



Unexpected College Towns in MBPR's Client Destinations

These Places Are Home to Universities That May Not Be on Your Radar ... But Should Be

(September 8, 2026) – When back-to-school time rolls around each year, the team at MBPR starts to see red ... not because we're angry, but because we happen to represent five incredible college towns whose school colors all feature that bold and beautiful color.

Though these universities may not be household names – yet – they totally should be. Here's a rundown of those schools and the charming towns that act as a home away from home for thousands of students.

All five universities welcome guests who want to explore the cultural attractions on their campuses, and all five college towns embrace students and visitors alike.

Here they are, listed from newest to most historic:

Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana, part of [Louisiana's Cajun Bayou](#)

- **Year Founded:** 1948
- **Student Population:** Approximately 6,000
- **Town Population:** Approximately 16,000
- **Home of:** The Colonels
- **School Colors:** Red and gray
- **Not to Be Missed on Campus:** Book a meal at [Bistro Ruth](#), which is run entirely by students enrolled in the university's [Chef John Folse Culinary Institute](#). Both the food and the service are top-notch, and reservations are at a premium. During the summer, the culinary school also operates The Bridge Bakery, which offers treats baked by students with special needs.
- **Not to Be Missed Around Town:** The [Cajun Bayou Food Trail](#) will celebrate its 10th anniversary next year, and it's a great way to eat where the locals (including students) do. Seven of the Food Trail restaurants are in Thibodaux, and you don't have to be a math major to know that works beautifully ... because you just need to visit five in order to eat your way into a Food Trail T-shirt.
- **Where to Eat on a Student Budget:** [Spahr's Seafood](#) is famous for their catfish chips.
- **Where to Get a Great Cup of Coffee Before Pulling an All-Nighter:** [Willow Coffeehouse](#), located in the heart of downtown Thibodaux, sources its blends from a local roasting company called [Spoonbill Coffee Roasters](#).

- **How the Students Connect with the Town:** Nicholls students can always be spotted lending a hand at local fundraisers and events. They help with the annual cleanup of Bayou Lafourche, which connects the Mississippi River to the Gulf and runs right past the school, and they have a university-operated farm that distributes native plants throughout the community. Also, this is Mardi Gras country, so you're sure to see those kids riding floats and performing in parades during Carnival season.
- **The Quirky Stuff:** The university has been hosting Crawfish Week each spring for more than 50 years – the Crawfish Olympics are not to be missed! – but in the fall during Homecoming, you need to witness the pirogue races on the bayou. A pirogue is a “Cajun canoe,” and soon the university will be the new home of the Center for Traditional Louisiana Boat Building, where you'll be able to learn how to handcraft your own vessel.



*Students at the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute learn the finer points of Louisiana cooking.
Credit: CJFCI*

Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky

- **Year Founded:** 1906 as Western Kentucky State Normal School, and it was renamed to WKU in 1966
- **Student Population:** Approximately 16,000
- **Town Population:** Approximately 78,000 (our biggest college town)
- **Home of:** The Hilltoppers
- **School Colors:** Red and white
- **Not to Be Missed on Campus:** The [Kentucky Museum](#) is open to the public and celebrates all aspects of life around the state. It includes exhibits about one of Bowling Green's most famous sons, Duncan Hines, and also features horror director and composer John Carpenter in its music exhibit. Carpenter's father was a music professor here and Carpenter attended the university himself.

- **Not to Be Missed Around Town:** Every Corvette rolls off the assembly line here in Bowling Green, so the city is home to the [National Corvette Museum](#), along with a pretty cool [test track](#) where you can try out “America’s Sports Car.” This part of the state is noted for its caves, and Bowling Green has an incredible one, [Lost River Cave](#), that can only be explored by boat.
- **Where to Eat on a Student Budget:** [Que Pasa Tacos](#) is super-affordable and open 24 hours. Also operating round the clock is [GAD’s](#), the Great American Donut Shop.
- **Where to Get a Great Cup of Coffee Before Pulling an All-Nighter:** [Spencer’s Coffee](#) has three locations around town, including one right on campus in The Commons.
- **How the Students Connect with the Town:** The university organizes the Big Red Blitz before the official start of each school year, and students can sign up to volunteer throughout the city. Activities include projects like painting a donation-based thrift shop, creating outdoor trails or building furniture for local schools.
- **The Quirky Stuff:** WKU is famously haunted ... and a former professor offers [ghost tours](#) here year-round. Keep your eyes peeled, though, because the small white things scurrying up and down trees are NOT ghosts ... they’re the rare white squirrels that have flourished here on campus because students and faculty help ensure they’re safe from the predators they’d encounter in other environments.

[Frostburg State University](#) in Frostburg, on the [Mountain Side of Maryland](#)

- **Year Founded:** 1898
- **Student Population:** Approximately 4,100
- **Town Population:** Approximately 7,000
- **Home of:** The Bobcats
- **School Colors:** Red and black
- **Not to Be Missed on Campus:** The university’s [planetarium](#) offers monthly shows that are open to the public. In addition, the [Museum of Natural History](#), which is located on the first floor of the Compton Science Center, has public hours, free admission and an incredible collection of wildlife specimens from around the world. The Brownsville Memorial, located on the upper quad of campus, draws attention to this region’s African American heritage.
- **Not to Be Missed Around Town:** Frostburg is an outdoors lover’s haven. It offers easy access to cyclists and hikers who want to explore the 150-mile [Great Allegheny Passage \(GAP\)](#), which begins in Pittsburgh and ends in nearby Cumberland. Maryland’s only rail bike operator, [Tracks and Yaks](#), departs from the old Frostburg Depot and sends participants out on the historic Western Maryland Railway line for some incredible views. There’s also a local [history museum](#), [memorial to the coal miners](#) who worked in these mountains, and self-guided walking tour in town.
- **Where to Eat on a Student Budget:** [The Princess Restaurant](#) is legendary for its specialty milkshakes. Order one from the same booth where President Harry Truman enjoyed a chicken dinner back in 1953.

