

Viewpoints

College towns

Ogden City officials are interested in working with Weber State University to make Ogden a truly great college town. I can certainly identify with the goal because I understand the enchantment of a college town.

When I was growing up, one of our favorite family outings was to make the nine-mile drive from our house to the University of Arkansas. Once at the university, we would walk the entire campus from Greek row to Old Main to the reflecting pool.

Although I didn't know it at the time, I think my parents' secret agenda was to have the kids fall in love with college. Their hope was that all the kids would earn college degrees, something no one in the family had previously done.

If that was their goal, it worked. All the kids earned degrees. By the time I was 25, I had completed my Ph.D. and was working as a full-time faculty. In my 30-plus years in higher education, I have studied and worked in college towns. I have traveled to countless others for conferences and accreditation visits.

I've been to Ithaca, Lincoln, Lawrence, Princeton, Pullman, Eugene, Walla Walla, Madison, Tempe, Berkeley, Fayetteville, Columbus, and Corvallis. I could list a couple of dozen others, but I will stop the recitation before I start to sound like the mythic truck driver in the Johnny Cash song "I've Been Everywhere."

I haven't been to every college town, but I have been to a lot. So, what have I learned about the things that make a great college town? Here are some common elements.

College towns are scenic, whether the beauty originates from the natural setting, meticulous landscaping or architectural elements. Great college towns are culturally rich, offering an eclectic menu of contemporary music, theater, symphony, galleries and museums. Multiple transportation options abound in great college towns ranging from mass transit to bicycles.

College towns normally have at least one college sports team beloved by the community and supported by strong attendance at home games. It is even better if the team responds to the community's support by winning a game every now and

then.

College towns also offer opportunities for residents to engage in at least some recreational sports. Some have become meccas for hikers, snow boarders, skiers, mountain bikers, and rock climbers.

Ogden already has a lot of these elements in place. In fact, Ogden ranks among the best in terms of a beautiful natural setting, and ample recreational opportunities. Weber State brings an expansive range of cultural events to the community. Still, there is always room for improvement, and that is why city leaders

have set their sights on enhancing the elements of a great college town.

As Ogden officials pursue this goal, they must be mindful of the single most important feature defining a great college town. The best college towns are unique, one-of-a-kind places.

Although college towns share a few common

themes, there is no single archetype for a college town. Some are in the middle of a metropolitan areas, some are located in small towns, and some are out in the sticks.

The favored coffee shop in Lawrence is different from java joint in Columbus, and neither is owned by Starbucks. The preferred beer in Eugene isn't the same as the brew of choice in Ithaca, and you can be certain that neither is Budweiser.

In Madison, students can choose from a variety of Jamaican restaurants featuring some great jerk pork and chicken. In Fayetteville, you won't find a single Jamaican restaurant, but you will find some pretty good barbecue.

Residents of college towns steadfastly eschew corporate chain stores and favor locally owned and operated businesses. This makes college towns unique, and that is one of the primary attractions of living in a college town.

As Ogden leaders seek to enhance the city's status as a college town, they should avoid a cookie-cutter approach and develop a college-town experience unlike any other.

If you want to offer your own opinion on making Ogden a college town, go to Weber State University's Facebook page where you will find a lively discussion taking place.

Top of Utah Voices



Michael Vaughan

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Commentary

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