

MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE TOWNS: ASSESSING THE
GEOGRAPHY OF COLLEGIATE CULTURE

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of Geography and Geology
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science

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May 2016

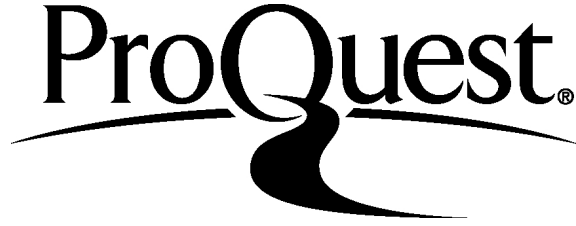
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ABSTRACT

MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE TOWNS: ASSESSING THE GEOGRAPHY OF COLLEGIATE CULTURE

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This study assesses the appearance of collegiate culture on the landscape of college towns in Mississippi. The research will add to the understanding of this phenomenon by contributing more focused studies of college towns not yet explored. Refining and adding to the concept of a “college town” by identifying physical and cultural factors that characterize it will open opportunities and provide options that will serve as a gateway for more pointed cross-disciplinary research. Not only are these towns havens for geographic research, but also for cross-disciplinary research pursuits due to their unique cultural characteristics. Using U.S. Census-derived maps and a list of expected college-related demographic and physical characteristics, 11 towns were evaluated based on the degree and presence of those characteristics, respectively. A scoring system was then used to relatively order the towns from most to least influenced. Generally, towns with more students were more heavily influenced. The results show that a standard definition of college towns can be used, but clearly different types of college towns exist and should be evaluated as such to see the specific effects of institution and municipality/community cooperation. Implications and principles are useful for any town focused on development because knowing the community– its demographic composition and assets present on the landscape– could help leaders in any town make decisions that respond to the needs of that community.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife who gave of herself to help me through this entire process. Your selflessness and sacrificial love are a reflection of how marriage is about glorifying the creator of marriage. The Lord is clearly your first love, and it is evident in the way you treat me and others. I am honored to have such a woman come alongside me so we can walk through this life together.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee for guiding me through this process over my graduate career. Special thanks to my advisor, Joby Bass, for consistently reassuring me and keeping me calm through all the stages. I also want to thank David Cochran for providing me with ample information and thorough conversation about the project. Finally, thanks to Mark Miller for making me think twice and refine my ideas. I greatly appreciate your willingness to help me through this project.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

College towns are differentiated from standard American towns by the presence of a dominating influence exerted by a local university (Gumprecht, 2003). They are not simply bounded geographical areas that contain an institution of higher education but a network of similar outstanding concentrations of characteristics not found everywhere. The influence of college culture is not exclusively limited to campus and its immediate periphery but extends throughout town. In these towns, the campuses, and those who use them, are connected to the town in various physical, economical, and social ways. These diverse and culture-rich places are the subject of Blake Gumprecht's work in *The American College Town* (2009) wherein he established parameters for identifying these types of towns. In addition to fostering formal education, colleges are considered public spaces serving different roles such as public parks, social and cultural centers, and symbols to the community (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 70). Given these roles, the college acts as a multipurpose resource for the host community. If there is a need that the community cannot meet on its own, the college is frequently employed to meet that need.

Colleges and the communities that contain them stand to benefit significantly from this type of collaboration because universities introduce cross-generational relationships, socio-economic and cultural diversity, and serve as rich centers for creating and attracting intellectual and human capital (Harris & Peabody, 2001; McGrail, 2013; Nunery, 2003; Winters, 2011, p. 447). Benefiting and connecting to the surrounding community has been a role of colleges since their inception in the United States. Today

the role of a campus in a community can be influential economically, socially, and otherwise (Gumprecht, 2007). Though a sampling of towns has been studied across the United States, no towns in Mississippi were considered in Gumprecht's study.

Typical American college towns and those in other countries like England have been studied and the benefits/detriments highlighted, but a new study on Mississippi's "college towns" would show how the state compares to research on traditional American college towns, yield insight into the condition of these towns, and show how attractive they may be to potential residents or employers. The procedures from Gumprecht's cross-country research were followed closely and applied to studying towns in the unexplored context of Mississippi. As such, the study's defined research plan first involves statistical demographic research, followed by field studies of the landscape, and finally data analysis that combines both quantitative and qualitative data. This combination of data bolsters the study by enriching the understanding of college towns and providing insight that one method alone could not do.

Purpose

College landscapes deserve more attention because they are linked, unique urban areas with layers of identity— cultural subregions found all over the United States that bear more resemblance to each other than surrounding communities without colleges (Gumprecht, 2003, p. 51; Zelinsky, 1973, p. 136). This study seeks to fill a gap in the research of pointed investigations of the characteristics of a college town. These towns are not only havens for geographic research, but also cross-disciplinary research pursuits. Therefore, refining and adding to the concept of a "college town" by identifying physical

and cultural factors that characterize it will open opportunities and provide options that will serve as a gateway for more pointed cross-disciplinary research. Gumprecht (2009) chose towns like Ann Arbor, Michigan, Manhattan, Kansas, and Auburn, Alabama that are renowned for their college town characteristics. This study, however, applies his methods in the lesser-known collegiately influenced towns of Mississippi to assess the impact of the presence of college campuses in this previously ignored state. Outside of the local context, these results can be applicable because at the very least this will provide some insight into what constitutes a general college town, and more specifically, a southern college town.

The results of this study will serve as a resource for professionals in education and community organizations, state and area planners, and businesses that benefit from the effects of college culture and diversity. As data will be used to show relationships between campuses and the distribution of specific elements of college culture, economic development efforts could also benefit through the exposure of connections between centers of this type of creative human capital.

State leaders in Mississippi are concerned with fostering this type of resource and improving the creative economy by seeking to retain and attract Mississippi graduates in creative degree programs while working to better connect creative people across the state (*Mississippi's Creative Economy*, n.d., p. 12). Representing these relationships through mapping could uncover unknown connections between differing campuses and students. Additionally, university officials could see from a different perspective what degree of involvement the university has with its host town and understand what relationships exist,

what could be utilized, or what successful idea may need to be put in place to further connect the college and town.

This insight is key because universities in medium sized cities are in a unique place to support the surrounding community and vice versa (Harris & Peabody, 2001; McGrail, 2013; Nunery, 2003). Mississippi has multiple universities and community colleges that could potentially play a significant role in benefiting surrounding communities, and in turn, benefit from those same communities. However, for this to be executed well, the resources and relationships must be made known and accurately portrayed. If town leaders are concerned with progress, this clear understanding of characteristics and similarities between successful college towns is vital. With some “best college town” surveys using obscure statistical criteria like football stadium size or number of restaurants to determine the rankings, it is important to see and understand the college’s apparent and actual influence on the surrounding landscape to make the best decisions for the community.