- **Where to Get a Great Cup of Coffee Before Pulling an All-Nighter:** [Clatter Café](#) offers a full menu of caffeine-forward beverages and is a proud part of Allegany County's [Donut and Coffee Trail](#).
- **How the Students Connect with the Town:** The town turns out in full force on the first Saturday of December for [Storybook Holiday](#), a festive tradition that finds students competing in the Elf Olympics as they raise money for the university's [Nowaczyk Family Children's Literature Centre](#).
- **The Quirky Stuff:** The university mascot is Bob E. Cat, a tribute to the small but mighty wildcat that's found throughout the Appalachian Mountains. He symbolizes regional wildlife, a fierce spirit and mountain toughness.



The Elf Olympics are a highlight of Storybook Holiday in Frostburg, where students turn out in full force to support their school's literacy center.

Credit: mdmountainside.com

Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia

- **Year Founded:** 1875
- **Student Population:** Approximately 5,000
- **Town Population:** Approximately 29,000
- **Home of:** The Hornets
- **School Colors:** Red and blue
- **Not to Be Missed on Campus:** [Conservatory Performs](#) hosts more than 150 music, theater and dance events each year, and they're all open to the public. Highlights include faculty recitals in Goodson Chapel, but sometimes they take things slightly off campus ... like the contemporary concerts held in the Bright Box Theater downtown.

- **Not to Be Missed Around Town:** All visitors to Winchester ultimately end up in [Old Town](#), where a pedestrian mall allows them to explore an array of restaurants, bars and shops. The [Museum of the Shenandoah Valley](#) provides a phenomenal overview of the entire Shenandoah Valley, putting its history, culture, arts and natural wonders into perspective. Time your visit right and you can be swept up in the beauty and fun of the town's annual [Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival](#), which will celebrate its 100th anniversary in April 2027.
- **Where to Eat on a Student Budget:** [Pizzoco Pizza](#) serves up great pies in a converted Sunoco station, and the venerable [Snow White Grill](#) in Old Town is the place to head for sliders and fries.
- **Where to Get a Great Cup of Coffee Before Pulling an All-Nighter:** [Hopscotch Coffee & Records](#) has plenty of offbeat charm ... and is a full-fledged record shop, too!
- **How the Students Connect with the Town:** The university designs and creates a special float for the aforementioned Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival each spring. Students also partner with the Winchester-Clarke Garden Club and work in the gardens at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, harvesting fresh produce for the local food pantry.
- **The Quirky Stuff:** Costumed students gather for a wacky real-life Mario Kart Race each Apple Blossom Festival weekend, riding tricycles and dodging water balloons on a course set up on campus.

Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, part of [Butler County](#)

- **Year Founded:** Chartered in 1809, the university welcomed its first students in 1824. It was envisioned long before that, however, as it was made possible by an ordinance signed by President George Washington. This makes it one of the oldest public universities in the United States ... and the oldest on our list.
- **Student Population:** Approximately 19,000 (our biggest school)
- **Town Population:** Approximately 23,000
- **Home of:** The RedHawks
- **School Colors:** Red and white
- **Not to Be Missed on Campus:** The university is home to several facilities designed to enhance students' educational experiences, but they're also open to the general public. These include the [Hefner Museum of Natural History](#), the [Karl E. Limper Geology Museum](#) and [Conrad Formal Gardens](#). The [Richard and Carole Cocks Art Museum](#) is a full-fledged art museum that boasts a vast collection, including a section dedicated to student work. (Please note that the art museum is closed for renovations now but will reopen next year.)
- **Not to Be Missed Around Town:** The town of Oxford is a charmer and a great place to walk around and do a little shopping. While strolling, don't miss the [Oxford Hive Mural](#), a piece of art that celebrates the city's and university's role as where the modern beehive was invented. The town is also home to the [Black Covered Bridge](#), one of the longest in the state of Ohio. It's a hybrid of two different types of truss bridge and dates to the late 1860s.
- **Where to Eat on a Student Budget:** [Bagel & Deli](#) is the perennial favorite and even offers the opportunity to create your own sandwich and get it added to the permanent menu.

- **Where to Get a Great Cup of Coffee Before Pulling an All-Nighter:** [Kofenya](#) serves an array of caffeinated beverages ... and plenty of cocktails, too!
- **How the Students Connect with the Town:** The [Miami University Geospatial Analysis Center](#) partners with local communities, giving students practical experience and providing real-world mapping for the organizations they work with. ComMUnity Connect matches students to large service projects throughout Butler County. In addition, the university's popular Steel Band performs at the region's municipal parks each summer.
- **The Quirky Stuff:** Lorenzo Langstroth, known as "The Father of American Beekeeping," lived in Oxford in the mid- to late 1800s and invented a special kind of beehive that's still used by keepers today. The cottage where he lived while revolutionizing the honey industry is a National Historic Landmark and can be found on the university's Western Campus.

Well, what do you know? Today we provided a little education and a little bit of fun ... and isn't that what college is all about? We hope this lesson has inspired you to dig out your favorite old sweatshirt and set out on a fall adventure, exploring underrated college towns.

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