



In September 2012, UWM officially adopted a set of framework principles for working with the associations that represent six neighborhoods in the immediate vicinity of the University (MENA: Milwaukee Eastside Neighborhood Associations). The Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Michael Laliberte, the Vice Chancellor of University Relations Tom Luljak, and the UWM Chancellor, Michael Lovell, signed the agreement. In this agreement the University committed to follow the agreed principles to advance the quality of life issues that had been degrading neighborhoods for more than a decade.

By late August 2013, it became clear that the University was not following the principles that had been agreed to. When the MHNA Board expressed our concern that the Agreement was not being followed, the University immediately cancelled the next meeting and has not followed up with us since. An invitation by the MHNA Board to the UWM Dean of Students to discuss the situation was declined.

The triggering event for the collapse in late August 2013 occurred at a meeting of the collaborative group a week earlier at which the University presented its plan of action for the new fall semester. The plan included several elements most of which were not the product of the collaboration itself. Among them was the creation a “good student neighbor recognition program” and a “block resource fair”. These programs were simply presented as fait accompli by the University. More importantly, the programs did not result from an evaluation of best practices and do not include any meaningful ways to measure success. They are little more than symbolic efforts.

The following notes provide some additional context for what the four principles are and how the University has failed to comply.

Formal Communications

It should be self-evident that direct communication is necessary if organizations are going to jointly address problems. Toward this end the Agreement calls for the involvement of MENA leadership. Per the agreement, meetings must be scheduled so that the work schedules of members of volunteer organizations can be accommodated (they haven't) and they must involve all parties to the agreement. It is unacceptable that the University has failed to notify the largest and most directly affected neighborhood within the MENA umbrella of any collaboration meetings subsequent to their cancellation note of August 27th.

Best Practices

It should also be self-evident that success is most easily attained if one looks to successful programs and policies from other places. UWM is not the only university that has been faced with off-campus student misconduct issues. And yet, it appears that the University has made no effort to learn from failures and successes elsewhere. No summary of comparative analysis has been produced even though any time spent in the Internet with a search engine will turn up examples of both.

In fact, a good example of how to successfully address issues comes from within the UW System itself. UW-Stout has taken a much more serious position on the subject of student conduct issues, enacting many of the very policies that UWM officials have claimed are not

allowable under UW System rules.

Following best practices can prove enormously advantageous when formulating solutions to problems. But only if you bother to look at them. UWM agreed to this principle but has notably failed to comply with this critical component.

Methodology

The Agreement requires that a formal methodology be adopted. It did not mandate any particular methodology but “none” was not an option. Still, “none” was the route taken. As a result, it has been impossible to define specific and measurable policies under the agreement. Instead, University officials offer vague measures of success. Specific numbers are rarely provided although in the absence of individual student-identifying information, there is no good reason for hiding these details (how many students received which kinds of sanctions).

One of the “measures” which is often offered is a reported low level of recidivism among students involved in misconduct. The argument largely relies on the belief that being called into the Dean’s office is sufficient deterrent to make sure the miscreant has “learned his lesson” and that particular individual is no longer a problem.

However, this is a mistaken view of the problem, as a brief statistical illustration shows.

We know that there are about 6000 UWM students living in the 53211 zip code, most of them in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the University. Let’s make a few assumptions...

Assume that on any particular party night (Thursday, Friday, or Saturday) ten percent of the students engage in some revelry. This is likely a low estimate. Let’s also assume that on average, over the course of the school year, on any particular party-night, MPD writes ten nuisance. (Probably, on average, this is a bit high.)

Given these assumptions, the chance that any one student will be issued a citation is only 1.7%. In other words, you are very unlikely to get a citation in the first place. Now, what is the chance of getting two citations on any two party-nights? Almost zero, .03%. If you are a habitual miscreant, not learning your lesson the first time, but attending 30 evenings of noisome revelry, the chance of getting caught twice are still less than one percent. Recidivism rates are not the sort of program monitoring that the Agreement called for. It is a sham measure of success.

A much better measure is available. MPD collects data whenever a complaint is registered. This data is available and provides a much more accurate “read” of misconduct in the neighborhood than end-of-the-line recidivism-rate measures. A successful disruption-reduction program should show significant declines in the number of complaint calls to police. Why not use those sorts of measures?

Accountability

The fourth principle of the agreement called for all parties to be accountable for results. Programs and policies were to be clearly described to all stakeholders along with clearly describing how programs were to be assessed. None of this has, in fact, occurred. Instead, the University seems to have simply maintained a public-relations stance of appearing to cooperate while failing to follow through on the clear and explicit commitments made in September 2012.