Goals and Research Questions

The project’s primary goal is to expound upon the definition of a college town and thereby broaden the idea of some of the characteristics of these towns. The research will also add to the understanding of this phenomenon by contributing more focused studies of college towns not yet explored. Getting a clearer picture will involve studying not only the town, but also the campus because it can guide some of the observations made in the town. The first objective for accomplishing the goal will be to gather pertinent statistical information for each study site regarding fundamental characteristics

of college towns. The second objective will be to use a rubric of characteristics and field work to analyze the landscape for elements mentioned in previous studies that represent collegiate influence. Additionally, comparisons made between Mississippi college towns will contribute to the primary goal.

Observing and describing Mississippi college towns is the focus of the research. As such, a guiding research question will be “What do towns with colleges look like in Mississippi?” The more focused, secondary research questions like “What landscape elements are present that represent the college’s influence on the town,” and “How do the study sites compare to each other?” will direct the observations and ultimately answer the main question. Comparisons will be made by evaluating each town against established research on American college towns and by comparing the towns to each other. Additionally, the study will aim to rank each study site based on existing characteristics/landscape features and place it on a statewide continuum that represents the degree of institutional influence, from the least influence to the most influence based on criteria met. These comparisons will lead to a better understanding of the appearance of the towns. All in all, this research will help to highlight the college towns of Mississippi and recognize what they have that makes them a college town.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The College Town

Current trends in research reflect two principle areas of college town studies. First, college towns and features of campus are studied to better understand the relationship between the town and campus. Blake Gumprecht (2003) has chiefly emphasized this encompassing approach that also tackles identifying and understanding the pieces that make a college town. The other trend is to use studies like Gumprecht's to legitimize the college town as a real, substantial place where productive and insightful research can be conducted. Some topics of study within college towns include community sustainability (Falconer, 2006), economic development (McGrail, 2013; Winters, 2011) and social behavior (Liao et al., 2012).

The primary role of Gumprecht's research in "The American College Town" (2003) was to identify and describe the concept of an American college town. In the study, he identified coexisting characteristics, which do not coexist in towns without colleges, and established the college town as a unique urban environment that is significantly influenced by an institution of higher learning. He used census data and personal experiences to understand how both the demographics and the university-inspired physical attributes, or the college landscape, gave the town its character. He sought to understand the influence of the college on the town and how the town had responded to the presence of a college through field visits and statistical analysis.

The design is mostly inductive and a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods with analysis of the statistical data for patterns that were common in the chosen study towns. In the end Gumprecht derived a set of characteristics that college towns had in common, producing an objective way of interpreting census and economic numbers to place a town within the college town category. However, he admits that these places exist along a continuum from simply towns with a college to highly influenced “college towns.” Although he takes an in-depth look at a few towns across the country, he excludes any towns in Mississippi from his extensive research. His methods yield insight, but learning the character of the university’s influence can also come from a detailed, systematic analysis of the landscape.

Gumprecht (2007) addresses the public role of a college campus, especially as a public space in smaller towns. Through fieldwork, photography, and archival research, he shows how the campus can play multiple meaningful roles as a public space in the community, specifically as a landscaped park, a cultural and social center, and a symbol. Using an inductive approach, he aims to see in what ways the campus public space attracts the community in and subsequently puts the university out in the community.

Focusing on specific examples at The University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma, he uses elements found on campus like football events, pool halls, cafeterias, concert halls, and theaters to describe how they are useful to the public or attract them. Particularly for smaller towns (like non-metropolitan college towns), campuses can provide facilities and cultural events that are not often found outside of bigger cities, bringing big city elements to smaller places (Gumprecht, 2007). These places, he says,

have been trying to connect to the community around them since their inception and were designed historically to be more connected with the community. In fact, using campus as a public space is a characteristic of American college towns (Gumprecht, 2007). In the end Gumprecht suggests that the role of The University of Oklahoma's campus in town is a small picture of its greater purpose throughout the state and with non-university affiliated people. Gumprecht does a thorough job of further defining what makes a college town, but he does so primarily through analyzing archival information rather than studying the landscape. Though he shows how the campus may serve as multiple types of public spaces, its representation on the landscape in the surrounding town is not addressed.

Other previous studies focus primarily on characterizing campuses and college towns and on examining individual aspects that play a role in setting these places apart. Other research uses college towns as a base of study for investigating research questions, thereby giving credence to the concept and its unique standing among non-college towns.

McGrail (2013) purposefully conducts a study in the college town of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where Lehigh University works with the local community. The article highlights how Lehigh University and the town of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania partnered together to set the community on the track to improvement after its major steel plant closed. The university was considered an anchor in the community with resources like human and intellectual capital that could be used to help revitalize the town. The university was to support the community while the community supported it. Designers used city planning techniques and connected the campus to businesses to improve the

area and bring excitement back to the region. The detailed overview of how the town and university started working together emphasizes the importance of a relationship with the university. In the end it is apparent that each party (the community and the university) need the other one to thrive; it was ideal for both to work together. Clearly, towns and universities benefit from working together.

Using a college town as a study site, Liao et al. (2012) try to understand how people act in a particular social space. They provide insight to an earlier call to further understand the interaction between space and society. The study identifies types of public behavior around and on the college campus in a college town since these towns were known to be unique public places with a variety of types of social behavior. After researching and learning about several sites, they chose three study sites that were widely used by the public and documented behavior visually and through interviews. They concluded that there is a connection between the type of place and the type of behavior observed. Areas around campus had symbolic power in the social and public sphere to attract people for specific reasons (Liao et al., 2012).

Whereas Gumprecht opened the door and brought attention to college towns, others have answered his call to give them more in-depth attention and study. The fact that varied types of research, whether it be social, political, environmental, or otherwise, have been done in college towns suggests that there is value in knowing where college towns are and what they look like. Research points out that college communities are unique and can be a force in their local context. This research affirms the findings from

studies of college communities that were done before a specific definition of a college town existed.

The study of campus ecology emerged during the 1970s long before college towns were specifically researched. Its evolution from the combination of several studies involving the campus environment resulted in a framework for understanding campus life and student development that centered on the relationships between college students and their environment (Banning & Bryner, 2001). The approach was founded on concepts from within ecology and environmental studies and was typically applied to collegiate education psychology in the 1960s and 1970s. Ecology and educational psychology became the platform from which campus ecology grew and determining behavior and development based on the environment became the goal (Banning & Bryner, 2001). Results from these studies were later used by higher education officials in campus policymaking and design to create better student outcomes.

There were several branches of study within campus ecology and the emphasis on campus environment and design (instead of the structure of administration or learning environments, for example) is particularly fruitful for geography because it focuses on relationships with the environment over space. In these studies, the environment consists of the college campus and its immediate surroundings, including the town and all the ecological/environmental variables at work that create a unique college situation.

