

Town and Gown: How Poly Royal and the Riots Shaped the  
Relationship Between Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo, 1960-1993

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Under the bright sunshine of a spring afternoon in San Luis Obispo in 1903, Theodore Roosevelt commended the citizens of San Luis Obispo (SLO) for their “courage and common sense.”<sup>1</sup> These SLO residents worked hard for several years to alert fellow Californians to the need for a new state school, and eventually, their hard work paid off. In the first fifty years of the college existing in San Luis Obispo, residents and students started to warm to the others’ presence. While in the first twenty years the school was more focused on building up the internal structure of the campus and recruiting a more robust student body, after this period the school began to spread its influence and service into the community of San Luis Obispo. Students and the community worked together to promote war efforts during the first and second world wars, and in 1938, President Julian McPhee “opened the campus to outside visitors to revamp Poly’s educational curriculum and promise to its students.”<sup>2</sup> This opening to campus visitors was crucial in establishing the campus as a public space in the town.

In later years, President Kennedy sought better relations with the town of San Luis Obispo by selecting members of his administration to serve on the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>3</sup> These two presidents’ efforts to engage the school with the community proved to be successful; as the school entered the second half of the century, a strong relationship with the community became more necessary. Beginning in the late 1950s, working partnerships between the city of San Luis Obispo and the students at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) were well underway. This relationship, with humble beginnings, grew over

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Loe, *The First Hundred Years* (Santa Barbara: Companion Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

the following thirty years to represent something with much more depth and complexity. The two groups worked together closely to establish bonds across various events, social justice movements, and more. Especially after the second world war, the world grew thirstier for higher education, and California boasted a “pioneering higher education system with global brand-name appeal that [was] unmatched by any other state.”<sup>4</sup> In a city much more reminiscent of a small coastal town, an ever-growing public university and a boisterous student population presented an equal amount of opportunity and trepidation to the residents of San Luis Obispo. The residents were understandably hesitant to embrace a large university that would only continue to grow in size, both of student body and of campus space. Quickly gaining and meeting the definition of a “traditional college town,” or having at least twenty percent of a city’s residents be college students, the city of San Luis Obispo had a big decision to make.<sup>5</sup> It was up to the community of San Luis Obispo to decide whether to welcome the youthful energy of the students and engage with the campus as an integral part of their city, or to control and regulate the actions and lives of the students. The City Council thus worked hard to make sure that they were meeting the residents’ needs while also supporting the campus events.

The clearest way to observe this working partnership between the school and the city is through analyzing how the relationship looked during the planning of Poly Royal. Poly Royal began as “Farmers’ Picnic” and lasted around twenty years, before discussions of a new campus

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<sup>4</sup> John Douglas, “Bring the World to California: A Global Hub for Higher Education,” *The Journal of California* 4, no. 1 (2014): 54.

<sup>5</sup> Blake Gumprecht, *The American College Town*, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008, 4.

open house emerged to celebrate the ‘learn by doing’ philosophy.<sup>6</sup> McPhee supported the creation of the new annual event as a method of publicizing the school and including the community in campus events. The inclusion of the community in campus activities during Poly Royal weekend was not present from the start, but quickly became a staple piece of the annual celebration. Poly Royal attracted massive crowds across the state and county, and citizens of SLO began to show pride in it as a staple San Luis Obispo tradition:

“Poly Royal is tired feet and a head full of ideas. Poly Royal is imagination wide open. It’s a hot dog or a fruit smoothie or a frozen banana. Poly Royal is a handful of brochures or jeans dusty from walking around the horse unit. Poly Royal is ponderance. How do those in charge do it? Poly Royal is a poster: signs of every size and color leading to this display and that area, this exhibit and that demonstration. Poly Royal is crowds, walking, looking, listening in silence, nodding in approval. Poly Royal is the carnival, the sports events, the knick-knacks sold in the Craft Center. Poly Royal is a show window of the progress of Cal Poly University.”<sup>7</sup>

As this opinion piece in the *San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune* so aptly states, the weekend-long event showcased campus and community organizations implementing the ‘learn by doing’ philosophy to the fullest extent. The campus and community felt an equal sense of pride in this annual event, and their relationship benefitted greatly from this shared honor. This sense of mutual responsibility made their strong relationship even more necessary going forward.

This relationship between the campus and the community not only emerged out of a desire to engage with the other, but out of necessity. Events like Poly Royal presented themselves as a large-scale opportunity for the campus to collaborate with the city and for the city to engage with the students and the school activities. The budding partnership between the two could be seen most clearly in student member positions on the SLO City Council, in city

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<sup>6</sup> Loe, *The First Hundred Years*, 110-111.

<sup>7</sup> *San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune*, April 22, 1982, 9.

ordinances passed that concerned the school and students, and in financial support provided by the City Council for the various Poly Royal events.<sup>8</sup> This paper will chronologically explore the engagement between the campus and community from the 1960s through the 1990s. The importance of taking a chronological approach is that there was a give-and-take that started to exist in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in which both SLO residents and Cal Poly students realized that maintaining positive relations would be mutually beneficial. In the 1970s and 1980s, strong partnerships were being built and maintained, even throughout changes in university leadership. Toward the end of the 1980s, the relationship between the two groups was incredibly strong and continuing to grow in trust and communication. After the 1990 Poly Royal riots, however, the town and gown relationship between Cal Poly and the city of SLO became strained, with residents divided over how to deal with the damage the riots caused and over how to treat and view the student body moving forward.

Focusing on Poly Royal and centering in on the dynamic forms the city and campus partnership took when planning the annual celebration, this paper discusses multiple components of the town/gown relationship, highlighting in particular the steps that both the university and residents of San Luis Obispo took to build a healthy and successful partnership. Furthermore, the paper also explores the traditional issues and problems encountered by other colleges and universities when attempting to establish a foundation in their home city. The issues displayed in San Luis Obispo are far from non-traditional; the residents of SLO exhibited similar frustrations as other researched communities did, such as complaints surrounding alcohol, noise, and the

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<sup>8</sup> City Council Meeting Minutes, August 14, 1967, City of San Luis Obispo Open Records, San Luis Obispo, CA, <http://opengov.slocity.org/weblink8/browse.aspx>.

societal impact the college students had on their hometown. Lastly, the paper will seek to determine if the relationship between Cal Poly and the SLO residents was indeed a successful one. It will argue that Cal Poly and the city of San Luis Obispo both worked to overcome obstacles in order to achieve the shared goal of maintaining a good relationship between the two groups, but in the end, tensions built up and reached their apex during the 1990 Poly Royal riots. Throughout the thirty years being explored, one can observe through Poly Royal the various attempts both groups made at establishing a long-lasting working partnership. With the riots in 1990, that relationship was put to the ultimate test, but this paper will argue that while tense at times, the relationship withstood the pressure from the public and would remain a positive benefit to both groups for years after Poly Royal.

