

# Parking, Crime, and Partying: A Case Study of Community-University Relations

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## BACKGROUND

- Universities increasingly strive to become engaged with the community and to maintain positive community relations (Dempsey 2010).
- Unequal power distributions can impede community-university relationships and partnerships (Peterson 2009).
- Researchers were interested in analyzing the relationship between a mid-size state university and its surrounding rural community.

## THE CURRENT STUDY

We collected data on factors contributing positively and negatively to the university-community relationship.

## METHODS

### Participants

- N = 13 community and university stakeholders
- The following stakeholders were of interest in this study:
  - University:** Current Students, Student Organization Leaders, University Employees, University Administration, and University Police Officers.
  - Community:** Community Residents, Community Religious Leaders, Community Political Leaders, Police Officers, Lawyers, Small Business Owners, News Reporters/Media, and Leasing Officers/Realtors.

### Procedure

- Various stakeholders were interviewed on their personal opinions on community-university relations and their recommendations on how to improve the relationship.
- Stakeholders were interviewed with semi-structured protocol and also given the option for the interview to be tape recorded
- A **PhotoVoice** project, conducted by the researchers, supplemented stakeholder interviews. PhotoVoice entails using photography to highlight research themes.

### Measures

The following three questions were asked to each stakeholder:

- What kind of relationship does Salisbury University share with the larger Salisbury Community? What kind of relationship should the University have with the broader community?
- Follow-up: Do you think that there is a positive or negative relationship between the University and the broader community?
- Are there any major problems in the current relationship between the University and the Salisbury community?
- What do you think could be done to improve the University's relationship with the community?

Additional questions were asked to specific stakeholders.

## DATA ANALYTIC PLAN

- Stakeholders' answers were compiled in a cross-case meta-matrix.
- A comparative analysis was conducted to identify key themes across stakeholders.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Problems and Suggestions for Improvement

- Stakeholders were relatively consistent in their identification of key problems in existing community-university relations.
- Three factors impeding community-university relations were identified. Stakeholders had numerous suggestions for improving the relationship. Themes are summarized in Figure 1 below.

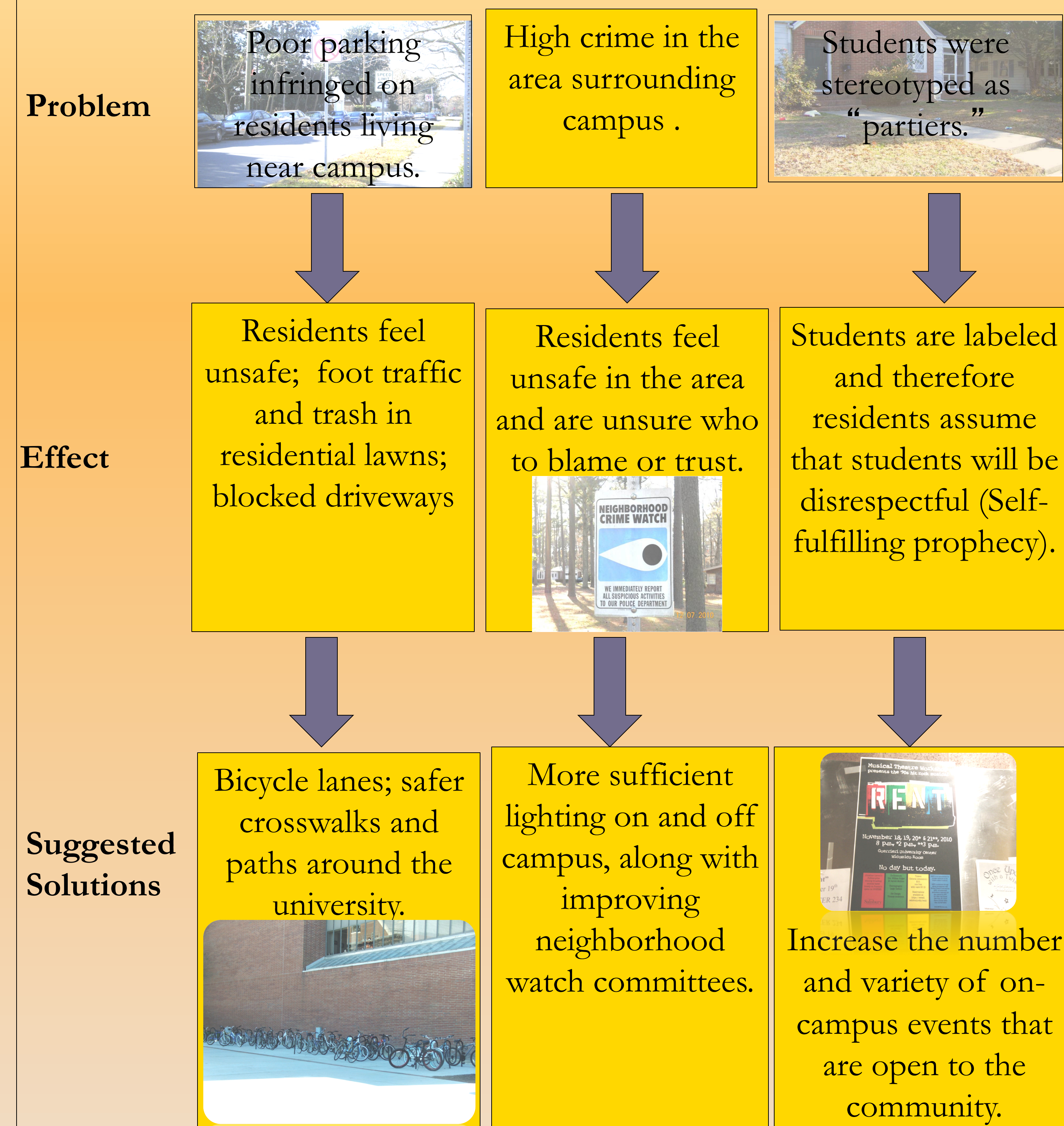


Figure 1. Themes across stakeholders.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION, Cont'd

### Positive Aspects of the Relationship

Community service projects benefit community relationships. —  
Alumna

The university is a fast-growing multicultural university which promotes unity. —  
Local Reverend

The University is good for small business, it brings income, jobs, and opportunities as well as job security and stability. —  
Local Business Owner

The University creates positive growth and it is the reason for the jobs. —  
Salish News Reporter

## CONCLUSIONS

- Students should feel welcome and safe in their learning environment and community members should benefit from the presence of a University
- Offering stakeholders an opportunity to voice their opinions may lead them to feel more empowered to voice concerns in the future
- Ecological interventions improve not only the ease of mobility around the community, but also the overall appearance
- Improving community-university relations is overall beneficial to the community as a whole and the community will function better if students and local members can cohabitate.
- Improving relationships with the community also facilitates collaborative research partnerships.

### Next Steps

- On the basis of these findings, we are establishing an on-going student committee whose goals are to accomplish the suggested solutions
- This student group will also further identify and prevent other situations that could potentially inhibit positive community-university relationships.