Alexander Astin conducted some of the earliest work that focused on the environment and campus design. Though one of Astin's studies (Astin, 1968) focused on the effects of the physical layout of the campus on students proved to be inconclusive, it

still treated the campus and college town as a unique place of study. Student perceptions of the university, and their standing within, can be affected by how the university is laid out, particularly in its size. If the university and “spread” of its campus are large students feel less connected to faculty and feel less personally cared for than at a smaller university (Astin, 1968, p. 89). The results suggested that the actual physical environment had an effect on how students feel and therefore develop while on campus. Taken as a whole, this college campus environment is able to shape at least the perceptions and feelings of some students depending on how it is arranged. This was the focus of many studies after his: Can the campus or town be arranged to elicit a response from students or affect them in a particular way? Fleming (2001) addresses this unique “college environment” and evaluates it for how the surroundings affect student development and outcomes. By including the town as part of the campus environment and overall college landscape, these studies tie the campus to the community.

Studentification

In cities with high concentrations of students, campus and the community are inevitably involved in a web of town-gown relationships, perhaps most extensively regarding the effects of student living, or studentification. A discussion on college towns in the United States would not be complete without addressing that form of relationship. Studentification, long-prominent in the UK, describes any of the changes in college town neighborhoods or residential areas that result from an increase in student residents, especially off campus (Smith, Sage, & Balsdon, 2014, p. 116). Although typically associated with political disagreements and issues of isolation and inequality similar to

gentrification, studentification can have effects on economics, social structure, culture, and the physical surrounding (Pickren, 2012, p. 128; Smith et al., 2014, p. 116).

Studentification looks different between cities and likely because of differences in student populations, but in general it is identifiable through changes in 5 areas. For example, the local population may have a higher proportion of student residents, a higher population density, housing markets would see changes like decreased owner-occupied housing and increase in property prices, residential environments may display unkempt lawns and a lack of space for vehicles, and services and culture shift more toward providing businesses and services aimed at students (Smith et al., 2014, p. 117). These changes can be seen as both positive and negative depending on the group, but what is most helpful for dealing with these challenges is for groups of different interests (students and other groups) to work together and communicate (Smith, 2006, p. 10).

Research in landscape studies necessarily implies both a familiarity with the study site through prior archival research and some type of qualitative fieldwork that involves describing and making observations (Bass, 2005; Raitz, 2001; Sauer & Jones, 1915; Watkins, 2010). Karl Raitz echoes Peirce Lewis, a pillar in cultural landscape studies, when he notes the importance of getting a “vocabulary of detailed information” about the place of study prior to going to the field (Raitz, 2001, p. 129). This prior research can include old photographs or census data and will not have an effect on what is on the ground at the study site; however, it will help to guide fieldwork, direct the method of sampling, and validate or enrich the observations (Watkins, 2010). As landscape studies can encompass large areas, most employ some type of purposeful sampling to get an

understanding of the landscape without visiting all possible places (Bass, 2005; Watkins, 2010). Creating a rubric to “grade” landscapes for certain qualities is another result of prior research that will not only limit the areas requiring observation, but the also the number of characteristics being studied (Watkins, 2010; West, 2012)

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

To assess the geography of college towns in Mississippi, I used a descriptive design to draw conclusions about the cultural landscape and appearance of college towns. I followed methodology similar to Gumprecht's by using a mixed methods approach for doing case study research in specific towns not yet studied for this purpose. Census statistics for the towns were gathered and observations made to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The purpose of this combination is to gain a clearer understanding and help validate both the observations and census information. The quantitative data collected does not necessarily affect what is on the ground, but broadens the perspective more than qualitative data alone. Additionally, quantitative data can be measured against qualitative observations of patterns.

Two major steps were needed to collect data. In step one, I gathered statistical data about the towns and colleges for analysis. I acquired demographic data from outlets like the U.S. Census, institutional research, and city websites. Primarily, I used the U.S. Census Bureau's American Factfinder web application to search for and download the appropriate data for each city. I organized a table by cities, attributed to each one the appropriate data, and compared the downloaded data sets to the following fundamental characteristics established by Gumprecht in previous research:

- Percentage of renting residents greater than 50%
- High percentage of college age students (around 26)
- Educational attainment higher than the U.S. average

- High percentage of residents working in education, particularly over manufacturing
- Median level of income greater than other similar sized cities
- Higher percentage than U.S. average of people who moved from out of town in the last 5 years
- Commuting practices like biking to work more prevalent than the U.S. average
- Diverse population with high percentage of people from out of state or out of the country

In this study, comparison of Mississippi college towns is the basis for understanding the effects of higher education institutions on the landscape. Rather than comparing to national data and similar sized cities throughout the United States (as in Gumprecht, 2009), my comparisons were primarily between college towns, occasionally using statewide data when necessary. To compare, I assigned to each town point values based on the relative ranking of the amount of a demographic characteristic reported on the U.S. Census. Ranging from 0.5 to 5.0, with increments of 0.5, the town with the least relative amount of a characteristic received 0.5 points, while the town with the most received 5.0 points. Any tied towns were assigned the average value of the ranks they held.

In the second step, primary data about the town landscape was gathered through field visits and online research. I removed any landscape category mentioned in Gumprecht's book that was inherently an element of campus (Campus Public Space, Campus as Park, Campus as Symbol, and Stadium Culture) as my main goal was to

understand the town. I created a table of three categories that grouped specific, observable landscape elements that I could mark whether present or absent in the town. Each study site was “graded” by receiving a score of 0 (absent) or 1 (present) according to the table of categories that included characteristics mentioned in Gumprecht’s previous research that both represent collegiate influence and are typical of towns:

- Specific businesses that appeal to college town residents
- Business or non-business establishments that cater to college student culture
- Peculiar residential districts (particularly student neighborhoods)
- Evidence of a liberal lifestyle like bike lanes
- Additional features noticed while researching

Off-campus elements of college culture like student housing areas were sought using a targeted sampling approach with maps created by 2010 Census block data of renting and average age. Using the Mississippi Automated Resource Information System (MARIS), I downloaded shapefile and boundary information for each city, including city limits and statistical divisions of blocks and block groups from the 2010 Census. Using the data’s attributed census information, I imported it into a geographic information system, Quantum GIS (QGIS), and created a block level map for each study site. After filtering the data by age and then by renting status, I created two maps that could guide my fieldwork toward areas that would presumably be influenced by students. For the average age map, I filtered the data to show only the blocks where the average age was 26 or less. The renting map was filtered to show blocks where renting rates (compared to home ownership) were greater than 50%.

