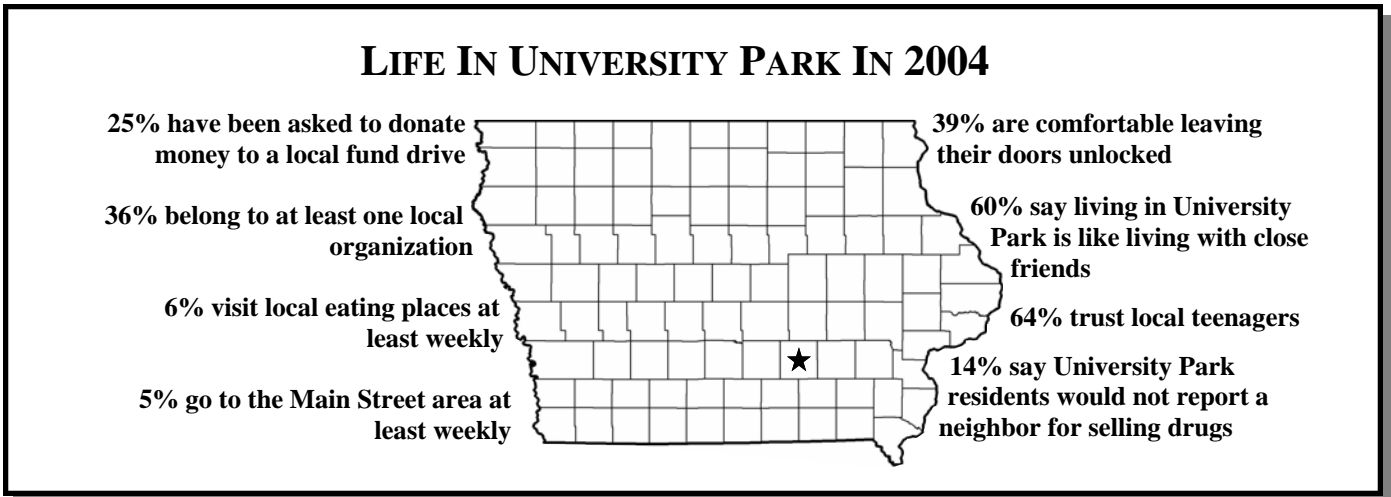


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN UNIVERSITY PARK

In February 2004, the Rural Development Initiative Project at Iowa State University conducted a survey designed to look at changes in the social conditions in Iowa's rural towns. The survey was mailed to nearly 15,000 households in 99 towns, one of which was University Park. Ten years ago, residents of these same 99 communities were asked to complete a similar survey. The households for both surveys were selected randomly from local telephone directories (150 households per community). In 1994, 80 University Park residents responded to the survey, and 70 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of University Park residents have changed over the past decade.



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

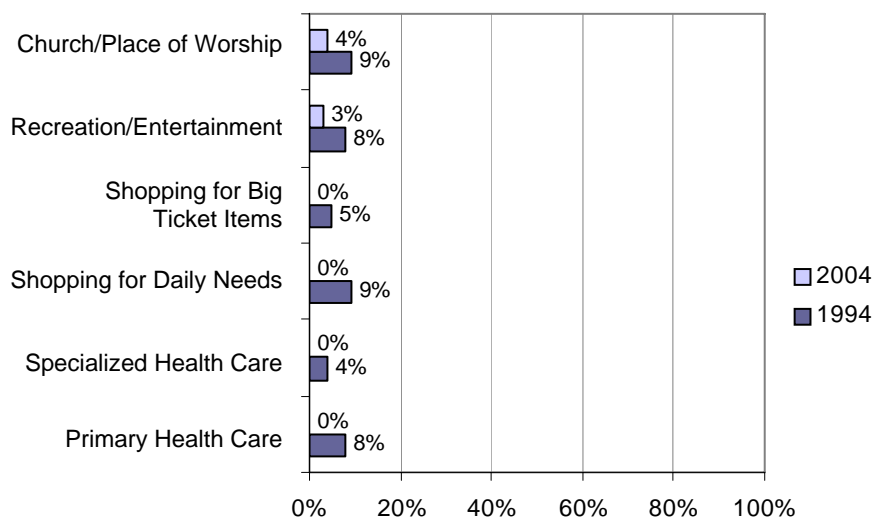


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that residents of University Park follow this pattern for all services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in University Park. Almost everyone went out of town for all services in both survey years. In 2004, there were no reports of residents

staying in town for any shopping or health care needs. Less than one of ten residents said they stayed in town for recreation and entertainment or attended a local church or place of worship. While the percentages have dropped slightly since 1994, there were no significant changes in local patronage patterns.