In general, histories of universities in the United States provide a brief glimpse into the building of a structured relationship between the campus and the community it is joining. Historian John Thelin “synthesizes modern scholarship across the whole of American history” to discuss the development of twentieth century colleges and universities.<sup>9</sup> He demonstrates that twentieth century colleges were often vibrant responses to the community’s needs and a source for anyone with a thirst for knowledge. College campuses took the form of a learning lab of sorts that the community could engage with and participate in, in order to advance not only their knowledge but also to contribute to the development of the university. His piece also shows that as far as history concerns, colleges and universities provided a lively energy to the community that was more often than not much-needed. However, it is difficult to assemble enough

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<sup>9</sup> W. Bruce Leslie, review of *A History of American Higher Education*, by John R. Thelin, *Journal of American Studies* 39, 2005, 140.

information to support a meaningful narrative about higher education. As Richard Storr mentions in his article, “the historian of higher education is frequently confronted with the difficulty of writing a comprehensive study either of the impact of education on the student or of the thinking of men having that education in charge.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, Douglas Noverr maintains that the campus culture was a “communal and shared experience with the community.”<sup>11</sup> This is a similar position to Thelin’s, yet Noverr approaches the history from a different angle. Here, he is choosing to focus on the already established university as part of the community’s culture. In contrast, Thelin predicts this amicable relationship by discussing the building of this shared campus/community culture.

Other historians choose to focus their research on the unique characteristics of the development of American higher education systems; this is especially true in the case of William Brickman, a historian who writes about the proliferation and pluralism of higher education institutions. With the phenomenon of proliferation, he argues that the “most conspicuous characteristic of the United States system of higher education is its size.”<sup>12</sup> Cal Poly could certainly be used as a case study for this argument for the rapid expansion of the size of institutions, as during this time period Cal Poly experienced extensive growth in student population. In the case of pluralism, Brickman discusses the diversification of the student body, mostly in terms of religion. Although this specific instance of variety of religion was not at

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Storr, “Academic Culture and the History of American Higher Education,” *The Journal of General Education* 5, no. 1 (1950): 7.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Noverr, *Michigan State University: The Rise of a Research University and the New Millennium, 1970-2005* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 99.

<sup>12</sup> William Brickman. “American Higher Education in Historical Perspective,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 404 (1972): 33.

prevalent at Cal Poly, in their first fifty years as an institution Cal Poly experienced the inclusion, exclusion, and re-inclusion of female students on campus, which definitely helped to increase the diversity of the student body. These themes of size and campus diversity also resonate with Martin Trow, who writes that American higher education is unique in its size and diversity and in its openness to all who gain a high school diploma. He also goes on to mention the sources of these unique characteristics, maintaining that the sources lie in American higher education's "peculiar origins and development, the central state's authority and the academic guilds' weakness, the college president's relative strength, and various markets' influence on an institution."<sup>13</sup> All of these sources ring true in the case of Cal Poly and also played a critical role in the establishment of town-gown relationships.

Historically, other literature on the topic of town and gown relationships is highly focused on a central theme of constant disruption of the peace by college students, where alcohol abuse and misuse are the prime culprits. Many scholars focus on the disturbances caused by a growing population of college students in a residential community. For example, Jason Speck argues in his article that while community members could benefit from "loosening up" and letting the students enjoy their youth, he maintains the position that communities were being "ravaged" by overly excited college students and their frequent partying.<sup>14</sup> This is far from a break in tradition; Speck's arguments follow the path laid out for him by multiple previous

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Trow, "American Higher Education: Past, Present, and Future," *Educational Researcher* 17, no. 3 (1988): 13.

<sup>14</sup> Jason G. Speck, "Walking the High Wire: The Impact of Campus Tales and Legends on the College or University Archivist," *Archival Issues* 35, no. 2 (2014), 119.

historians. Blake Gumprecht also discusses the effects that alcohol and partying have on college towns, saying that communities were overwhelmed by the increasingly large numbers of college students that live in their towns.<sup>15</sup> While alcohol and partying certainly do play a factor in the issues surrounding Cal Poly and SLO's strained relationship, the way the 1990 riots were handled was a unique opportunity where Cal Poly could model appropriate behavior and humility during a time of intense pressure.

Similarly, Scott Peters, Nicholas Jordan, Margaret Adamek, and Theodore Alter discuss that as a result of increased alcohol use amongst college students (or perhaps just an increased publicity of college partying in general), overall campus-community engagement has declined post-Vietnam War.<sup>16</sup> This could be a result of the community's growing distaste for the perceived campus party culture, but it also could be a larger generational or cultural difference that emerged as many college campuses grew to be more liberal than their surrounding conservative counterparts. Whatever the reason, these authors choose to funnel their research into focusing on the negative impact college campuses had on communities. While these are important perspectives, they are lacking an answer to many of the fundamental questions this paper seeks to answer regarding the town and gown relationship.

On the contrary, there are many authors who have a more positive approach to the topic of town and gown relations. Stephen Bruning provides academic context and research-based

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<sup>15</sup> Gumprecht, *The American College Town*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Scott Peters, Nicholas Jordan, Margaret Adamek and Theodore Alter, *Engaging Campus and Community: The Practice of Public Scholarship in the State and Land-Grant University System* (Ohio: Kettering Foundation Press, 2005), 272.

support for the argument, noting that community members who “attended campus events had a significantly more favorable impression of the university than those who had not attended an event.”<sup>17</sup> These findings are extremely sensible, as positive and consistent exposure and engagement tend to have overwhelmingly positive results. This framework for success is one that is well-matched in the case of Cal Poly and the residents of San Luis Obispo, especially when looking at Poly Royal as a community-wide event and one that showcased the entire city of San Luis Obispo with Cal Poly as its core. In the same vein as Bruning, Kevin Davis exposes similar proposals for success from the perspective of the university leadership. Davis maintains that the university relies on the community to build a strong sense of home for the students and to make the students feel more connected to their school and the area around it.<sup>18</sup> This reliance and trust displayed by the university and its leadership in the community shows the awareness the campus had in their role in not only educating but protecting their students, and their trust in the surrounding city to offer equal love and support to the students in their home away from home.

Thus, the literature on the topic is greatly divided, just as is the evidence for the case of Cal Poly and the city of San Luis Obispo. Some scholars quite stubbornly maintain that the college campus is at the greatest fault in any situation for overwhelming an innocent residential population with partying and excessive noise. Other authors counter this statement with the assertion that the campus is a public space in any college town destined to spread goodwill and a

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Bruning, “Town-Gown Relationships: Exploring University-Community Engagement From the Perspective of Community Members,” *Public Relations Review* 32 (2006): 127.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin Davis, “University and Community Partnerships: Building Successful and Mutually Beneficial Relationships While Addressing University Readiness and the Unequal Balance of Power,” presented April 2013, <https://www.ohio.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/upload>.

sense of community for all.<sup>19</sup> Whatever the position, however, many authors fail to address a specific incident between a campus and community with which to base these arguments on. Moreover, these scholars do not address equally both the town and gown perspectives in relation to any of their assertions. This paper seeks to chronologically explore the building relations and tensions between California Polytechnic State University and the city of San Luis Obispo as related to the production of Poly Royal, during a tumultuous three decades characterized by progress and protest.