To make the maps useful while travelling, I exported the highlighted blocks and added them to the Google Maps My Maps feature and placed them over a matching baselayer showing the streets in the study town. By printing out the maps with college-age and renting blocks highlighted, I was able to efficiently direct my visit to each targeted sample area of the town and note the characteristics that represented student influence (see Figure 1).

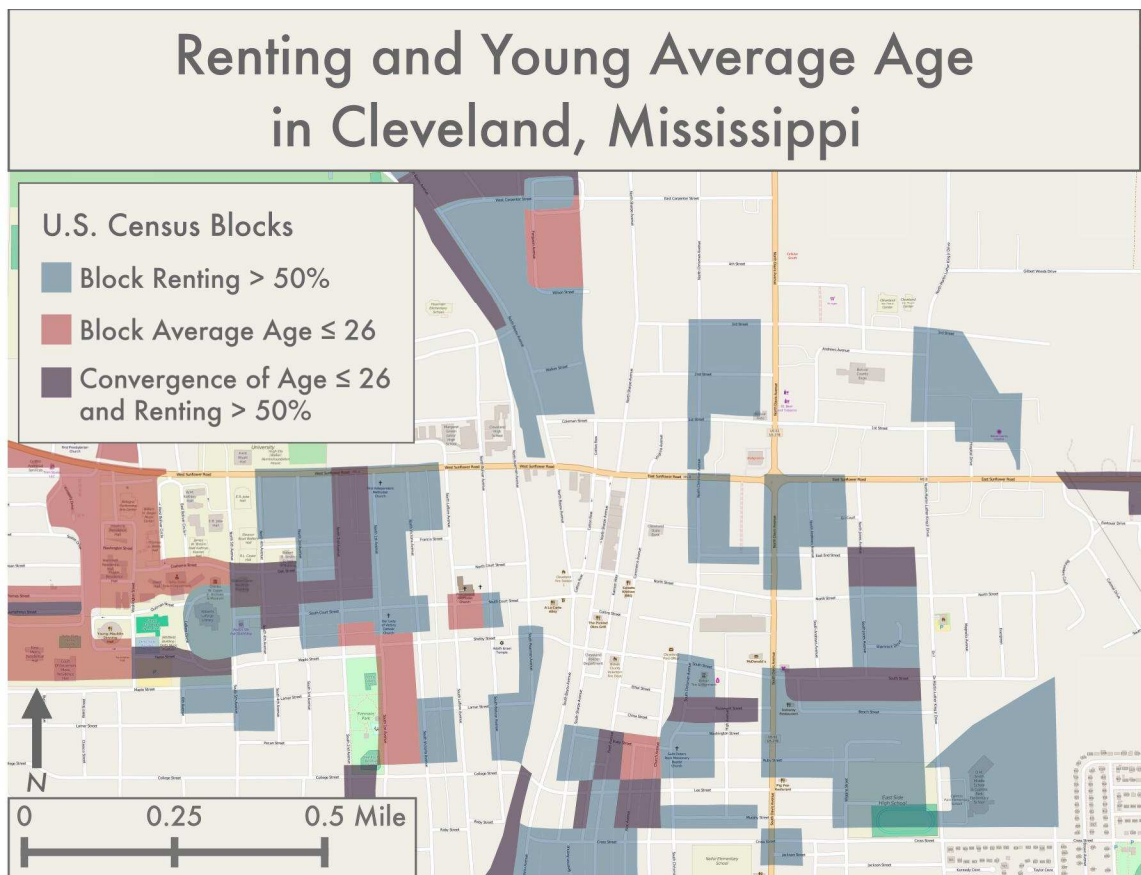


Figure 1. Cleveland College Areas. A map of Cleveland, Mississippi highlighting the college influenced blocks that are a young average age and have high rental rates (Map by author, map baselayer by OpenStreetMap contributors, data layers provided by Mississippi Automated Resource Information System, 2016).

Identifying the business district and establishments that catered to college student culture involved accessing online resources to see whether or not these types of establishments were in the study towns. I searched for specific types of establishments, listed in “Results,” by key words like “coffee shop” and “bike store” using a combination of customer supplied data (Yelp) and advertised businesses (Yellow Pages). If specific establishments were present, I marked them on a table as being in the town.

I made field notes in town and around campus, created maps, and took photographs to enhance the understanding of the campus landscape and college material landscape across the state in a way that statistical data alone could not. Photography, which can be used to visually record the landscape, combined with descriptive notes, ensured an accurate representation for later data analysis. This two-step process was used to enrich the understanding of the similarities and differences in Mississippi, instead of relying solely on either numbers or the physical landscape. Together with statistical data, these observations can be more beneficial for understanding where a college stands in its role of influencing the community.

The samples from the population of all Mississippi towns with colleges were selected in two different stages. Overall, there are 23 main public institutions in the population. In addition to the main campuses, there are multiple branches and satellite campuses across the state. Given the large population size, it is necessary to determine which of these would clearly show how towns are geared toward and marked by students. The first stage of sampling eliminated those institutions that would not be helpful for

understanding the appearance of college towns. The state capital and the Mississippi coast were eliminated because the cities are large metropolitan areas with many other influences. Also removed were branch campuses, as they often do not include on-campus housing. Finally, I removed private colleges as many are in Jackson, the enrollment is significantly lower, and data is not as accessible or standardized as that from public institutions. Determining influence is difficult if the students that make up the university live elsewhere and commute. After these purposeful eliminations, 7 public, four-year universities and 15 community colleges remained. All 7 four-year universities were chosen for study since they were likely to display the most influence as opposed to community colleges. These 7 universities and their associated cities range in location from the Mississippi Delta to the Piney Woods regions, and up into northeastern Mississippi with student populations ranging from 2,500 – 20,000 students. In addition to the 7 universities, a small, purposeful random sample of 4 community colleges located around the state and within city limits were studied, though these colleges were unlikely to exert much influence (see Table 1, Figure 2).

Statewide comparison ultimately provides a characteristic explanation of college towns in Mississippi similar to the way Gumprecht created a list of features characteristic of college towns across the country. This characteristic explanation of towns with universities or community colleges will allow for comparisons across the state regarding the relative degree of collegiate influence. The results could help interested parties see what could be implemented to help a town disconnected from the university be more like another state university that has a good relationship with its community. It is likely that

larger universities, particularly in smaller towns, will be more influential and integrated into their communities but that region and institution type (land grant, flagship, regional, or community college) will have an effect on both the degree and type of visible influence. College students are not going to leave college towns. Producing a study that helps officials and leaders better understand the student population and its ties to the university could help them make proactive decisions to foster beneficial relationships.

