The best college towns appeal not just to potential students but to potential residents and businesses looking for strong economies and opportunities to grow. Sports teams, research facilities, historic buildings, and proximity to bars and restaurants create an attractive atmosphere to spend four (or five) years, but a university’s off-campus impact can also shape a town’s character and keep people there for a lifetime.

“The same factors that make locations attractive to students also make them attractive to businesses,” says Steven Cunningham, director of research and education at American Institute for Economic Research College Destination Index. “A growing, highly-educated population with an extensive proportion of creative people and entrepreneurs means a high-quality labor pool. City accessibility supports morning commutes. Low cost of living means less upward pressure on wages. A high student concentration suggests enthusiastic part-time labor and internships. Favorable economic measures suggest a stable business environment and local demand for goods and services produced. All of these factors are important to quality of life in the broadest sense, which is important to employees and retirees.”

The criteria used to identify and rank the Top 10 College Towns 2013 ranged from cost of living and educational attainment to the participation local colleges take in community outreach.

“University outreach can provide significant assistance to area residents,” says Jim Fitzgerald, president of the International Town-Gown Association and associate director of University of Virginia Community Relations. “Through outreach, universities can offer numerous programs including continuing education courses, CPR training, counseling and career services, mentoring and tutoring and, frequently, legal advice. University students frequently support community businesses and nonprofits through volunteerism, internship programs and financial donations.”

Ranking Criteria

- Low cost of living
- Top Employers (must be a college)
- High student to resident ratio
- High educational attainment
- Strong college-led community outreach
- High percentage of 21- to 34-year-olds
Select towns similar in size and content to Binghamton:

(1) **Fayetteville, AR**
- Population: 75,818
- Med. Age: 28
- Med. Household Income: $37,383
- Med. Home Price: $157,000
- Average Work Commute: 14 MINUTES

Fayetteville has become a haven for entrepreneurs and innovative companies, largely because of its college town vibe, artistic scene and progressive residents. A collection of developers recently renovated many old homes and apartments, transforming them into hip, modern abodes.

College students mix well with residents in Fayetteville's top restaurants, which offer everything from BBQ (sorry hogs) to Thai food and contemporary cuisine. Music from a variety of bars and restaurants spills onto Dickson Street, the city's entertainment district, nearly every night of the week, while the Downtown Square and Gardens provide a more peaceful place to pass through. The annual Bikes, Blues & BBQ rally rumbles into the city every fall, while the Walton Arts Center sets the stage for musicals, plays, concerts and comedic performances.

(2) **Missoula, Montana**
- Population: 68,154
- Med. Age: 31
- Med. Household Income: $37,422
- Med. Home Price: $213,750
- Average Work Commute: 12 MINUTES

Community events engage students and residents, giving Missoula a small-town feel. Lush forests and fresh waterways surround the city, but Missoula's cultural attractions and entertainment options are surprisingly urban for a place founded by miners, timber companies and farmers. Live theater and music venues, museums, eclectic shops, restaurants, and bars create a lively scene. Breweries in Missoula attract beer lovers across the Northwest. Missoula hosts several festivals that help residents and students connect with the culture, such as Garden City Brewfest, River City Roots Fest and a series of free concerts overlooking the Clark Fork River, where kayakers test their skills. Nearby mountains, rivers and lakes also offer outdoor activities.

Many events and programs on the UM campus are open to the public. These include athletic games, music recitals, concerts, art gallery receptions, public lectures and film screenings. The Grizzly Pool, an indoor, Olympic-sized pool on campus, and the UM Golf Course are open to Missoula residents for a fee. The university holds a series of youth summer camps on campus.

(3) **Columbia, Missouri**
- Population: 112,963
- Med. Age: 28
- Med. Household Income: $42,320
- Med. Home Price: $158,000
- Average Work Commute: 13 MINUTES
As the school's enrollment more students led to more restaurants, more rental housing, more teachers and eventually more jobs. But city leaders and residents haven't let growth homogenize their community, which retains an artsy vibe that is equal parts to college quirk, Midwestern culture and progressive innovation.

