

Foster town and gown cooperation

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In Our Opinion

The Eastern Washington University campus is once again full of students. These students shop at local grocery stores, eat at local restaurants, perhaps they play their music too loud and occasionally drink beer on their lawns.

Many locals admit that Cheney wouldn't be the city it is without Eastern. The city's Web site has a link to the university on its homepage. Eastern's Web site seems to tout its proximity to Spokane more than its home in Cheney.

It seems to us that there are a whole lot of opportunities for collaboration that the university and Cheney haven't taken advantage of. Admittedly there are several complicated issues surrounding the college and the city, but for now let's just talk about some potential positives that would help and enrich both communities.

Though it's understandable that the city and the university want to keep their own identities, there's no reason not to work together. The university has a lot to offer citizens: professors with expertise, top-notch facilities, archives with local significance and students with a need for real-life experience.

Local businesses need to talk with corresponding university programs to set up internships and partnerships that will help business and revitalize the local economy.

City government could employ graduate students to work as consultants on their various projects, saving some money and getting those young professionals engaged in the community. Open up the lines of communication and both communities will benefit.

Of course, communication is a two-way street. The city of Cheney is growing and planning for a bright future. Eastern should be proud to be located in Cheney, and should plug the advantages of living and working here to students, not just during their college career, but after college.

Spokane already has two colleges; if students wanted to go to school in Spokane they had plenty of opportunities, so Eastern administrators and teachers need to take a second look at Cheney. More students should engage with the community, too. Whether its participating in volunteer work, attending a "Choices for Cheney" workshop, landing a local internship or, ahem, voting in local elections, young people have an opportunity to develop as individuals as they contribute to this community. It's truly a win-win. Above all, community building is about forming relationships. As technology advances and text messaging becomes its own language, we encourage everyone to get out of his or her personal bubble. Go outside. Talk to people you don't already know. Ask questions. Attend a meeting or patronize a local business. Be curious. Be a community.

Some of the things we've talked about are already happening, it's true. It's certainly possible that this editorial board doesn't know everything. But our doors are open to publicize events and programs that bring these two communities together. So please, if you have an idea or an ongoing program that develops positive relationships between Eastern and Cheney, we applaud it and want to know about it. We hope to hear these things are going on; otherwise, we'll assume there's some work to do.