A Note on Interpretation: For University Park, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 14 percent should be considered a statistical "dead-heat." That is, they fall within the margin of error range, which occurs whenever samples are used to draw conclusions about a larger group. With the modest sample sizes used in this study, the differences must be relatively large before we can be confident that they are real. Throughout the report, differences that are equal to or exceed 14 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk ().

RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

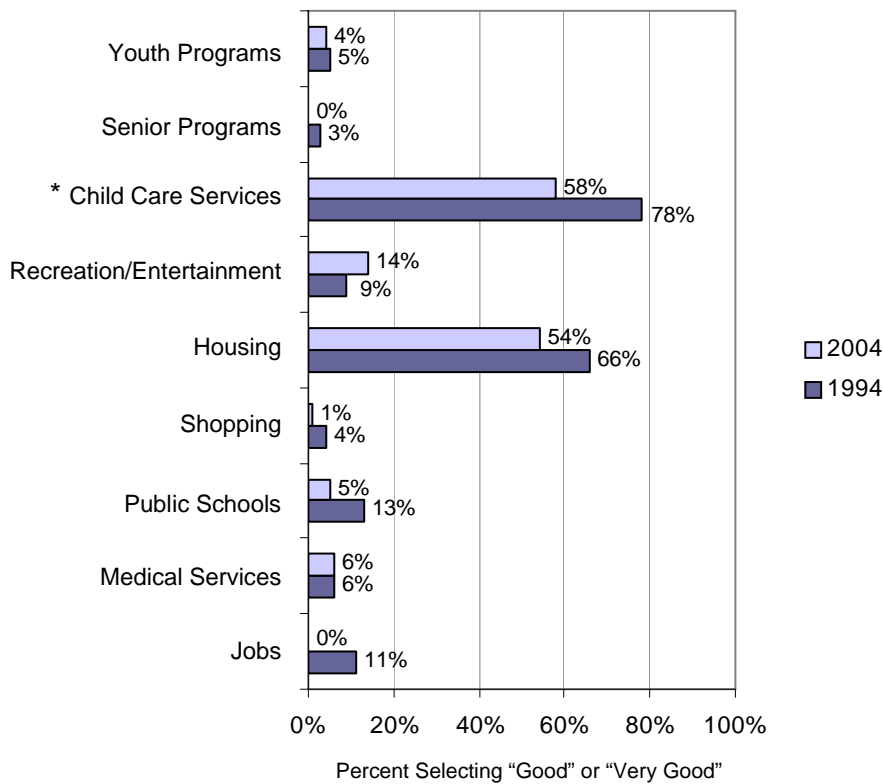


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

Nine local services were listed on the questionnaire along with instructions to rate each as “very good,” “good,” “fair,” “poor,” or “not available.” Figure 2 shows the percentage of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. In both years, just two of the services, child care services and housing, received a favorable evaluation from more than half of residents. There were few or no favorable ratings for youth and senior programs, recreation, shopping, public schools, medical services, and jobs in University Park in 2004. While child care services received positive ratings from 78 percent of residents in 1994, this decreased significantly to 58 percent in 2004. There were no other significant changes in evaluations of local services and facilities over the decade.

RATINGS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Respondents were asked to provide ratings for seven services normally provided by local governments. Figure 3 shows the percentage of residents rating each service as “good” or “very good” for 2004 and 1994. Overall, University Park residents reported being satisfied with local government services. In 2004, a large majority of residents rated water, condition of parks, fire protection, emergency response, and garbage collection favorably. Over half of residents also gave positive ratings to condition of streets and police protection services in University Park. The percentage of residents assigning favorable ratings to the condition of parks increased significantly from 59 percent in 1994 to 84 percent in 2004.