It's a bit hard to tell exactly where the campus ends and the city begins. Situated between three colleges, including Mizzou, an entertainment area called The District comprises more than 100 shops, 70 bars and restaurants, and at least 45 live performances a week. Beloved restaurants like The Old Heidelberg, Booche's, Shakespeare's Pizza and Sparky's Homemade Ice Cream attract students and residents. The MKT Nature and Fitness Trail is a popular place to burn calories. The trail meanders through Columbia for more than eight miles. Rock Bridge Memorial State Park, located about seven miles south of Columbia, is home to 15 miles of hiking and biking trails and caves that many explore.

Mizzou students engage in a variety of programs and groups that improve the surrounding community. Outreach efforts include mentoring local children and exposing them to activities such as fencing, sailing and rodeo, helping teenage girls with low self-esteem, introducing children to health-care careers and making science fun. Mizzou's student-run Homecoming Blood Drive anchors a campus-wide blood donation effort that nets about 8,400 units each year.

(4) Boulder, Colorado

- Population: 100,230
- Med. Age: 29
- Med. Household Income: $49,995
- Med. Home Price: $407,500
- Average Work Commute: 15 MINUTES

Boulder is a city of innovative thinkers, environmentalists and researchers who work as hard as they play. Home to the University of Colorado and a collection of national laboratories, residents place a high value on the city's diverse perspectives. Breathtaking natural beauty, a sense of cultural freedom and a highly educated population combine to deliver a wildly creative atmosphere where both students and residents flourish.

Highly active lifestyles are the norm in Boulder, where residents take advantage of the region's recreational activities, mountain environment and an average of 300 days of sunshine each year. Vintage clothing shops, independent book stores, brew pubs and restaurants line the streets in downtown Boulder. Street performers provide entertainment along Pearl Street, the city's main pedestrian drag. Located on Pearl Street, one of Boulder's top rated bars, Mountain Sun Pub & Brewery, offers a large selection of beers and a Grateful Dead vibe. Many restaurants in Boulder use locally produced ingredients, serve artisanal breads and handcrafted drinks. With so many styles of food to choose from, picking a restaurant can be a challenge.

http://livability.com/top-10/top-10-college-towns-2013/boulder/co
“Sustaining a Town-Gown Relationship: How St. Lawrence University has nurtured and sustained a relationship with its hometown of Canton, N.Y.” University Business, Jun 2007

I have loved St. Lawrence University and the Canton community from the very first time I saw it in the fall of 1960 when I visited as a prospective student. The university, located in the heart of New York State, owes its founding in 1856 to community leaders who, in collaboration with the Universalist Church, "lit a candle in the wilderness that will never be extinguished." The university and the Canton community have, as a result, an interdependent relationship that is like--but also very different from--the typical "town-gown" pairing.

Today the university is among St. Lawrence County's largest employers, and we realize that critical to our success as a university is a healthy, attractive, and vital town of Canton with excellent K-12 schools, high-quality health care, attractive housing, affordable day care, and a growing tax base.


“The Blending of Communities: Town and Gown Relationships at Colleges”
Executive Director of the International Town and Gown Association

What makes a successful relationship between a community and a college campus? In this month's HigherEd Careers, the balance between the "town and gown" is discussed. Kim Griffo, the executive director of the International Town and Gown Association (ITGA), explains common issues and trends as well as tips to foster successful relations between colleges and the communities in which they reside.


Town-Gown: A New Meaning for a New Economy

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of Campus Compact, a national coalition of over 950 college and university presidents that promotes community service, civic engagement, and service-learning. As regions around the world aggressively organize to compete in this economy, it is timely to celebrate the thawing of town-gown relations and suggest ways in which organizations like Campus Compact can further strengthen campus-community partnerships going forward.

Over the past two decades, a dramatic sea change has occurred, by which institutions of higher learning and their host communities have come to recognize their relationship as symbiotic. There are at least four major forces at play that have helped to bring about this transformation.

1. The Public Service Revolution
2. Touting the Economic Impact of Higher Education
3. Innovative Higher Education Alliances
4. Building Upon the Momentum