### **1960 - 1970: Selling San Luis Obispo as a Part of Cal Poly**

Throughout the first fifty years of the school's history, San Luis Obispo warmed up to the idea of having a college in the town. A period greatly characterized by trial and error, the school and the community began to work with and depend on each other more and more, especially as Cal Poly experienced more national attention and attraction. Prospective students flocked to Cal Poly to visit the school, and these visits gradually garnered more tourist attraction for the city of SLO. The community and campus slowly realized, through the help and work of the influential President McPhee, that focusing on selling Cal Poly as a great school and San Luis Obispo as a beautiful place to live would be mutually beneficial. These patterns proved to the city and to the school that events like Poly Royal were reciprocally valuable to the success of both.

In this vein, the Cal Poly campus worked to make Poly Royal into an "inclusive event for everyone to attend."<sup>20</sup> This mindset helped the students plan Poly Royal events for the future that

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<sup>19</sup> Blake Gumprecht, "The Campus as a Public Space in the American College Town," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007): 89.

<sup>20</sup> "A Country Fair on a College Campus," *Cal Poly Report* 20, no. 36 (April 1970): 3.

involved the community more and showcased what Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo had to offer as a joint package. An important piece of this dual success was the marketing and press releases the school published that advertised Poly Royal as a program that was broadly varied, and that “every member of the family, regardless of age, should find activities pleasing to [their] interest.”<sup>21</sup> The forethought to include the entire family in the weekend events shows the students were focusing not only on their current students but the surrounding community and its visitors of all ages. This advertising spread to the city a contagious excitement for Poly Royal that was matched by the students in charge of planning it. Enthusiasm from the students was crucial in making the community feel like a larger and more important part of the event, and this feeling only bettered and improved their working relationship.

Their eagerness to plan an inclusive event being showcased in the university marketing reflected a cohesive campus that was welcoming and friendly to all. Administration publications conveyed their desire for the community to attend, and similarly, student newspapers showcased various advertisements from community organizations wishing them “good luck with Poly Royal” that year. One from Mid-State Electronic Supply Inc. reads “We hope that Poly grads, guests and students have an enjoyable Poly Royal weekend. Congratulations Cal Poly on 65 years of service to our community.”<sup>22</sup> This advertisement alone shows the mutual benefit that each group experienced as a result of collaborating on Poly Royal. Past the simple inclusion of community organization advertisements in a student-run campus newspaper, the advertisement also included a warm congratulations to the campus and its’ sixty-plus years of success in the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>22</sup> “El Mustang Special Edition.” *El Mustang*, April 29, 1966, 2.

community. The achievement of dual-advertising for the community and campus when it came to Poly Royal shows that both groups were extremely aware of the advantages of working together.

Community groups were well aware of the other benefits the extensive opportunities to advertise during Poly Royal brought. In 1939, Poly Royal became known throughout the state when a local radio station presented a series of programs to advertise Poly Royal.<sup>23</sup> Aside from the appearances of having advertisements in each other's publications, the SLO City Council advocated for the increased use of advertising during Poly Royal because of the tourism it brought to the city. In City Council Meeting Minutes from 1967, city council members argue the point that "Poly Royal brings wanted and needed tourism and visitors to the city."<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that high-ranking government officials recognized the benefit of funding various Poly Royal events and participating in them; their acknowledgement of the valuable nature of Poly Royal showed that they understood how that involvement would be translated into tourism for the city and more money raised for local businesses, especially during the weekend events. Tourism was especially important to the small, local businesses, who had been struggling to get back on their feet after World War II.<sup>25</sup> Thus, community organizations could be seen requesting booths, advertisements, and more during Poly Royal in order to get their name out there during a high activity time for the school and the community.

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<sup>23</sup> "Poly Royal 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition," *Mustang Daily*, April 23, 1982, 1.

<sup>24</sup> City Council Meeting Minutes, August 14, 1967.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

In addition to the students' eager willingness to include and invite the community to participate and attend, the faculty also showed these interests. While Poly Royal was a largely student-run production, the faculty had a hand in the weekend events as well, both in participating in and overseeing the events.<sup>26</sup> This campus-wide participation in building an engaged university proved to be a key factor in bettering this town and gown relationship. It is also crucial to acknowledge that this concept of the "engaged university" is one that has been addressed in literature and is defined as a "new way for the university to fulfill its functions in society, meeting the criticism that universities take public support but ignore the interests and concerns of the community."<sup>27</sup> These criticisms that universities only take support from the community could not be applied to Cal Poly during this time, especially as they sought to include the community in all of their events. While there definitely were instances of frustration from the community in their formative years, these feelings dissipated as the community got to know the students and the campus philosophy. There was also the necessity to redefine this "engaged university" concept, as it was often the case that the "links for universities to communities were through religion, particularly as many institutions were originally founded with religious affiliation."<sup>28</sup> This was clearly not the case for a public university like Cal Poly, but nonetheless, the concept of a university that was fully immersed in its community was sought after and achieved by Cal Poly and SLO during this time period.

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<sup>26</sup> "A Country Fair on a College Campus," 5.

<sup>27</sup> Loomis Mayfield, "Town and Gown in America: Some Historical and Institutional Issues of the Engaged University," *Education for Health* 14, no. 2 (2001): 232.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

Two key parts to maintaining an engaged university were the university administration and city officials and their working relationship. Scholar Stephen Gavazzi underscores the critical role that university presidents play in establishing functioning campus-community relationships, stating that “higher education leaders should take co-responsibility for engaging their host communities, especially before major events.”<sup>29</sup> Gavazzi is highlighting this crucial piece of any town-gown relationship as a make-or-break moment for universities to establish their commitment to their surrounding community. Therefore, any transition between university leadership was a crucial process to include the community on in order to provide a consistency in their relationship. Lawrence Martin chooses to address this effective partnership by attributing it to a shift from the old ‘government’ paradigm to the new ‘governance’ paradigm:

“The governance paradigm encourages the creation of innovative partnerships between the government sector, the private sector and the non-profit sector in order to harness the collective energies and strengths of all partners. Innovation has been defined as a new approach or technology that politely alters the operation of a service, program or administration process. The governance paradigm stresses the importance of synergistic partnerships that harness the strengths of each partner.”<sup>30</sup>

This model that Martin discusses can be applied to Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo, especially during this time period. Cal Poly experienced a shift in leadership that affected their community partnership, especially as it related to Poly Royal. After President Crandall retired in 1933, a fresh face emerged onto the scene, determined to change the perception of Cal Poly and increase

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen M. Gavazzi, “Campus and Community Leadership in the Spotlight: How University Presidents and City Managers View Town/Gown Relationships,” *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* 11, no. 1 (2018): 8.

