disturbance is taking place. It also suggests that the method of dealing with these issues is punitive and reactive. We think that such may not be the best setting

in which to educate students as to the negative impacts that their actions are having on neighbors. It even potentially reinforces adversarial, and ultimately detrimental, attitudes.

With “other neighbors” also scoring well (46% of respondents rating them as “helpful” or “extremely helpful”), we can see that a sense of community is not lost in Orono, and neighbors are still turning to each other for help. Firstly, this seems to indicate that a top-down approach using policy might be unnecessary, or even counter-productive. Secondly, it would be helpful to attempt to extend this sense of community to students themselves. If student neighbors were seen to residents as fellow neighbors, and not just as students, maybe residents would be more apt to approach a student with an issue. This would lessen the involvement of Orono Police Department in incidents, and potentially produce more productive forms of contact between students and residents resulting in fewer disturbances. It seems that the sense of community is already present, and that the work should instead be focused on attempting to make residents see students more as fellow neighbors as opposed to a distinct and seemingly foreign group.

To that end, the University of Maine is not seen as a viable resource in dealing with student disturbances. The university scored with the most “unhelpful” and “extremely unhelpful” responses (20%), and with the least “helpful” and “extremely helpful” responses (9%, with less than 1% as extremely helpful). Clearly, individuals in the community do not view the university as a resource to whom they can turn in the event of neighborhood-related issue.

Conclusion & Suggestions for “Next Steps”

In light of all the preceding we have determined a few key things. From our analysis of student-density and neighborhood-satisfaction related questions we can say with some certainty that the data debunks any sort of “tipping point.” To that end, the information regarding student renters and the upkeep of their property seems to highlight absentee landlords as a reliable

indicator of poorly-behaving students. These landlords, we feel, may only be dealt with through policy changes from the town. In addition, we found that residents have little confidence in the university when it comes to conflict resolution, and that the university seems to provide less information than is expected to their undergraduates regarding off-campus housing. Such issues, we believe, may be best dealt with by the University of Maine. With all these factors in mind, we now turn to a policy recommendation section in the hopes that we can build meaningful change upon this foundation.

Suggestions for Next Steps

In what follows, we will provide specific or general guidelines by which the town and university may work to address the issues brought to light above. First, we will discuss the issue of landlords. Second, we will turn to a “neighborhood ambassador” program that we highly recommend the university initiate.

What the University of Maine Can Do

The data indicates that there is still a sense of community (neighbors turning to each other for help) within Orono, that the university needs more involvement in off-campus incidents, and the Orono Police Department is strained by the level of dependence residents have on them in dealing with student disturbances. An effective policy response could be a program to help integrate students into the community.

Programs which would bring students and residents into contact with one another early in the year/semester could help residents to see students as neighbors, making students more approachable to residents. This could be done through university/town sponsored events early in the year (social events or community BBQs for example). In turn, if students and residents can

solve their issues amongst themselves that would translate to a reduced dependence on Orono PD in dealing with student disturbances.

The neighborhood ambassador program seems the most viable of the options in this vein. Such a program would allow for the university to play a larger role in the lives of off-campus students. Not only could these ambassadors help to facilitate productive contact between residents and students, but they can also act as a way to identify problematic behavior/students. If the university had a better way to identify said problematic students, they could then punish negative behavior themselves.

Neighborhood ambassador programs could also provide students with information on general neighborliness. As noted above, when students in the survey were asked how helpful resident assistants were in providing information on off-campus living before moving off campus, 70% of students said that their RA did not provide them with information. Neighborhood ambassadors could act as a way for the university to educate students on general neighborliness before issues arise. Additionally, a neighborhood ambassador could serve as a contact for residents when dealing with student disturbances. This would lessen the degree of ambivalence among residents in who to turn to in such events, and further alleviate the strain on Orono P.D.

The program itself would consist of off-campus students who meet certain requirements (GPA, and off-campus status being the primary requirements), who are each in charge of a certain neighborhood/street within the Town. The students would be supervised by a university administrator, expected to meet with said administrator on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, informed of relevant information regarding their particular area or neighborhood, be asked to disseminate

said information to students, act as a resource for students, and act as a liaison between the community, residents, and students.

Most programs expect the Ambassadors to attend town meetings, plan neighborhood events, deliver newsletters, go door-to-door to speak with neighbors, and think critically about community issues.²³ Such a tactic is by no means new. In fact, many universities are implementing this sort of program (including the universities of Michigan, Montana, Albany, Ohio, and Oregon), and they have been reported successful so far.

In terms of expense, which is most likely a concern of the university, they might like to know that typically ambassadors are compensated for their time. The University of Montana pays Ambassadors 8.50/hour for an average of 6-7 hours a week, and Ambassadors are allowed to work no more than 75 hours per semester. If the University of Maine worries how they might afford this, it is not unlikely that such a program might be partly funded through federally-provided work-study. Moreover, it is not unheard of for such programs to receive financial support from their town. The University of Montana received \$10,000 from the neighboring town of Missoula. The town found the program successful enough to invest in it, and Mayor John Engen said the program, “pays big dividends for the city.”²⁴

If the town of Orono were to view the ambassador program as a viable option to increase the appeal of neighborhoods both for their current and prospective residents, they might be convinced to invest in that program for the sake of future dividends brought on by a rising population. Such a program would, in addition, allow the town to be kept better aware of problematic landlords, an issue we will turn to now.

²³ University at Albany-SUNY, *Off-Campus Ambassador Program*

²⁴ *City Funds Expansion of ASUM Neighborhood Ambassador Program*

What the Town Can Do

To address the issues concerning landlords and student rental property owners, we can recommend some written policy suggestions. The qualitative data suggests that there is little to no accountability for these landlords currently and that they often take advantage of this fact. This is unacceptable. There must be a system in place to address this issue, particularly for those landlords who are habitual offenders.

One option we would suggest would be to put in place a system of fees or fines for those offenders who are repeatedly noted as being “bad eggs” within their neighborhoods. This would be coupled with the ambassador program, allowing the town and university officials to keep track of those properties with a boots on the ground approach. For example, if a student complains to their ambassador that their landlord is persistently negligent, then that ambassador will be obligated to contact the town, who may then either contact, or simply fine, that landlord. Moreover, it might be necessary to draw up policy (if such it does not already exist), wherein after a certain number of violations reported by the student ambassador or resident neighbor, the landlord has revoked the right to rent to students in Orono (at least until such time as they can show they are capable of meeting the bare minimum standards set forth by the town). By creating a direct contact link between those residents who can help identify these rental properties and the neighborhood ambassadors, the town would be able to reprimand those property owners or landlords.

Throughout we have recommended a “soft policy” approach, wherein no real ordinances are put into action by the town. In this specific case, however, we strongly recommend the town to go about the process of better holding landlords and homeowners accountable. It was related to us that a “property maintenance ordinance” had been discussed, but ultimately not put in

place. We recommend that any such policy related to better accounting for problem landowners be seriously considered by the town.

By way of summing up, we will restate that we recommend the town of Orono work to put in place greater means to hold landlords accountable. In addition, we believe the university ought to utilize resources they already have (resident assistants, as well as a new ambassador program, to better educate and inform their students of what proper, neighborly behavior consists of and what living on their own requires. Such responses, we think, will prove far more beneficial than strict policy or ordinance changes, as they will create a sense of community within the town that will prove invaluable in the long run.

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