

## **Friend or Foe...Who Benefits: the University, the Community or Both?**

**Scott Presslak, Sarah Floyd, Owen Kulemeka**

### **EVOKE**

#### **About the Ethnographer**

Sarah X. Floyd: An undergraduate student studying Urban Planning. Her future aspirations are to obtain a graduate degree and eventually own her own firm, thus continuing a family tradition of entrepreneurship.

Owen Kulemeka: A graduate student in communications. His previous experience includes research and marketing positions at various Washington D.C. lobbying firms.

Scott Presslak: An undergraduate student studying Urban Planning. His future ambition is to pursue graduate studies in transportation planning.

### **EXPLORE**

#### **Question**

**What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?**

The question our team will focus on is as follows:

In certain university and community based organization relationships, is the university perceived as a friend, foe or both.

In order to answer this question, we will focus on three relationships:

1. The relationship between the university and the Southeast Urbana Neighborhood Association.
2. The relationship between the university and The Urban League of Champaign County.
3. The relationship between the university and a Champaign-Urbana based organization that participates in the UIUC Extension program.

\*\*\*The issue of selection bias raised by our reviewers\*\*\*:

This is an extremely valid point. Following their advice, we have rephrased our question to read as follows:

In certain university and community-based organization relationships, is the university perceived as a friend, foe or both.

Our goal is not to come up with a conclusion regarding "all university-community based organization relationships." Rather, we are interested in these particular three relationships.

The issue of selection bias, albeit important, is of minor concern in this context (in other contexts, it is a key issue) because our findings are not meant to reflect the university's overall relationship with all community based organizations. In other words: We are not saying "Our findings will reveal the nature of the relationship between the University of Illinois and community based organizations."

Instead, our qualitative study is aimed at painting a picture of three, specific contexts. Our wish is that later scholars can build upon our work to carry out large scale studies whose conclusions can give a comprehensive picture of university-community based organization relationships at the University of Illinois.

## **Plan**

### **How will you go about answering your inquiry?**

At this stage, we have conducted preliminary research on the three organizations that we plan to examine: the Southeast Urbana Neighborhood Association, the Urban League of Champaign County and a Champaign-Urbana based organization that participates in the University of Illinois Extension program.

Through this research, we have identified:

1. The people we plan to talk to.
2. The research material currently available.

A summary of this research can be found in .pdf format at these web links:

<https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/okuleme2/www/Urban2/ResourcesandPotentialInterviewees2.pdf?uniq=-3rgpcc>

or

<http://tinyurl.com/f7jsq>

In this .pdf document we answer, in detail, the following questions:

- \* Who we plan to interview at the community based organization?
- \* Who we plan to interview at the university?
- \* What research material is available?
- \* What university documents do we plan to examine and how we plan to obtain the material?
- \* Other observations we have made.

The anticipated structure of our project paper is as follows:

### **\*\*\*Review of literature\*\*\***

In this section, we will examine the available written material (news articles, websites, reports) to gain an understanding of the current relationship between the university and the three community-based organizations.

\*\*\*Thesis/hypothesis\*\*\*

Based on our literature review, we will develop a thesis statement/hypothesis regarding the current state of the relationship between the university and the community-based organizations.

\*\*\*Testing the thesis statement/hypothesis\*\*\*

The next step will be conduct interviews with representatives from the university and the community based organizations. These interviews will be conducted in-person or online using web-based conferencing software:

<http://www.zohochat.com>

<http://www.campfirenow.com>

Our goals, through the interviews, is to:

1. To learn new insights regarding the university-organization relationship.
2. Determine whether our thesis/hypothesis was correct.

To prevent our interviews from degenerating into pointless fishing expeditions, we plan to plan to administer a similar set questions to all the organizations (modified to fit context). The goal is to learn information that can be compared and contrasted.

\*\*\*Discussion\*\*\*

In the concluding section of our paper, we will discuss our findings. Specifically, we will compare and contrast similarities and differences in the university's relationship with the three community based organizations.

## **OBSERVE**

### **What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?**

Progress as of October 25, 2006:

On October 25, we attended that first public meeting (there are more to come) on the Orchard Downs.

The university announced that it has established a website where residents can learn about the project:

<http://www.orcharddowns.uiuc.edu/>

The meeting was contentious.

Angry residents, one by one, accused the university of:

- \* Mishandling the early part of the project
- \* Ignoring the plight of graduate students.
- \* Proposing an environmentally unsound plan.
- \* Promising "the sky" but not putting anything in writing.

The tone of the residents, overall, was one of extreme dissatisfaction. Among the 20 residents who registered to speak (over 100 people were in attendance), not one commended the university of a job well done.

One lady, in her 80s, suggested she will place herself in front of a tree if the university decides to bulldoze trees.

We distributed several surveys to residents that we will analyze.

Our next step is to distribute the surveys to graduate students who live at Orchard Downs.

## **DISCUSS**

### **Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data**

We are now reaching the final stages of our data collection. There are three phases in how we have collected our data.

Phase 1: On October 26, we attended a public forum on Orchard Downs at the Carle Hospital in Urbana. At the meeting, we distributed surveys and conducted interviews. The meeting was extremely helpful because it also enabled us to hear at least 20+ residents present prepared statements to the University. These public statements were detailed, articulate and often personal.

They illustrated the extreme apprehension that the neighborhood surrounding Orchard Downs has toward the project. It also clarified why some residents feel that the University has not done a good job.