<sup>30</sup> Lawrence L. Martin, Hayden Smith, and Wende Phillips, “Bridging ‘Town & Gown’ Through Innovative University-Community Partnerships,” *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector* 10, no 2 (2005): 1-2.

its status as a powerful public university that was invested in supporting its students and its supporting community members.

When Julian McPhee first took office in 1933, he set out to build a better and more innovative relationship between Cal Poly and the city San Luis Obispo. In his first ten years at the school, he diversified many academic programs and hired hundreds of new faculty members, which vastly increased the school's expanse in the community.<sup>31</sup> This expansion was not initially met with excitement from the community because they were nervous about the school overgrowing its' boundaries. However, they quickly realized that a larger public university would bring more attention and business to their small coastal town. Additionally, there were many buildings being constructed on campus during the time period to host more campus and community events.<sup>32</sup> Community members thus were excited about the progress the campus was creating for the entire surrounding area; they were entering the modern period because of this expansion that was propelled by McPhee. He both physically expanded the campus and also spread the campus influence into many areas of the community, like with his wife serving on many local committees and boards.

McPhee also modeled the relationship he expected the campus to hold with the community by participating in many personal collaboration efforts with community groups and organizations. The most visible of these collaborative projects was his interview and editorial article with the *SLO Tribune* in his outgoing year as university president. In the personal

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<sup>31</sup> Loe, *The First Hundred Years*, 67.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

editorial, Julian McPhee exalts the students and their successes, and he also commends the community for their openness and thirty years of excellent partnership.<sup>33</sup> McPhee was an important part of the school's increased and improved partnerships with the city, and he helped showcase the students in a positive and involved light. His efforts were noticed; the Governor of California at the time commented that "It is rare in the history of this state that one man could accomplish and contribute as much as Dr. McPhee has in the educational and public affairs of this state."<sup>34</sup> McPhee's dedication to building a lasting relationship between the campus and community proved successful, as both Julian McPhee and his wife's presences in the community helped engage the campus more in community activities and vice versa. Their efforts built a strong foundation for his successor, Robert Kennedy, to get his start at.

In a decade that was marked by consistent change and rapid progress, the community of San Luis Obispo and the Cal Poly campus worked together to build a better partnership. Key to this success was the realization of the mutual benefit that a working relationship provided and the hard-earned efforts that President McPhee made during his time to extend the campus influence even further into the community. The post-World War II years were a period of tremendous growth for America's universities, as the "flood of veterans and, later, the arrival of baby boomers caused enrollment to rise exponentially."<sup>35</sup> There was a large need for new faculty and new buildings, and Cal Poly relied on San Luis Obispo to adapt alongside the university to those changes and expansions. Especially in a small town like San Luis Obispo, the campus was

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<sup>33</sup> "Poly Royal '66," *San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune*, April 28, 1966, 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Gumprecht, "The Campus as a Public Space in the American College Town," 82.

a large public space for them to use and enjoy, and looking ahead, Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo were focused on advancing into the future together, relying on each other for constant partnership and support.

### **1971 - 1980: Working Together Towards a Better Future**

After President McPhee retired in 1966, the Cal Poly and San Luis communities had to handle the transition from McPhee to Kennedy. While both men had similar philosophies, McPhee's unwavering support for the students and their needs was not entirely matched by Kennedy. The new president and his wife were far more concerned with the community and garnering their support and energy. This focus was incredibly important, but Kennedy's increased rigidity with the students led to certain tensions between university administration and student leaders. Nevertheless, as the baby boomer generation entered adulthood, Kennedy prepared the city of San Luis Obispo for increased student enrollment and even larger-scale campus events.

With this increased focus came a growing divide in community sentiment towards the school. Some community members appreciated the increased attention, while others resented the school for taking over more and more of their public space. The Cal Poly administration was aware of this tension and tried their best to address not only the inter-community strains but the disagreements between the campus and community as well. In a 1975 Cal Poly Report, the administration addressed the "growing tensions that exist between our campus and the surrounding community due to the growing numbers of students on campus."<sup>36</sup> However, the

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<sup>36</sup> "Becoming Aware of Our Environment," 2.

report also stated that the community was still eager and willing to work with the campus on Poly Royal. Moving forward into the second half of the decade, the administration was thus determined to plan Poly Royal with respect for the student experience but also with appreciation for the surrounding community. This was a key mindset for the administration to hold as tensions were still present between the campus and the community.

A multitude of scholarship has been conducted on the topic of how campus and community partnerships are to be successful and mutually beneficial. Sally Leiderman addresses three issues in her research, saying that the “first issue is the importance of follow-through, the second is how community partners weigh the costs and benefits of the partnership, and the third is the influence of parity on community members’ attitudes toward their campus partners.”<sup>37</sup> Even through the difficult times, Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo were able to meet these expectations of successful town-gown relationships. Follow-through was evident in the multiple meetings university leadership would have with their city counterparts every month, and community partners, for the most part, saw the benefit of working with the students towards a successful event. Perhaps most important was the obvious equality that the school and community balanced — while at times one was greater than the other, at the end of the day both parties were concerned with achieving equity in their partnership.

With regards to the student experience, the administration was well aware of the opportunities planning a large event like Poly Royal provided. Administrators and faculty members were quick to defend and support the students in any requests they made to the city

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<sup>37</sup> Sally Leiderman, “Building Partnerships with College Campuses: Community Perspectives,” *The Council of Independent Colleges* (2002): 2-3.

council for support. An instructor for a horticulture class at Cal Poly saw a dual benefit from the Poly Royal exhibit that students put together, saying that “so many great things come out of Poly Royal, but mostly it gives the students a chance to know each other and really learn by doing.”<sup>38</sup> These opportunities, as previously mentioned, were ways for the students to appeal to the city council for funding for the event. Students learned many valuable life experiences from Poly Royal that they may not have in the classroom, and these lessons had a positive impact on the students and on the community. The instructor’s emphasis on Poly Royal providing a ‘learn by doing’ experience for the students was crucial to the community’s acceptance and support of the project; with this example specifically, the display even included a bonsai demonstration and visiting displays from the San Luis Obispo County Bonsai Society.<sup>39</sup> Many more student exhibits included demonstrations of their community counterparts, and this accommodation was appreciated by the citizens of San Luis Obispo. Their collaboration on event displays was a good role modeling of what a stable working partnership between town and gown looked like.