Table 1

Study Sites

4-Year Universities	City
Alcorn State University	Alcorn, CDP
Delta State University	Cleveland
Mississippi State University	Starkville
Mississippi University for Women	Columbus
Mississippi Valley State University	Itta Bena
The University of Mississippi	Oxford
The University of Southern Mississippi	Hattiesburg
Community Colleges	City
East Central Community College	Decatur
Holmes Community College	Goodman
Northeast Mississippi Community College	Booneville
Pearl River Community College	Poplarville

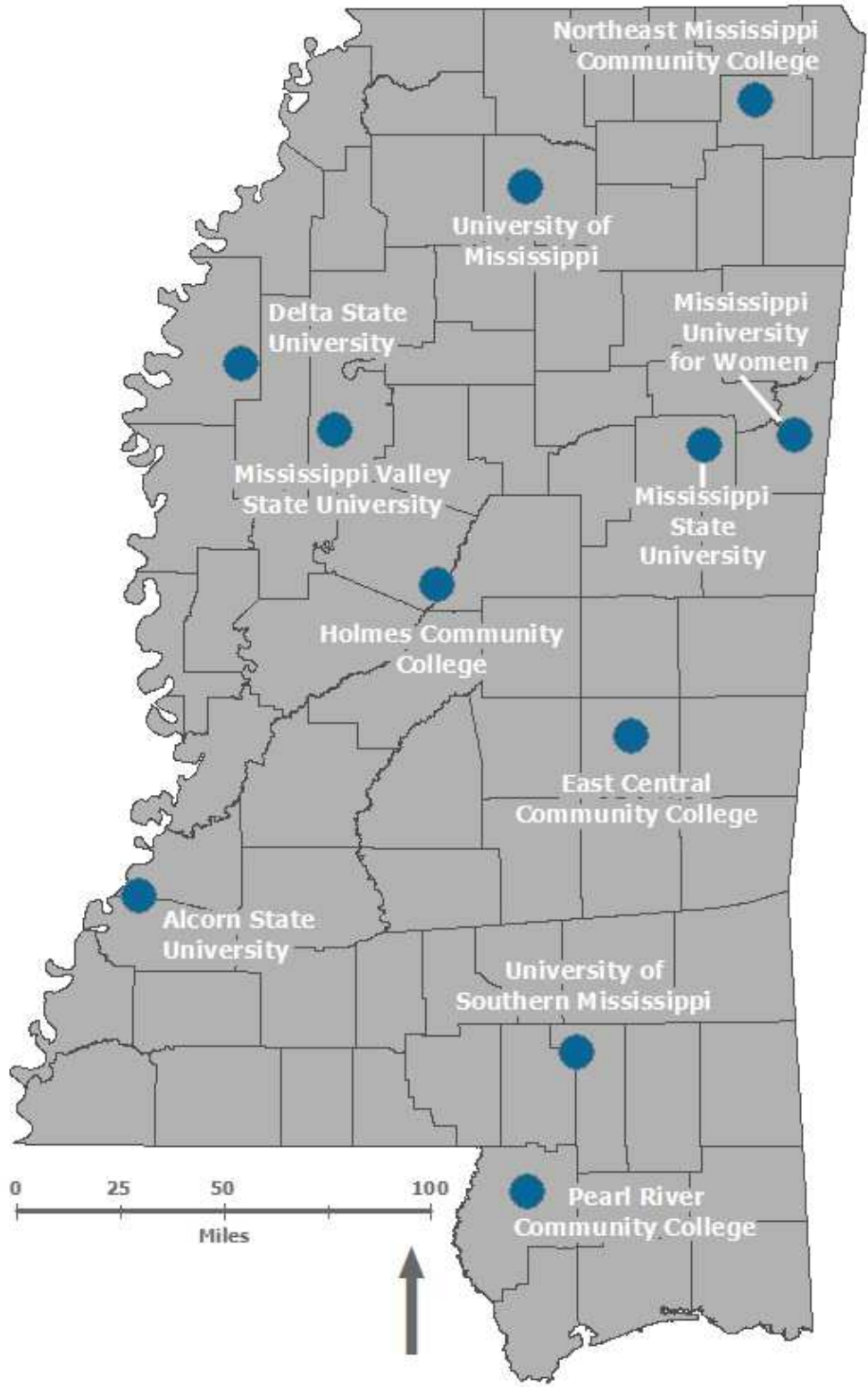


Figure 2. Mississippi Study Sites. This map of the state highlights all 11 study towns (Map by author, data layers provided by M.A.R.I.S.).

CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS

The study sites were visited throughout the summer months of 2015 and mostly during weekends (see Table 2 for the timeline). The length of time at each site was mostly dependent on the size of the town and the institution. The last two towns, Hattiesburg and Cleveland, were studied while school was about to start or had started, respectively. Student areas during this time were significantly more obvious than those of towns I studied while classes were out for the summer mostly due to multiple cars being in the yards in student neighborhoods.

Table 2

Study Site Timeline

Study Site	City	Date of Visit
Alcorn State University	Alcorn, CDP	May 25, 2015
Mississippi State University	Starkville	June 20, 2015
Mississippi University for Women	Columbus	June 21, 2015
The University of Mississippi	Oxford	July 3-4, 2015
Northeast Mississippi Community College	Booneville	July 4, 2015
East Central Community College	Decatur	July 5, 2015
Holmes Community College	Goodman	July 22, 2015
Mississippi Valley State University	Itta Bena	July 22, 2015
Pearl River Community College	Poplarville	August 8, 2015
The University of Southern Mississippi	Hattiesburg	August 15-16, 2015
Delta State University	Cleveland	September 5, 2105

Before doing fieldwork, I compiled 2010 United States Census and 2009-2013 American Community Survey (ACS) data for each study site. The ACS 5-year estimate represents data collected for a 5 year period, in this case from 2009 to 2013 (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). I organized a table to become more familiar with the communities and to guide some of my observations. Not only did this allow me to learn about the town before visiting, but it also helped me to make side-by-side comparisons of the demographic makeup of each study site.

Early analysis began with making field notes during and after visiting each study site. After qualitative data was collected in a city, I organized notes on the observed characteristics by the groups on the rubric and then grouped results according to similarities between towns. This first step was used to show patterns within the data and across the state. Field notes helped me to work toward the major goal of comparing what was actually present on the landscape to what I originally expected to find. Overall, I compared the fundamental statistical data, notes, photographs, and rubrics for each town and looked for patterns across the state to understand which typical characteristics were present and shared in Mississippi college towns and which were absent, as well as which characteristics of college towns in Mississippi were shared but were not common or mentioned in previous research. The results of evaluation using the ranking system follow.

One of the most indicative demographic characteristics for college towns is a large proportion of young people. Similar to Gumprecht, I used the U.S. Census cohort of 18-24 years old to distinguish the group of young people. Immediately, Alcorn State

stood out as the study site with the highest, with 82.8% of its residents in the college age cohort. However, when Alcorn was compared to the rest of the study sites, it was anomalous because it was the only site not considered a town but rather a Census Designated Place (CDP). This place delineates what people think of as Alcorn, which is mostly the campus boundaries (see Figure 3).

