Putting Students First Means Health and Safety Must Come First
By Robert Mock and Eli Capilouto

Our success as a university begins and ends with one goal: Putting students first in everything that we do.

Nothing is more important in pursuit of that goal than ensuring the health, safety and well-being of our students. And that also requires that as a university, we contribute to the health of the neighborhoods that make Lexington a special place.

For the last several months, a diverse group from the university and the community we serve has been examining student health and well-being as well as neighborhood vitality. Toward that end, we've taken an unflinching look at how other universities have grappled with issues such as alcohol and substance abuse, student codes of conduct, education and counseling.

We've engaged in candid dialogue with neighbors about how our students can provide even more community service and be better partners in breathing new life into distressed neighborhoods.

We know that the vast majority of our students positively contribute to the life of our community. They give thousands of hours in community service through events like FUSION and DanceBlue, which raises millions for children's cancer research efforts.

In the midst of the recent celebrations that occurred during the Final Four, Lexington police made 40 arrests. Of that, three UK students were arrested. Some of the headlines and pictures suggested a different story.

Yet we also know that three arrests is three arrests too many. And, at the same time, we know we must be a stronger, more productive neighbor ourselves. We haven't always lived up to our own expectations in that regard.

We know, for example, that despite our best of intentions years ago in making our campus largely dry, we haven't changed whether students consume alcohol. We've only impacted where they do it.

From a candid examination conducted with our neighbors and the city, we are now charting a more comprehensive and positive direction forward for our students and the neighborhoods that make up our borders.

Between now and the start of the Fall 2014 semester, a permanent committee of concerned citizens and university community members will flesh out the details of a number of policy initiatives, designed to improve both safety and quality of life for our campus and community. Those policy points will include:

- Expanding the Code of Student Conduct beyond campus boundaries.
- Revising the university's alcohol policy to allow consumption on campus under clear guidelines and conditions by those of legal age.
- Developing an active enforcement task force between the university and the city to coordinate reporting and handling of violations of the student code of conduct.
• Instituting a medical amnesty policy to encourage students to report instances of substance abuse or potentially dangerous situations.
• Encouraging students who live off-campus to establish positive relations with neighbors and neighborhoods and providing more formal opportunities for town forums for both UK and the broader community to exchange ideas and discuss concerns.
• Developing a year-round community service program focused on near-campus neighborhoods.
• Rehabilitating and leasing university-owned houses and apartments in adjacent neighborhoods to faculty and staff.
• Improving and increasing student-focused prevention and education programs throughout campus and the surrounding community.

Some critical questions still must be answered. Where exactly is alcohol allowed on our campus and in what contexts? What does it mean to expand the Student Code of Conduct? What are the university's borders -- the county line or does it extend across the globe to take into account student conduct on a Spring Break trip or in the midst of an education abroad experience?

Together, we will answer these questions. Together, we are committed as a university and a community to charting a positive, mutually beneficial, path forward.

We know that the tapestry that comprises our city is only strong as its most worn threads. Together, we can weave a more vibrant, stronger and positive community for everyone who calls Lexington home. That includes our students and our neighbors.

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