Poly Royal’s expansion meant both positive and negative things for the city of San Luis Obispo. Since Poly Royal’s inception, the event had nearly tripled in size, growing to be a “two-day affair involving the whole campus, and thousands of dollars.”<sup>40</sup> Funding for the event was not possible anymore without the assistance of the community; California’s public higher education system consistently “suffered dramatic long-term cuts in public funding, creating unprecedented financial challenges and threatening its ability to grow in enrollment and

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<sup>38</sup> “Struttin’ Our Stuff,” *Mustang Daily*, April 22, 1977, 2-3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

academic programs required to keep pace with the state's growing population."<sup>41</sup> Students were able to appeal to the city for funding through promoting their need to use extra monetary support for the protection of residents and visitors during Poly Royal. In 1979, the students were granted the largest allocation of City Council funds they had ever received, showing the community's continued support and equal investment in Poly Royal's events.<sup>42</sup> The support from the community indeed meant a lot to the campus, but even certain campus administrators saw the negative impacts that Poly Royal was starting to have as it became more commercialized:

"It has become more and more commercialized in a lot of ways. One disadvantage of Poly Royal now is that it is so big. When I first came to Cal Poly in 1952, you were able to see it in one day. Now you couldn't see it in a week it has grown so much. Student participation on a large scale is what makes the event everything that it is; with 250 students actively behind the event, Poly Royal has grown to exceed the expectations of its original founders."<sup>43</sup>

The commercialization of Poly Royal spurred rather contradictory feelings from campus and community members. On the one hand, the ever-expanding event brought more and more tourism to the city, bringing massive revenue to local businesses. As the festival got larger, it began drawing "more than 100,000 visitors to the city of about 41,00 residents and generated an estimated three million to five million dollars in business revenue."<sup>44</sup> However, on the other hand, more publicity meant more crowds of visitors to the small city. These visitors weren't always respectful to the small coastal town, and some citizens grew impatient of the event and its overpowering presence in the community.

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<sup>41</sup> Douglas, "Bring the World to California," 56.

<sup>42</sup> City Council Meeting Minutes, April 17, 1979, City of San Luis Obispo Open Records, San Luis Obispo, CA, <http://opengov.slocity.org/weblink8/browse.aspx>.

<sup>43</sup> "Struttin' Our Stuff," 3.

<sup>44</sup> Miles Corwin, "Cal Poly Festival Started in '33 Canceled After Rioting," *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1990, 1.

Evidence of Poly Royal's presence in San Luis Obispo are the many advertisements, articles and references to the campus events in city-wide publications like the *San Luis Obispo Telegram-Tribune*. In an April 1977 edition, articles address and advertise the weekend's events, including schedules, maps and posters. Businesses reserved spots in the newspaper to use the media attention surrounding Poly Royal for their own monetary gain; there was obviously a communal appreciation for the benefits Poly Royal had to give.<sup>45</sup> Despite using the upcoming Poly Royal to their advantage, the community of San Luis Obispo still harbored some resentment towards the event and the increasingly rowdy visitors it attracted. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1970s, the school was still actively working towards the goal of planning a Poly Royal each year that showcased not only the campus spirit but the pride of San Luis Obispo as well. The administration looked to the students to plan events that were inclusive of the entire student body and the surrounding community. There was a strong need for a cohesive planning committee, comprised mostly of students but advised by faculty members. Poly Royal's theme for 1980, "Transition Through Time," described the era perfectly — it encompassed "a broad spectrum of events and trends of the 1970s, and [alluded] to changes for the next ten years."<sup>46</sup> Not only was the school experiencing the transition in decades, Cal Poly entered the 1980s with a new president, Dr. Warren J. Baker. Looking into the 1980s, Baker was focused on setting the school on an altered master plan — one that would preserve the quality of education and depend less on

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<sup>45</sup> "Royal Celebration Shifts Into High Gear," *San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune*, April 21, 1977, 8.

<sup>46</sup> "Poly Royal Edition," *Mustang Daily*, April 25, 1980, 2.

state money.<sup>47</sup> His changed vision for the school took Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo's relationship in a different direction that would be greatly tested in the following decade.

### **1981 - 1991: A Once-Strong Relationship Experiences Setbacks**

Transitioning to a new decade while also experiencing a shift in university leadership, Cal Poly entered the 1980s with a fresh outlook on their relationship with the city of San Luis Obispo. While the school still desired to work with the community, they also began to look towards a future where the campus grew in population and academic auspiciousness, without the constraints the small-town mindset of San Luis Obispo placed on them. President Baker's new vision for the school certainly put them on an accelerated path of growth that the residents of San Luis Obispo were not accustomed to. In addition, the growing popularity of the school and of Poly Royal brought more and more visitors to the coastal town, and these visitors became increasingly rowdy during their annual visits. The ever-growing rowdiness of Poly Royal weekend visitors eventually reached an apex with the Poly Royal riots in 1990. Underlying tensions between the two groups boiled over, and the campus and community worked together to rebuild their fractured partnership in the aftermath.

1982 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Poly Royal; in their Poly Royal Special Edition, the *Mustang Daily* proclaimed:

“Cal Poly is a vivid tapestry presenting the past and present that has a rich history and auspicious future; the Poly Royal theme, ‘Tapestry of a Golden Era,’ does more than refer to the 50th annual celebration. It represents the university itself: the pride and respect earned through years of quality service and education for its students. It represents the university's quest to promote its vision of progress and prosperity.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “Poly Royal 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition,” *Mustang Daily*, April 23, 1982, 2.

This opinion piece, written by a community member, shows a depth in the community's understanding of the importance of Poly Royal that was crucial to the city of San Luis Obispo and Cal Poly's working relationship. Poly Royal presented the best that Cal Poly had to offer, and every year the event grew in size and pomp. Poly Royal was the celebration that the quiet town of San Luis Obispo needed to liven it up a little and add some fresh perspective and unique ideas to the mix.

At the start of the decade, San Luis Obispo and Cal Poly still maintained a healthy communication in their working partnership. For example, the Public Safety Department of SLO was equally as invested with Poly Royal and the safety of its attendees.<sup>49</sup> This investment only really began towards the end of Kennedy's presidency, showing the former president's commitment to community inclusion and partnership. On and off campus departments were working towards a safe and fun event for all, and they both were able to understand the equal impact the event would have on both groups. Comparable consequence and reward existed in both groups participation in keeping Poly Royal safe across all guidelines, and these shared feelings united on and off campus departments. Even though Poly Royal was something different to everyone, each visitor walked away with wonderful memories and an excitement for the years to come. This could definitely be seen as a result of Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo working together to serve not only the Poly Royal visitors but each other.

