

Executive Summary

Missouri Campus Compact (MOCC) seeks to advance community engagement within institutions of higher education and strengthen the partnerships between the institutions and the communities they serve. In order to work toward fulfilling that mission, MOCC embarked upon a research study examining community engagement through the lens of town-gown relations. While the relationships between higher education and the communities in which they are located can be difficult at times, they can also be impactful and foster transformative change for mutually beneficial outcomes. By focusing on neighborhood-based engagement efforts, colleges and universities can build and improve town-gown relationships to have a larger positive effect on communities in close proximity.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the nature of neighborhood-based engagement and celebrate successes in positive town-gown relations across the state of Missouri. Representatives from Missouri Campus Compact member schools were asked to submit case studies of their engagement programming related to neighborhood relations. Categories of programming included community building with off-campus student housing, neighborhood partnerships, and neighborhood revitalization and redevelopment. The goals of the study included providing best practices related to neighborhood relations and sharing descriptive examples of successful and impactful programming from within member campuses for replication across the state.

In all, 10 of the 32 colleges and universities who were MOCC members during the 2014-2015 academic year submitted case studies. Case studies were submitted from the following schools:

- Washington University in St. Louis
- Saint Louis University
- Northwest Missouri State University
- Harris-Stowe State University
- University of Missouri-St. Louis
- Rockhurst University
- University of Missouri-Columbia
- Drury University
- William Jewell College
- University of Central Missouri

The content of this work includes a literature review of town-gown relations, themes, and best practices gleaned from the case studies, and the actual cases submitted. Analysis of the case studies revealed the following common themes: making a long-term commitment; ensuring mutually beneficial outcomes; addressing a community need; resolving conflicts and easing tensions; focusing on leadership capacity; planning for comprehensive partnerships; and incorporating the project into the mission of the institution. All of these themes align with the existing literature on university-community partnerships and engagement strategies.