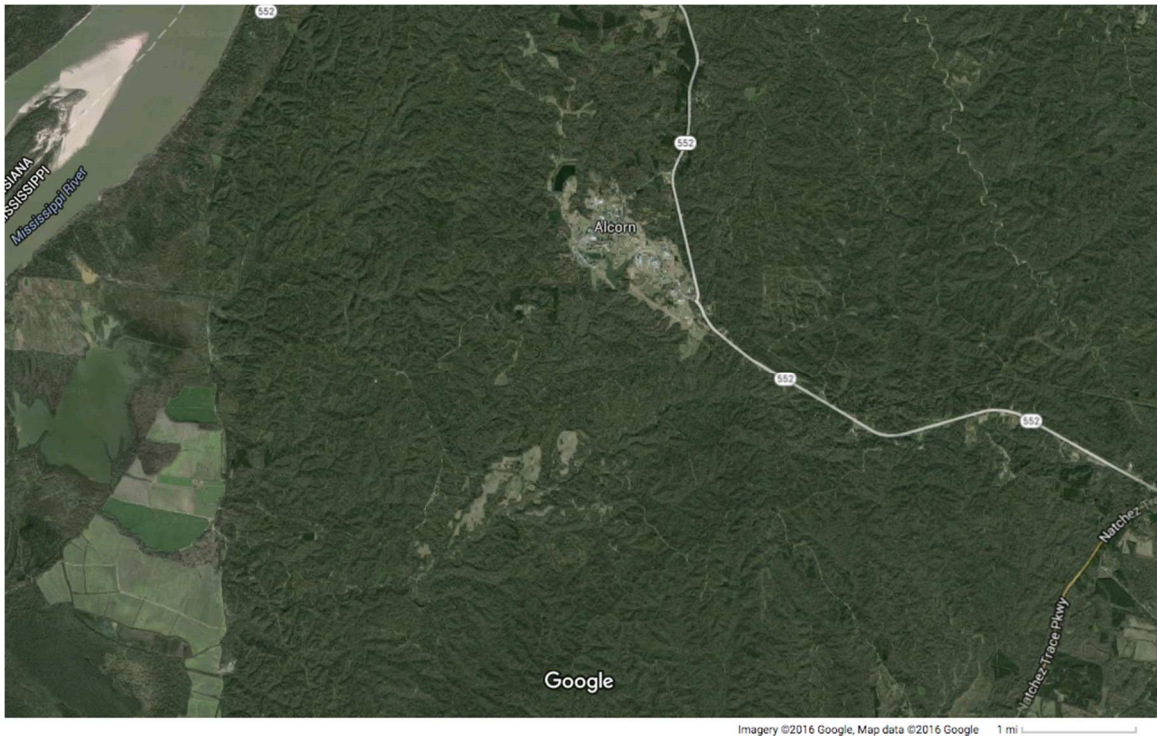


Figure 3. Alcorn Area Image. A satellite image of the area around Alcorn State University in Mississippi. Alcorn State did not have an associated college town, but is known as a Census Designated Place (Map and imagery © Google, 2016).

As such, it was not beneficial or revealing to include any demographic result because the statistics associated with Alcorn CDP are primarily a reflection of the population living on campus. With Alcorn removed, there was a range of 28.8% between

the highest and lowest values. Goodman topped the list with 39.3% college age students and Itta Bena had the least with only 10.5%. Oxford (34.4%) was the only 4-year university to be ranked in the top three college towns by student population. The minimum threshold of 20% college age is a basic measurement for the college's influence (Gumprecht, 2003, p. 52). Using this threshold, after Oxford, the towns of Decatur (31.5%), Starkville (28.4%), and Hattiesburg (22.3%) made the list in decreasing order.

The percentage of renters in a place can also be used as a measure of the influence of collegiate culture, particularly when it exceeds the percentage of homeowners (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 12). If students are not living at home or in dorms, renting a home or apartment is likely an affordable option given their transient residential tendencies. The U.S. Census provides a percentage of "Renter Occupied Housing Units" with a ratio of renter-occupied compared to total housing units. Oxford had the highest renting rate at 65.5%, while the lowest was Booneville at 37%, representing a range of 28.5%. Of all 10 towns, 6 had higher renting than home ownership rates. Cleveland (45%) did not make the list because its renting rate was below 50%. The three cities with the highest renting rates were Oxford (65.5%), Starkville (62.6%), and Hattiesburg (61.7%), representing the only cities with renting rates above 60%.

Understanding the degree of the university's influence can also come from the educational attainment of college town residents (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 9). The Census has categories for amount of education obtained and I used the category of people 25 years old or over, as this would represent more people who have passed the traditional

age of college years and are likely to hold a degree. The other category, 18-24 years old, would exclude many older degree-holders. Using the stipulation of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher, Oxford and Starkville were tied for the highest rate with just over half of residents (51.8%) holding a college degree. With Booneville (14.5%) having the least amount of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher, there was a range that spread 37.3% from highest to lowest. The other two highest, much lower than the top two, were Decatur (36.1%) and Hattiesburg (31.2%). In most of the towns less than 30% of the population held a degree from a 4-year university.

A higher median family income than similar sized, non-college towns characterizes the average college town in the United States (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 9). Though higher income may not necessarily show that a town is more influenced by its university, it is useful for gauging how these Mississippi college towns differ from each other. Median family incomes ranged from \$63,632 in Oxford to \$18,542 in Goodman. The range of median family income was close to \$45,000 and combining all the towns resulted in an average median family income of \$42,243. Decatur (\$57,727) and Starkville (\$57,468) were also included in the top three cities with the highest income. Cleveland (\$46,559) was the only other town to fall above average. Of the four cities with an above average median family income, three had 4-year universities. Three out of four community college towns had a lower than average level of income.

Using a measure like commuting methods helps to explain how residents affect their surroundings and distinguish the college town from other towns in the country. The proxy measure of the unique nature of the towns can be found in walking and biking

commuting methods. In college towns, these rates are much higher than the national average at four times higher for walking and seven times higher for biking (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 15). None of the Mississippi towns met these criteria when measured against national rates, but the rates stand out more when compared to Mississippi's average bike commuting rate of 0.1% and walking commuting rate of 1.6%. Decatur (9.8%) and Goodman (9.2%) by far had the highest walking rates, while Cleveland (5.1%) was a distant contender for the top three towns. However, all three of these towns (as well as Booneville and Itta Bena) tied for the least amount of bicycle commuting at 0%. The highest rate of bicycle commuting was in Hattiesburg (1.3%), followed by Oxford (0.9%) and Poplarville (0.7%). The majority of the towns were high in one characteristic and low in the other. Booneville had both low rates of walking (2.6%) and biking (0%), while Hattiesburg scored high in biking and was close to average for walking at 4.4%.