Cal Poly's administration, at this point in their working partnership with the community, was extremely cognizant of the impacts the Poly Royal events could or would have on its

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

neighbors. While the university exalted Poly Royal as a great showcase of the campus and applauded all of the wonderful things being done by the students each year, it was also wary of its increasing intrusion into San Luis Obispo.<sup>50</sup> Through many Cal Poly Reports from the decade, it can be seen that the administration was heavily investing their time into balancing their attention on advancing the students' academic opportunities while also maintaining solid foundations with the city. Maintaining balance was key for all universities and their host cities to have successful and meaningful relationships. Most universities and their communities responded to a 1998 study about maintaining balance saying that the "two-way symmetric model of communication was most effective in solving town-gown issues and improving community relations."<sup>51</sup> With examples like increased noise, use of public space to grow the university campus, and abuse of alcohol by students, the study aims to prove that simple communication between the two groups would solve many issues. Cal Poly certainly practiced this model leading up to and after the riots; city council members and school administrators conducted many meetings to reach conclusions that would benefit both the city and campus, and this communication helped save their relationship from crumbling.

There still existed a desire to collaborate and work with each other, but there was a lot of work to be done by city officials and campus leadership to better the sentiments of some community members towards the students. A brochure created by the Council of Independent Colleges offers some insight into how university and city officials from other areas managed to

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<sup>50</sup> "Portrait of Progress Next Week," *Cal Poly Report* 34, no. 34 (April 1984): 3.

<sup>51</sup> Nicole M. Spagnolia, "Universities and Their Communities: What Fosters Positive Town-Gown Relations?," PhD diss., Rowan University, 1998, Rowan University Rowan Digital Works, 17.

repair their relationship. The summit had two goals and the intended audience was higher education and community leaders who design and administer campus and community partnerships. The goals were:

“To bring community perspectives into clearer focus, by documenting the perspectives, experiences, and voices of experienced community partners regarding the creation and maintenance of partnerships between community organizations and institutions of higher education; and to understand better those perspectives as a way to gain insight into common challenges and opportunities that ultimately lead to more successful and effective partnerships between institutions of higher education and community organizations.”<sup>52</sup>

This source is relevant because from a surveyor’s perspective, communities and colleges were best able to build and repair relationships through listening to the other’s voice and understanding the other’s perspective. These goals could be paralleled with the objectives Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo shared when it came to maintaining and then repairing their partnership. Through working together to respond to the crisis caused by the Poly Royal riots, and through holding many meetings and listening to the other’s concerns and desires, Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo reflected the suggestions present in this brochure. Although not directly impacted by this data, it is interesting to see how Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo gravitated toward a path of mutual listening and understanding. This inclination set Cal Poly and SLO on a path towards a bright future, one where their partnership would continue to be beneficial and profitable.

While the city did exhibit some growing unrest about the school and its rapid overwhelming of the city space and population, many community members were still paying

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<sup>52</sup> Leiderman, “Building Partnerships with College Campuses,” 4.

great attention to the success of Poly Royal and utilizing its occurrence to their benefit.<sup>53</sup>

Through continued use of advertisement space in student and city newspapers, and collaboration at many Poly Royal festivities, the community made their presence and support known. Even after the riots happened in 1990, residents expressed their lament and dismay that Poly Royal was cancelled.<sup>54</sup> This was likely because of the increased business and incredible boost in tourism the events brought, but also due to the relations and working connections community had made with several student groups. Not all residents, however, were happy with the campus as the 1980s drew to a close, and the tight-knit community of San Luis Obispo was faced with tough decisions after the riots of 1990.

In 1990, Poly Royal drew more than 100,000 visitors to San Luis Obispo, a city that had approximately 41,000 residents at the time. That weekend alone generated an estimated three to five million dollars in business revenue. However, on Friday, April 27, riots broke out on the corner of Hathaway Street and California Boulevard; they began as a “speeding bicyclist collided with a car, prompting the arrival of paramedics and police, who offered aid.”<sup>55</sup> A crowd of around 1,000 people began to throw rocks and bottles at the police officers; they greatly outnumbered the officers and did not settle down until tear gas and high-pressure hoses were used. Later in the evening, people began “throwing bottles into the street, breaking car windows and setting bonfires.”<sup>56</sup> Quotes from witnesses described the wild scene that they never imagined seeing in quaint San Luis Obispo. Animal science junior at the time Marie Lindsey said,

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<sup>53</sup> *San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune*, April 22, 1982, 9.

<sup>54</sup> “Editorials,” *San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune*, May, 1990, 12.

<sup>55</sup> “Poly Royal: Bringing Back the Name, But Not the Violence,” *Mustang Daily*, April 16, 2014, 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

“railroad swing-arms and hooded signals on Foothill Boulevard were destroyed, and at one point she heard one rioter say, ‘we need more bottles.’ The ambulance couldn’t get near the scene without being pelted with rocks.”<sup>57</sup> These testimonies truly depict just how wild and unexpected the riots were for both the school and the city of San Luis Obispo. Businesses, street signs and sidewalks were left damaged and scorched; glass littered the streets where the riots took place the morning after, and windows were boarded up for weeks at several of the nearby businesses.

Many students, other rioters and police officers were injured as a result of the events that transpired that evening. Even though the riots only lasted for a few hours on Friday evening and into early Saturday morning, fierce debates broke out about the riot’s cause. A few students cited police’s “excessive force” as the cause, while the Police Chief Jim Gardiner said the police response was “appropriate, measured, and restrained.” Attendees were likewise divided on the scene the riots caused; many people said the “crowds, with intoxicated boldness, taunted the police wanting to see some action.” Others blamed “punk little high school kids and out-of-townners” for the uproar.<sup>58</sup> Whatever the cause, the riots left a bitter taste in many community members’ mouths, and then-President Baker was compelled to indefinitely cancel all future Poly Royals. The decision, while difficult, was one that was initially received with uncertainty by many community members. This decade, because of the growing tensions and Poly Royal riots, proved to be just as uncertain as the relationship’s formative years. It is also the time where Cal Poly started to gain national attention, more so than ever before. President Kennedy, and then President Baker, set Cal Poly even further down the path of academic prestige and excellence,

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<sup>57</sup> Marianne Biasotti, “Riots Erupt at Poly Royal,” *Mustang Daily*, April 30, 1990, 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

but not all of the attention they got was good. News of the riots traveled fast, and the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* featured the aftermath of the Poly Royal riots on the front page of the next day's news. This attention obviously was not positive, but these articles reveal a lot about the response the school assembled, with the help of city officials, saying that "city officials and campus leaders will meet soon to discuss possible alternatives to Poly Royal."<sup>59</sup> The assistance of city council members and leaders was key to Cal Poly's success with winning back the favorable attitudes of some of the community, especially towards the students.