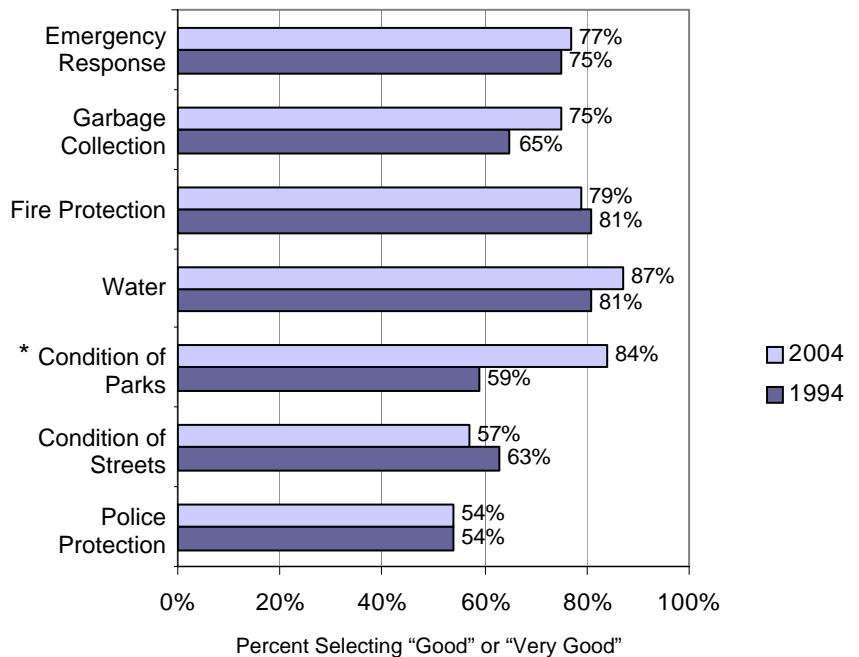


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

UNIVERSITY PARK'S SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

In spite of the frequently publicized economic challenges faced by many of Iowa's small towns, they are regularly praised for having favorable social climates. A main goal of this project has been to determine the extent to which Iowa's rural towns possess favorable social environments. Accordingly, a variety of questions were included on the survey asking residents to evaluate various social attributes of their communities.

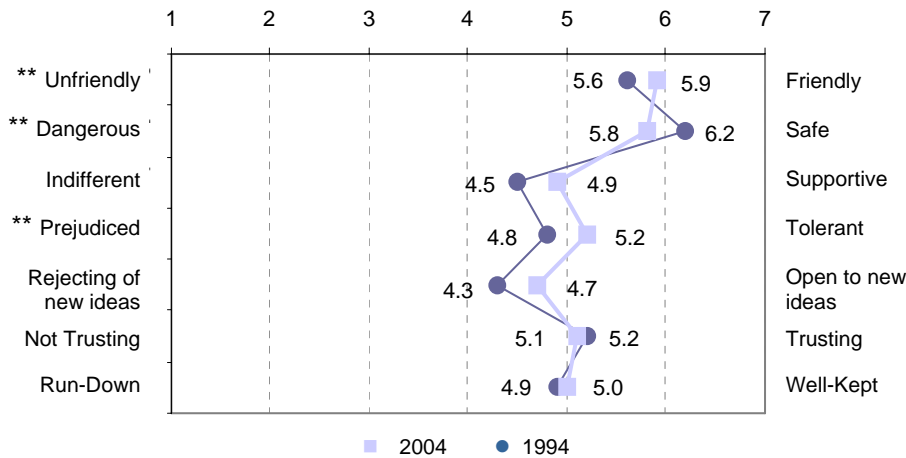


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994, residents assigned the highest ratings to the safety of University Park, while in 2004, friendliness received the highest ratings. The extent to which the town is supportive and open to new ideas were rated the lowest in both 1994 and 2004. While there was a significant decrease in residents' feelings of safety since 1994, ratings of the friendliness and tolerance of University Park increased significantly.

** The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only those items designated by double asterisks (**) have differences large enough to fall outside of the statistical margin of error and can thus be considered to have changed since 1994.

SOCIAL TIES

“Everybody knows everybody” is often cited as a feature of small towns. The extent to which people know and interact with each other influences commitment to the community and interest in its well-being. As such, questions were included to assess local social ties. In 2004, 13 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in University Park, compared to 24 percent in 1994. Nine percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in University Park, a significant decrease compared to 23 percent in 1994. As for relatives, one percent of residents in 2004 and four percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in University Park.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do University Park residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question, almost all residents in both years reported that they do feel at home (see Figure 5). Furthermore, a majority indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from University Park. These responses indicate that most residents feel attached to their community.