Universities work to recruit from more than just the host community and as a result, new residents who come from out of town become a hallmark of the diversity in college town populations (Gumprecht, 2003, p. 55; Gumprecht, 2009, p. 13). The 5-year ACS estimates what percentage of residents (1-year-old and over) are from out of state using data from the previous 5 years. In Oxford, 7.9% of the population was from out of state while no residents in Itta Bena were from out of state. Cleveland (4.8%) and Starkville (4.4%) had the next highest amount of residents from out of state, while every other city's population was less than 3.5% from out of the state.

When these ranks were combined, Oxford topped the list with 34.8 points, while Itta Bena had the lowest overall score of 9 points, representing a range of 25.8 points (see

Table 1). The average score was 20 points. Goodman (17.5), Columbus (17.3), Booneville (11.5), and Itta Bena (9) fell below average for all the study sites, but the 4 below average sites were split evenly between community college and 4-year university towns. Aside from Oxford, Starkville (32.3) and Hattiesburg (27.5) round out the highest scoring towns for demographics related to how influential a university is in its town.

Table 3

Demographic Results

Criteria	Oxford	Starkville	Hattiesburg	Decatur	Cleveland	Poplarville	Goodman	Columbus	Booneville	Itta Bena	Alcorn*
<u>Age</u>	34.4%	28.4%	22.3%	31.5%	17.5%	17.0%	39.3%	13.0%	16.4%	10.5%	82.8%
Score:	4.5	3.5	3	4	2.5	2	5	1	1.5	0.5	–
<u>Renting</u>	65.5%	62.6%	61.7%	46.2%	45.0%	51.2%	56.9%	50.3%	37.0%	47.6%	44.8%
Score:	5	4.5	4	1.5	1	3	3.5	2.5	0.5	2	–
<u>Education Attainment</u>	51.8%	51.8%	31.2%	36.1%	29.2%	27.0%	15.2%	21.7%	14.5%	22.2%	24.8%
Score:	4.75	4.75	3.5	4	3	2.5	1	1.5	0.5	2	–
<u>Income</u>	63,632	57,468	38,085	57,727	46,559	35,641	18,542	36,378	42,143	26,250	35,640
Score:	5.0	4.0	2.5	4.5	3.5	1.5	0.5	2.0	3.0	1.0	–
<u>Biking</u>	0.9%	0.3%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Score:	4.5	3.5	5	1.5	1.5	4	1.5	3	1.5	1.5	–
<u>Walking</u>	2.7%	3.7%	4.4%	9.8%	5.1%	3.0%	9.2%	3.4%	2.6%	2.2%	11.4%
Score:	1.5	3	3.5	5	4	2	4.5	2.5	1	0.5	–
<u>Education Workforce</u>	15.5%	16.8%	9.2%	10.0%	10.1%	14.1%	3.0%	8.8%	8.5%	7.8%	0.0%
Score:	4.5	5	2.5	3	3.5	4	0.5	2	1.5	1	–
<u>Out of State</u>	7.9%	4.4%	3.4%	1.5%	4.8%	1.8%	0.9%	1.8%	1.6%	0.0%	12.0%
Score:	5	4	3.5	1.5	4.5	2.75	1	2.75	2	0.5	–
TOTAL	34.8	32.3	27.5	25.0	23.5	21.8	17.5	17.3	11.5	9.0	–

Note: *Alcorn is a Census Designated Place, not a city. The results were not counted in the scoring as they were a reflection of the population on campus.

To understand the relationships between the towns with respect to collegiate culture on the landscape, I used a ranking system to mark whether physical features were present or absent. I primarily evaluated two different areas of town where influence would likely be the most obvious, namely the downtown/ commercial district and student neighborhoods. For evaluation, I only marked whether these features were present or absent; the total numbers of features were not tallied.

Throughout each town, I searched for features from Gumprecht's commercial district category (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 108) and a category of businesses I named "Catering to Culture." The commercial district consisted of coffee shops, bookstores, pizzerias, bike shops, record stores, ethnic restaurants, and bars, for a total of 7 features. Using key words within a combination of online resources including Yellow Pages, Google, and Yelp, I searched for businesses to confirm whether or not they were present. Oxford and Hattiesburg tied with the most features that were present; each city had all 7 features. Starkville and Cleveland tied with 6 out of 7 features. Poplarville was the only community college town to have over half of the business district features, while Itta Bena (2/7) was the only 4-year university town to have less than half of the features.

Using similar methods and resources, I searched for establishments that clearly catered to the university-related population. The category included live music venues, independent film theaters, art galleries, natural food stores, juice bars, outdoor recreation suppliers, vegetarian restaurants, and campus ministries. I chose to eliminate the "juice bar" characteristic as a few exist in the entire state and only one college town has a juice bar. The "t-shirt shop" characteristic was also eliminated because the concept is not clear

in “The American College Town,” and most campuses already have a bookstore that also sells t-shirts. Additionally, Gumprecht did not exclude the likes of Wal-Mart or department stores, both of which sell t-shirts. If there is a college, these establishments could be expected nearby.

Hattiesburg (5/7) had the highest amount of establishments catering to college culture, but there was a 4-way tie between cities having 4 out of 7 features: Cleveland, Columbus, Oxford, and Starkville. The three community college towns of Booneville, Decatur, and Goodman, as well as the university town of Itta Bena, were ranked last with only one of seven features. Independent movie galleries and vegetarian restaurants were not found in any of the surveyed towns. The only feature found in every town was campus ministries that spanned a variety of denominations.

College towns typically have distinctive neighborhood areas segregated by age, family status, or affiliations with the university (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 71). For this study, I chose to evaluate the appearance of student neighborhoods. I intended also to evaluate the areas where faculty might live, but this became difficult and time-consuming as the expected characteristics (like single family homes, architect-designed homes, and New York Times subscriptions) are not as apparent as student neighborhood characteristics. Without a guided and targeted approach for faculty neighborhoods, the search would have been prohibitively time-consuming. After using census information to first find areas of town with student demographic characteristics, I evaluated the area based on the presence or absence of: student apartments, majority renting, out of place furniture, numerous students, bikes chained to things other than bike racks, and cars in yards.

Two obscure characteristics to measure, “numerous students” and “prevalent renting,” were evaluated using the Census information. If the Census-derived map showed areas of town that had majority renting and average age 26 or younger, I marked the town as having “numerous students” and “prevalent renting,” particularly if those areas coincided and other student neighborhood criteria were met. Out of place furniture, like couches on porches, characterize student neighborhoods (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 86). Similarly, office and fold-out chairs, barbecue grills, and ice-chests— typically hidden inside or behind a house— sat prominently on the front porches in multiple student neighborhoods. Displaying objects from the back, profane space in the front, dignified space represents a reversal of Yi Fu Tuan’s space concept (Tuan, 1977, p. 40). As this reversal was often found in these neighborhoods, I also used it to help categorize student areas.