Even as student leaders like the ASI President at the time released professional statements, students still felt mistreated. Students could feel the animosity and changed attitudes from the police officers of San Luis Obispo.<sup>60</sup> A Cal Poly senior said "A lot of people especially college students, have lost a lot of respect for San Luis Obispo police officers. And I think it's getting worse. The complaints go all the way back to Poly Royal. But everyone I talk to say it's been getting worse over the past few weeks." Police officers, on the other hand, simply said that there was a "gap" between college students and police officers that created frustration and hostility on both sides.<sup>61</sup> There was a lack of communication between the students and police officers that did not help some residents view the students favorably. It was therefore crucial for the future town-gown partnership to pursue a deeper understanding of each other's needs.

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<sup>59</sup> Miles Corwin, "Cal Poly Festival Started in '33 Canceled After Rioting," *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1990, 2.

<sup>60</sup> "Disturbances Mar College Festival," *New York Times*, April 30, 1990, 18.

<sup>61</sup> "Tensions Rising in SLO," *San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune*, October 12, 1990, 1.

The 1990 riots that happened during Poly Royal weekend soured the city and campus relationship and left the transition between decades with a bad taste. Before the riots, tensions were already at a high point between the two groups; residents had begun to notice increased noise levels and alcohol misuse issues with the large student population.<sup>62</sup> The riots thus pushed these emotions over the edge, and when President Baker announced the cancellation of all future Poly Royals, residents were torn on their feelings about the announcement. Most community members urged the city to continue to seek partnerships with the school, but others wrote in expressing their relief that the school and city could start to drift off as separate entities.<sup>63</sup> The cancellation of Poly Royal produced a divide between the community that did not help the campus as they were struggling to deal with the large publicized aftermath of the riots. City Council meetings immediately following the riots were full of complaining residents or pleas from school officials for help; some community members were relieved that the wild behavior associated with Poly Royal celebrations would end, while others were sad about the cancellation of such a fun family event and great promotional weekend for their business.<sup>64</sup> Visitors to the school and people from other parts of California even expressed their dismay that Poly Royal was cancelled. Reine Wiley of Thousand Oaks said she was “saddened to see Poly Royal ruined by a few riotous outsiders. I wanted to go — and I never had the chance.”<sup>65</sup> Poly Royal was a state, even nation, wide event that when cancelled caused negative, adverse reactions among

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<sup>62</sup> City Council Meeting Minutes, November 16, 1987, City of San Luis Obispo Open Records, San Luis Obispo, CA, <http://opengov.slocity.org/weblink8/browse.aspx>.

<sup>63</sup> “Editorials,” 12.

<sup>64</sup> City Council Meeting Minutes, May 1, 1990, City of San Luis Obispo Open Records, San Luis Obispo, CA, <http://opengov.slocity.org/weblink8/browse.aspx>.

<sup>65</sup> “Editorials,” 12.

many of its former and future attendees. This discontent, combined with the divided community population and the defensive student population, made for a very tense city and partnership.

Although this was one of the most successful Poly Royals, once the event had the reputation of a large party weekend, it could not return to its original academic emphasis, and therefore had to be cancelled indefinitely. The reactions to the cancellation of Poly Royal were mixed amongst students and community members alike. For SLO Police Chief Jim Gardiner, the reaction was fairly positive, as he claimed he could not “knowingly subject members of [his] department, other public safety agencies, and the citizens of this city to the inherent dangers presented by the last two years of Poly Royal.” President Warren Baker shared similar sentiments, saying he had “an obligation to the student body and the community. Everyone was victimized by the behavior.”<sup>66</sup> Many students could appreciate and understand President Baker’s decision, but others could not. Some students said they were “bummed, because there were just a bunch of drunken idiots out [there].”<sup>67</sup> These students did not contribute any progress towards the overall student body’s attempt to win back the positive sentiments of the more disgruntled community residents. Those students who were more understanding, however, expressed their gratitude toward the university and community leadership for making the right decision:

“I would have hoped they would cancel it. I do not think the city or me as a resident should have to put up with it. It is absurd. I do not like the way that what happened at Poly Royal affects the reputation of the school. That affects me as a graduate. Our initial reaction is to feel badly. It’s bad for all of us. The event usually represents the city in such a good light, but health and safety have to come first. It is unfortunate that a few individuals had to ruin it for everyone else who comes here, but I agree with the decision. It seems to be the only thing they can do at this point.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Tara Murphy, “Royal Mayhem,” *Mustang Daily*, May 1, 1990, 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Students like these were the reason for the overall understanding from the community. Residents of San Luis Obispo, for the most part, were blaming the outside visitors and influences for the escalation of the riots. Community members, for the most part, stressed the importance of the media to address the rioters that were not students of the university: "It's good. We shouldn't have those type of people coming in and intimidating the community."<sup>69</sup> While there were some community members who were always unhappy with the students and the "college party culture," overall the sentiment from the community was similar to the students. Against claims of "most people blaming the students of Cal Poly," the ASI President at the time "calmly maintained that was because they were ill-informed."<sup>70</sup> The community was disappointed with the cancellation of the riots, and it was these feelings that were pushing their negative reactions towards the students. Ultimately, the students who were displaying humility and grace in the face of this national disaster were the hope for a continued partnership with the city.

Clearly, residents were torn on their feelings about the cancellation of Poly Royal and the continuation of their partnership with the school. The divide that the cancellation of Poly Royal drove between community members could also be seen in the general unease the community felt years after the riots, when Cal Poly announced the possibility of re-branding Poly Royal as "Open House."<sup>71</sup> This re-branding was an attempt by the university to make Poly Royal weekend more academic in nature, but that didn't stop residents from worrying about the same issues happening. Even so, the university moved forward with their decision to re-brand, a key move in

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Larre Sterling, "Poly Royal's Fate Discussed," *Mustang Daily*, May 4, 1990, 1.

<sup>71</sup> "Open Houses Not a Poly Royal Revival," *San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune*, November 2, 1993, 3.

further distancing the citizens of SLO from the production of such events. They still gave key updates and communicated with the city council, but they were no longer a part of the initial planning processes. Individual colleges were putting on their own events on a more solitary basis, and the local community was not really part of the plan.<sup>72</sup> While Open House was no longer as much of a community effort, it still provided very many of the same benefits Poly Royal once did. It wasn't Poly Royal, but according to a few San Luis Obispo business owners, Cal Poly's "first Open House had a significant economic impact on sales and profits in the local business community. If formulas provided by the State Bureau of Tourism hold true, San Luis Obispo businesses earned an additional \$1.2 million in profits during Open House weekend."<sup>73</sup> If the students' mature responses and eagerness to collaborate weren't enough to change the stubborn members of the community's minds, the return of large profit to local businesses certainly helped.