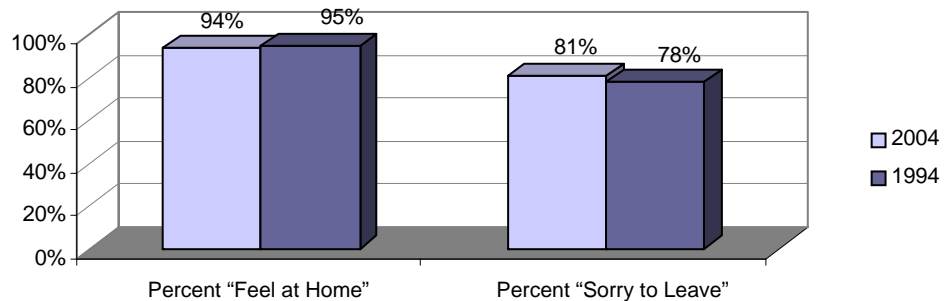


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For University Park, 49 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, about one in three residents reported participating in a community improvement project in the years prior to the surveys and 22 percent described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). This is essentially unchanged since 1994 when 34 percent reported participating in a project and one-fourth of residents described themselves as active in the community.

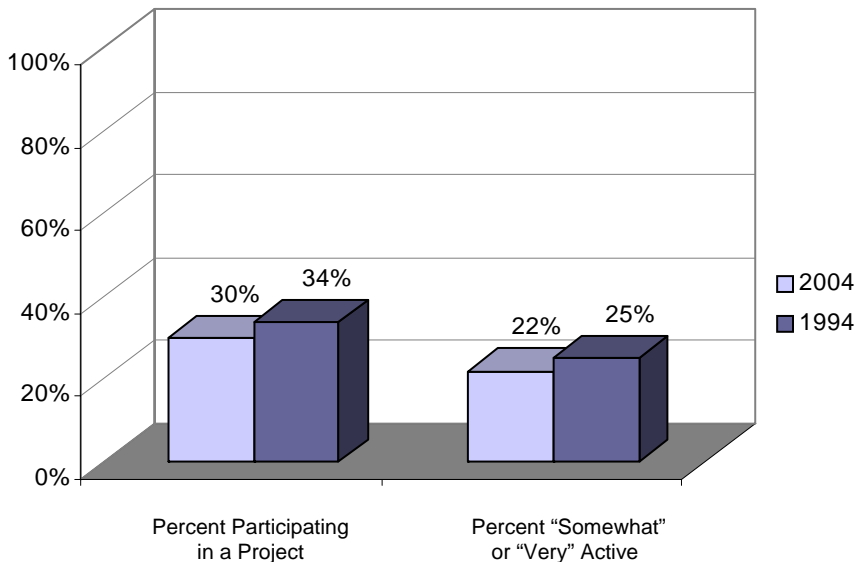


Figure 6: Community Involvement

When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors mentioned were lack of time (64%), not being asked (42%), and not knowing how to become involved (36%).

SUMMARY

A major goal of this project is to examine changes in the social conditions in rural Iowa over the past decade. As previously discussed, the differences between 2004 and 1994 shown in this report must be interpreted to account for the margin of error—that is, we cannot say with confidence that a change has occurred unless the difference is equal to or greater than 14 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in University Park over the past decade? Residents continue to go outside of town for services such as shopping and health care. The evaluations of the quality of child care services decreased significantly since 1994. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high, with ratings increasing significantly for the condition of parks in University Park.

The social environment has changed somewhat. University Park residents view their town as less safe than it was ten years ago, but also describe it as more friendly and tolerant. Residents of University Park remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. However, the percentage of residents indicating that half or more of their friends live in University Park decreased significantly. Levels of community participation were unchanged over the decade. It is interesting to note that two of the top reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects were that no one asked them and that they didn’t know how to get involved. These responses suggest potential strategies for increasing community participation.

The past decade has been challenging for Iowa’s small towns. We hope this information will prove useful in planning for University Park’s future. **We wish to thank the University Park residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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