What struck us about this meeting was the absence of graduate students from the meeting. Among those who spoke, only 3 were graduate students. When we quizzed a senior official in charge of graduate housing, we learned that many students found the timing (on a school day) and location (accessible only by bus) inconvenient. This finding prompted to switch to the second phase of our research.

Phase 2: At this point, we brainstormed on the best way to reach graduate students and gauge their opinion. After debating, we decided that online (web) was probably the best method. This is the method the University usually uses to gauge student opinion.

After researching several methods, we settled upon the service provided by <http://www.questionpro.com>.

We designed a questionnaire that could be filled out confidentially over the internet. The questionnaire can be seen here:

<http://www.questionpro.com/akira/TakeSurvey?id=573239>

The challenge was to make sure that the survey completion process complied with IRB

guidelines. To ensure this, we drafted the following email. Owen sent it to the president of the Graduate Employees Organization at UIUC. The president then forwarded to all graduate students who are on the union's mailing list:

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Graduate Students:

I need your help!!! My name is Owen, a first year communications graduate student pursuing a minor in Urban Planning ([www.recoveryst.org](http://www.recoveryst.org)).

\*\*\*\*\*What I am doing?\*\*\*\*\*

I am conducting a survey on the university's efforts to rebuild Orchard Downs (family graduate housing here at Illinois).

\*\*\*\*\*How you can help?\*\*\*\*\*

Please help me out by filling a short online survey. Everything is online. Just click, click and you are done. The survey is confidential and your email address will not be recorded.

\*\*\*\*How can you take the survey?\*\*\*\*

Three simple steps:

1.

Please reply to this email saying you are interested in taking the survey.

2.

I will then provide you with PAPER copies of the:

A. Informed consent form: <http://tinyurl.com/ygvvgs>

B. Referral form: <http://tinyurl.com/yawnrj>

3.

If you agree to take the survey and have signed the forms (don't worry I will print out copies, deliver them to you to sign, and even collect them from you irregardless of location), I will THEN send you a link to take the survey online.

In summary: I will do all the grunt work. You don't have to worry about printing anything.

Thank you very much in advance.

Owen Kulemeka

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We received several responses from graduate students interested in taking the survey.

After each person had signed the consent form (we used campus mail to collect completed forms), each person was provided the link to complete the survey.

Obtaining consent in this format was a bit frustrating and in other circumstances, we would probably have used other IRB guidelines which allow web users to give electronic consent. However, since this study is based on a paper based format of consent, we utilized it. Irregardless of the additional work it created, we received several responses to the electronic version.

### Phase 3: Door to Door Interviews

Arguably the most enlightening but also frustrating aspect of the data collection process. Over a period of 2 days, we did the following:

A. Walked around the neighborhood of Orchard Downs and knocked on doors. When we gained consent, we distributed a short survey and conducted interview to find out what they know about the rebuilding process.

B. We rode the number “8” and “80” Transit Buses which service the Orchard Downs complex. During these trips, we asked students to participate in our survey and conducted short interviews to learn their views.

C. Canvassing the neighborhood surrounding Orchard Downs: We walked around, going door to door, talking to people who live in the houses surrounding Orchard Downs.

What are findings are beginning to show:

1. Graduate residents of Orchard Downs know very little about the rebuilding process. On many occasions, we encountered students who know very little or nothing at all regarding the changes that will take place.

2. Residents who live in the neighborhood surrounding Orchard Downs are very aware of the process.

3. Many residents who will be directly impacted (whose houses are adjacent) to Orchard Downs are either selling or renting.

## **REFLECT**

### **Link**

#### **Connect with other resources and materials.**

If we were to connect this with any other resources or materials we would use the Dudley Street Movie because it has similarities to the Orchard Downs Project.

Although Orchard Downs is not located in a bad neighborhood, they are trying to

displace residents just like the in the movie.

We believe that some of the tactics utilized by activists groups in the movie could also work in this movie. In addition, a need exists for graduate students to form a coalition and explore how they can work with the university to create alternatives for affordable housing.

It is clear that the model of the university providing subsidized housing for graduate students is one that many universities find outdated. The lessons from the movie and sources can be used to see whether an alternative form of affordable graduate housing is possible.

## **Implications**

### **Could your findings have broader implications beyond this inquiry?**

This study illustrates that the university needs to do a better of ensuring real participation and not token participation. The findings illustrate that one of the key publics, graduate students, are not being informed. This is problematic because it could create problems in the future.

In its participation, the university needs to make sure that there are no "participation" holes. For example, the University's public meetings on this issue are being held in locations inconvenient for graduate students. In the future, these issues in ensuring access need to be addressed.

## **OTHER**

### **A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc.**

1.

A copy of our final paper:

[https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/okuleme2/www/UrbanPlanning4/FloydKulemekePresslak.pdf?un  
iq=oe75i](https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/okuleme2/www/UrbanPlanning4/FloydKulemekePresslak.pdf?uniq=oe75i)

or

<http://tinyurl.com/yjzoec>

2.

The new website of the Orchard Downs Residents Coalition which we created as a result of this project.

<http://orcharddowns.blogspot.com/>

3.

The new Orchard Downs video we have made and is now playing on Youtube.com and will be coming to a cable television near you.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PI\\_K1P\\_Ymw0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PI_K1P_Ymw0)

Note.

The file below, uploaded to ilab, does not appear to link correctly. Ignore it and refer the file above or simply click here to view our final report.

<http://tinyurl.com/yjzoec>

***Files:***

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