Even though the revenue generated by Open House was not nearly as great as it was during Poly Royal, hotels and restaurants especially in San Luis Obispo were extremely happy with the outcome of the weekend's events. After the weekend, the general consensus in the community indicated that Open House would be welcomed back with open arms by local businesses the following year. One shop owner shared "It's a real important part of Cal Poly. We are dependent on tourists, and a lot are brought in by Cal Poly and its students. Open House does more than just increase local shops' revenues. A monetary value cannot be assigned to the public

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Chris Rombouts, "SLO Vendors Clean House in Poly Event," *Mustang Daily*, April 27, 1994, 1.

relations benefits that a positive event like the Open House has on the community.”<sup>74</sup> This shift demonstrates how the riots of Poly Royal in 1990 set the town-gown relationship on a path very different than one that McPhee or even Kennedy had for the pair. While this relationship was different, it was still a pretty positive one; a majority of the campus and community wanted to overcome the tensions of 1990, and university and city administrators worked hard to do so.

### **Where To?**

Remaining tensions and concerns most certainly existed in the years after Poly Royal was cancelled. The Poly Royal riots were used as an example for other schools on what to avoid when planning open-attendance events. The range of the news of the riots, and how fast it traveled, showed that much had to be pulled under control before large-scale events could continue on the campus. As mentioned previously, the community was concerned about this “new version” of Poly Royal that would be re-branded as “Open House.” They were torn over this because some thought it would bring the same level of chaos and destruction to the city, while others saw the benefit of bringing back a large-scale event that attracted visitors to the campus and to the city. The Mayor of San Luis Obispo at the time, Ronald Dunin, said “I hope we can still have a festival... but one that is educational and cultural and one that avoids all these problems. It’s important to have these activities so that students who are interested in the school, their parents and other people have the chance to enjoy the campus for a few days.”<sup>75</sup> This support from city leadership was key in order for Cal Poly to remain in good graces with the city and maintain key aspects of their relationship.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>75</sup> Corwin, “Cal Poly Ends Annual Fest,” 2.

After immediate concerns of the riots blew over, residents remained concerned with the rapid growth of the school population and campus space. More students meant more noise, and residents increasingly felt their presence with loud neighborhood parties and the overuse of alcohol. Especially due to the fact that around one third of the rioters booked in the local jail were Cal Poly students, residents were concerned that the “animal-like” behavior displayed that weekend would become a regular occurrence. Cal Poly administration and city officials, however, maintained to the press and concerned residents, parents, and students that they were confident in the ability and responsibility of the Cal Poly students to behave.<sup>76</sup> The trust that the leadership in charge of maintaining the town-gown relationship placed in the student body was important going forward in gaining the residents’ trust and respect back.

While the community still had reservations over the students’ rowdy behavior, they also were well aware of the continued benefits the campus provided as a public space in their town. The campus acted as a social and cultural center of the town, hosting concerts, plays and sporting events for all families and people to enjoy.<sup>77</sup> Cal Poly’s role in San Luis Obispo as a vibrant cultural community space was also a key factor in the determination of San Luis Obispo officials to continue their partnership with the school. The benefits that the partnership provided were crucial for the city to pursue the restructuring and maintenance of the working relationship. As Kevin Davis states, “throughout the history of universities there has been a constant struggle to balance their place within their local communities.”<sup>78</sup> Scholarly support for the university

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<sup>76</sup> Miles Corwin and Sheryl Stolberg, “Cal Poly Festival Revelers Rampage in San Luis Obispo Riot,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1990.

<sup>77</sup> Gumprecht, “The Campus as a Public Space in the American College Town,” 86.

<sup>78</sup> Davis, “University and Community Partnerships.”

struggle to maintain their position in their surrounding area helped to show the delicate balance that existed in university-community partnerships. The best way for a “community to be fully vested is if the community feels they have ownership in the partnership, and if they feel their voices are truly heard.”<sup>79</sup> It was and is critical that the educational leaders truly listen to the needs, wants and desires of the community partners.

The partnership model presented by Sanders and Lewis in 2005 demonstrates that it is possible to build these relations in any setting, and it takes into account the issue of university readiness in regards to partnership building and allows the community partner to have some measure of control in the process.<sup>80</sup> Cal Poly was ready and willing to build partnerships with San Luis Obispo at the time of the university’s creation, and this desire continued throughout their years of development. When times of crisis hit, it was essential for both Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo to look to the other for support and guidance. The partnership that they modeled is supported by many scholarly works that emphasize effective, consistent communication and dual fiscal responsibility as key aspects of successful working town-gown relationships.<sup>81</sup> If it is true that it is possible to build partnerships in any setting, even at the most tense of times, then Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo did stand a chance at repairing their relationship. The relationship wasn’t completely broken, but after the Poly Royal riots there was a lot of work to be done to return the partnership to what it once was. Their partnership experienced ups and downs from

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Mavis G. Sanders and Karla C. Lewis, “Building Bridges Toward Excellence: Community Involvement in Schools,” *The High School Journal* 88, no. 3 (2005): 7.

<sup>81</sup> Spagnolia, “Universities and Their Communities: What Fosters Positive Town-Gown Relations?,” 6.

before the 1990 riots until 1994, when Open House, to many people's surprise, brought back the true kindred spirit of the historic Poly Royals.

Open House absolutely helped in reviving the campus as a public space in the town and in rejuvenating the students' and residents' pride in the school. The first Open House weekend enjoyed incredible success, with around "40,000 students, parents, alumni and other curious visitors attending the festival that was the first attempt to replace the fund-raising and educational aspects of Poly Royal."<sup>82</sup> Students, faculty and community members learned a lot from previous Poly Royals, and the general responses was that Open House was good and a nice way to start a new tradition. Clubs were able to make a profit and enjoy good publicity, local businesses generated nearly double their normal revenue during the weekend, and the small, vibrant town of San Luis Obispo and the wonderful, high-achieving campus of Cal Poly returned to a positive media spotlight. Visitors and locals both noticed that while Open House was considerably smaller than Poly Royal, it was a step in the right direction.<sup>83</sup> Looking to the future, it was up to Cal Poly administration, students, and San Luis Obispo residents to continue working down their new path of success.

The hard work and time that the city and the campus had dedicated to building strong relations over the past nine decades ultimately paid off after the Poly Royal riots in 1990. Initially, as was expected, there were strong outbursts and reactions from the community; however, with time and care, the foundations that were already in place helped the town-gown relationship recover. With each passing decade, Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo were forever

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<sup>82</sup> Marla Schuyver, "It Worked!," *Mustang Daily*, April 25, 1994, 1.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

evolving their relationship to best suit the needs of each group. The adaptability of both groups to meet the other halfway and create joint resolutions was a powerful skill that helped Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo maintain and mend their relationship. The image of their partnership changed with each new decade and each new president that came into power, and the shifting nature of this relationship could best be analyzed through their joint efforts on Poly Royal. While the relationship never was the same after the Poly Royal riots, the city and school were able to regain some of their lost trust as they looked towards the new century and the changes it would bring.

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