

PRESIDENTIAL PROFILES

David P. Roselle

The University of Delaware

David P. Roselle took office as the 25th president of the University of Delaware on May 1, 1990. Roselle is a graduate of West Chester University and Duke University, and he holds a Ph.D. in mathematics. Roselle's professional activities include membership in the Mathematical Association of America, which he has served in many capacities. He was secretary from 1975 to 1984 and also served as associate editor of the American Mathematical Monthly. Additionally, he is a member of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics, and the American Mathematical Society. He referees for several journals as well as for Mathematical Reviews.

Q: *Since 1996, the University of Delaware has been one of the 10 colleges funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's A Matter of Degree program to address high-risk and underage drinking by college students. What activities have occurred since then?*

A: We are now three and a half years into the project. One of our jobs is to keep people at the university safe. With regard to alcohol use, we have made policy changes, increased enforcement, and made sure that students are aware of the consequences of abusing alcohol and violating policies. We have not distanced ourselves from the problem.

For example, we started parental notification before Congress expressly allowed it. The prospect of having to tell parents about a tragedy involving their child, when we knew the student displayed problem behaviors that we did not tell them about, made us decide that parental notification was a good idea.

We have a "three strikes and you're out" program. When students commit a third alcohol offense, they are suspended. We revamped the campus judicial system to provide more support for our resident assistants and faster turnaround on judicial cases. Resident assistants told us that the delay between a violation of the rules and punishment was not helpful. We levy fines on students who are in our judicial system for alcohol offenses.

Our five-star rating system for Greek organizations judges them against the principles they say they have. The leadership goals and aspirations of Greek organizations are impressive, and if they adhere to them they rate five stars and can hold their rush whenever they want. Fewer stars limit the amount of rushing they can do. Those that rate two or fewer stars are not permitted to take in any new members.

We enforce a tailgating policy at football games, which has been an interesting experience because tailgating has quite a tradition at



Delaware. We increased financial and other kinds of support for alcohol-free events. We instituted a volunteer activity option that is available to students and community members.

Q: *How have these changes been perceived by the campus community?*

A: In general, the campus response has been positive, although there has been some confusion on the part of some students who complain that this effort is all about prohibition. We reassure them we are interested in promoting responsible behavior and consider-

ation for fellow students, community members, and others. We want students to be concerned about their own safety and the quality of life of others.

Attendance at football games is one indicator that our efforts have been well received. Our policy calls for an end to tailgating when games begin. But in 1998, before we stepped up enforcement of that policy, we had 23 ambulance trips from the football stadium to the hospital for alcohol poisoning. In 1999, when we enforced our policy, there were none. Despite the fact that it was a fairly ordinary football team that year, we set the all-time record for attendance.

Q: *You have been able to bring together a wide range of constituencies in your efforts to focus on alcohol problems, including city leaders, law enforcement officials, students, faculty, parents, high school teachers, PTAs, and community members. How did you go about bringing these people together? What challenges did you encounter?*

A: Our biggest asset was then-mayor Ron Gardner, who got the Newark police department involved. Much of the business community joined largely because the mayor urged them to do so. We've recently included many of the local secondary schools because we inherit a lot of the drinking problems from high school.

When we said that we were going to enforce the rules on campus, people in Newark were concerned that we were pushing our problems into the community. We worked hard to show that we wanted to work with the community to prevent off-campus problems also. Bar owners and others have been coming up with ideas about what to do. Students came up with the idea of having bars offer free soft drinks to a designated driver for a group of others who choose to drink alcoholic beverages.

Q: *What other things has the coalition set in place to address the issue of collegiate alcohol and other drug problems?*

A: Happy hours and alcohol advertising have been the subject of a great deal of talk. Even the student newspaper, which is a self-supporting enterprise, is having an internal conversation about whether it should continue to accept alcohol advertising. That conversation is ongoing, and alcohol retailers are helping out somewhat by advertising less.

Q: *Are you seeing results both on and off campus?*

A: Yes. For example, self-reported levels of high-risk drinking have decreased. We have had a decrease in recidivism in the judicial system. I think about 80 percent of the alcohol offenders last year were first-time offenders. Vandalism in residence halls took a remarkable dip. The Greeks have higher grade point indices than ever before. There have been fewer alcohol-related arrests in town and on campus.

Q: *What kind of policies and action would you like to see at the state level in order to address problems related to student alcohol use?*

A: More controls on the alcohol supply at the local and state level would help us a lot. For example, keg registration laws would help. We'd like limits on discount pricing for over-the-bar and in-store sales. The amount students drink is related to the cost of what they are drinking.

Q: *You've been vocal about the role of private industry in problems related to excessive drinking. How does private industry contribute to the problem and how would you like to see that role addressed?*

A: College kids are our students so the perception can be that excessive drinking is our problem. But what the community has to be aware of is that those providing alcohol to students are from the community

and not from the university. The alcohol industry strategy is to blame all the negative consequences of drinking on the consumers. The larger community has to be made aware that the supply of alcohol in Newark comes from private enterprises. Everyone needs to be better informed and concerned about how those enterprises can contribute to what I see as our mutual problems.

Q: *You've also talked about changing the national college environment or culture in which college students drink. Can you tell us what you mean by this suggestion for change?*

A: Anytime you set out to change culture, it's somewhat of a daunting task. Our position has been that those who drink responsibly or not at all should not have to suffer the secondhand effects and actions of those who drink irresponsibly. We call the secondhand effects "the three Vs": vomit, vandalism, and violence. We have been working to encourage our students to express their disapproval of such behavior when it adversely affects their lives and their community. We have told students that if you continually have to clean up your roommate's vomit, you should say, "This is not right. I'm not doing it. I'm trading you in for a different roommate."

Q: *What do you think a college president can uniquely bring to bear upon the effort to stem student alcohol problems?*

A: You state clearly that this is a high priority and encourage everybody to consider what role they might play in attacking it. Then you check to see what people are doing. I also think the outreach into the community is far easier if the university's top administrators are seen to back the initiative. In practical terms, the leader of an institution has to be willing to acknowledge that a problem exists and that it is in the best long-term interest of the institution to do something meaningful about it. It's easy to underestimate how that support might be challenged by others who might fear negative publicity and its effect on enrollment or support, monetary or otherwise. Some of my presidential colleagues know full well they have a drinking problem on their campus, but they don't want to admit it because they are worried about public relations. My sense is that public relations are handled best by making it clear to everyone that you are doing everything reasonably possible that you can to combat the problem. Then, if something bad happens, you can at least point to something that you were doing.