The neighborhood category had a 4-way tie, each city having all six characteristics, between Cleveland, Hattiesburg, Oxford, and Starkville. All other cities had either one characteristic or no characteristics, but Booneville was an exception by meeting two of the neighborhood characteristics. Either the town had all of the characteristics or less than half. The most often met criteria was the presence of student apartments, with all but three community college towns having them.

Gumprecht also mentioned that evidence of a liberal mindset would be present in a college town. The two examples mentioned in his work are bike lanes and food co-ops. The only evidence of this type of “liberal living” was represented by bike lanes and was

only found in Columbus, Hattiesburg, Oxford, and Starkville. No community college towns had either criteria represented.

Similar to bike lanes in respect to a different way of doing life, I added a transportation system to the criteria list because many of the small-to-medium sized cities in Mississippi do not have transit systems. I was compelled to include it due to its obvious display of a town and university partnership. Hattiesburg, Oxford, and Starkville have public transit systems, however the systems in Oxford and Starkville show evidence of cooperation in the town and gown relationship. Oxford's O.U.T. system (Oxford



Figure 4. Starkville Bus Stop. A stop located along the Starkville-MSU Area Rapid Transit (S.M.A.R.T.). Footpaths leading toward student apartments can be seen on the far right (photo by author).

University Transit) and Starkville's S.M.A.R.T. system (Starkville-MSU Area Rapid Transit) both reflect that cooperation in their names (see Figure 4).

Table 4

Landscape Results

Criteria	Oxford	Hattiesburg	Starkville	Cleveland	Columbus	Poplarville	Booneville	Itta Bena	Decatur	Goodman	Alcorn*
<u>Business (7)</u>											
Score:	7	7	6	6	5	4	2	2	1	0	2
<u>Culture (7)</u>											
Score:	4	4	4	4	4	3	1	1	1	1	1
<u>Neighborhood (6)</u>											
Score:	6	6	6	6	1	1	2	1	0	0	0
<u>Liberal Living (2)</u>											
Score:	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<u>Town and Gown (1)</u>											
Score:	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL (23)	19	18	18	16	11	8	5	4	2	1	4
SCORE:	83%	78%	78%	70%	48%	35%	22%	17%	9%	4%	–

Note. Numbers in parenthesis represent the total amount of features possible.

*Alcorn is a Census Designated Place, not a city. The results were not counted in the scoring as they were a reflection of the population on campus.

To see how towns scored on an overall basis, I added all scores for each town from the 23 criteria and derived a percentage of components present by dividing the total by 23 (see Table 4). The lowest, Goodman, had only 4% of the landscape features present, while the highest representation of landscape features was in Oxford at 83%. Overall, there was a difference of 79% between study sites and an average score of 44% of landscape features present. Hattiesburg and Starkville (78%) and Cleveland (70%) were part of the 3 highest-scoring cities, but only one other city, Columbus (48%), had above average for the landscape features. All community college towns scored below average with Poplarville (35%) ranking the highest of these towns. Itta Bena (17%) was the only town with a 4-year university to score below average and scored below both community college towns of Poplarville and Booneville (22%).

When the scoring from the statistical evaluation was combined with that of the landscape evaluation, Oxford had the highest score both times. Starkville remained constant on both lists, scoring 2nd highest for statistical evaluation and 2nd highest for landscape features. Hattiesburg ranked third in the statistical evaluation. The only city consistently ranked above most other cities was Cleveland which scored 5th for statistical evaluation and 4th for landscape features. Clearly Hattiesburg, Oxford, and Starkville form the upper rankings of the cities with most physical features and demographic characteristics that reflect a college-oriented place and population respectively. On the opposite end were cities that consistently ranked near the bottom. Booneville, Goodman, and Itta Bena scored in the lower 3-4 schools for both the demographic and landscape analysis. The 4-year university town of Itta Bena and three other community college towns failed to make it out of the lower end.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Collegiate influence and culture is translated onto the landscape and there will be more evidence of that lifestyle in the town if there are more people connected to the institution. Reaffirmed here is Peirce Lewis' basic axiom of the landscape as a clue to culture as the distinct culture of this group of people produces a distinct landscape (Lewis, 1979, p. 15). The logic that evidence on the landscape is related to the number of students is affirmed as a useful measure, at least regarding 4-year universities, as the three larger institutions consistently scored higher and Delta State University, Mississippi University for Women, and Mississippi Valley State University, having the lowest enrollment numbers through the data time frame, consistently scored lowest regarding influence (MS IHL, 2010, 2013, 2014).

This study demonstrates that U.S. Census data can be used to identify areas of greater student influence, with some success. With fieldwork, or even Google Street View, one could verify U.S. Census findings about student areas, as a block characterized by young average age and a high percentage of renters also corresponds to lower income areas in the studied towns. Using that software, a researcher could study the landscape and identify key elements on the porches and in the yards to verify supposed student neighborhoods. Compiling a map with this information, like the one of Oxford or Hattiesburg (Figures 5 and 6), can help a town to not only understand how, or if, the needs of the students are being met, but also if citizens' rights are being respected. A map conveys a location for the college culture core for the town. If city planners and leaders analyze a map and aim to cater to those tied to the college, those responsible for

future businesses or infrastructure changes may have a better idea of where or if the changes will be made.

College Town Population

Though placements slightly varied, the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, and the University of Southern Mississippi consistently had by far the highest share of students in the state over the data's time frame of 2009-2015 (MS IHL, 2010, 2013, 2014). It is not surprising that the towns with the highest student populations also had the highest overall scores on both the statistical census evaluation and the survey of collegiate-related landscape elements. Institutions with the largest student populations in Mississippi also have a need for more faculty and services, giving the town more avenues for catering to the culture.

It is also not surprising that the cities on top of the study site list have populations lower than the state's most populous cities. The only exception is Hattiesburg, having the 4th largest population in the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). However, a larger population does not appear to play a role in making a town more of a college town. Oxford, with the lowest population of the four most populated cities in the list of study sites (Columbus, Hattiesburg, Oxford, and Starkville), consistently scored the highest and Hattiesburg, with by far the largest population in the list, did not have a population or landscape most influenced by collegiate culture. In accordance with Gumprecht's findings, college towns are also not the largest of towns in Mississippi.

Oxford stayed consistently at the top for both types of analysis and Starkville was consistently second. Hattiesburg moved from third in the demographic category to tied for second in the landscape characteristics. This jump could be the result of Hattiesburg's diverse nature and vision unrelated to college students. Hattiesburg claims

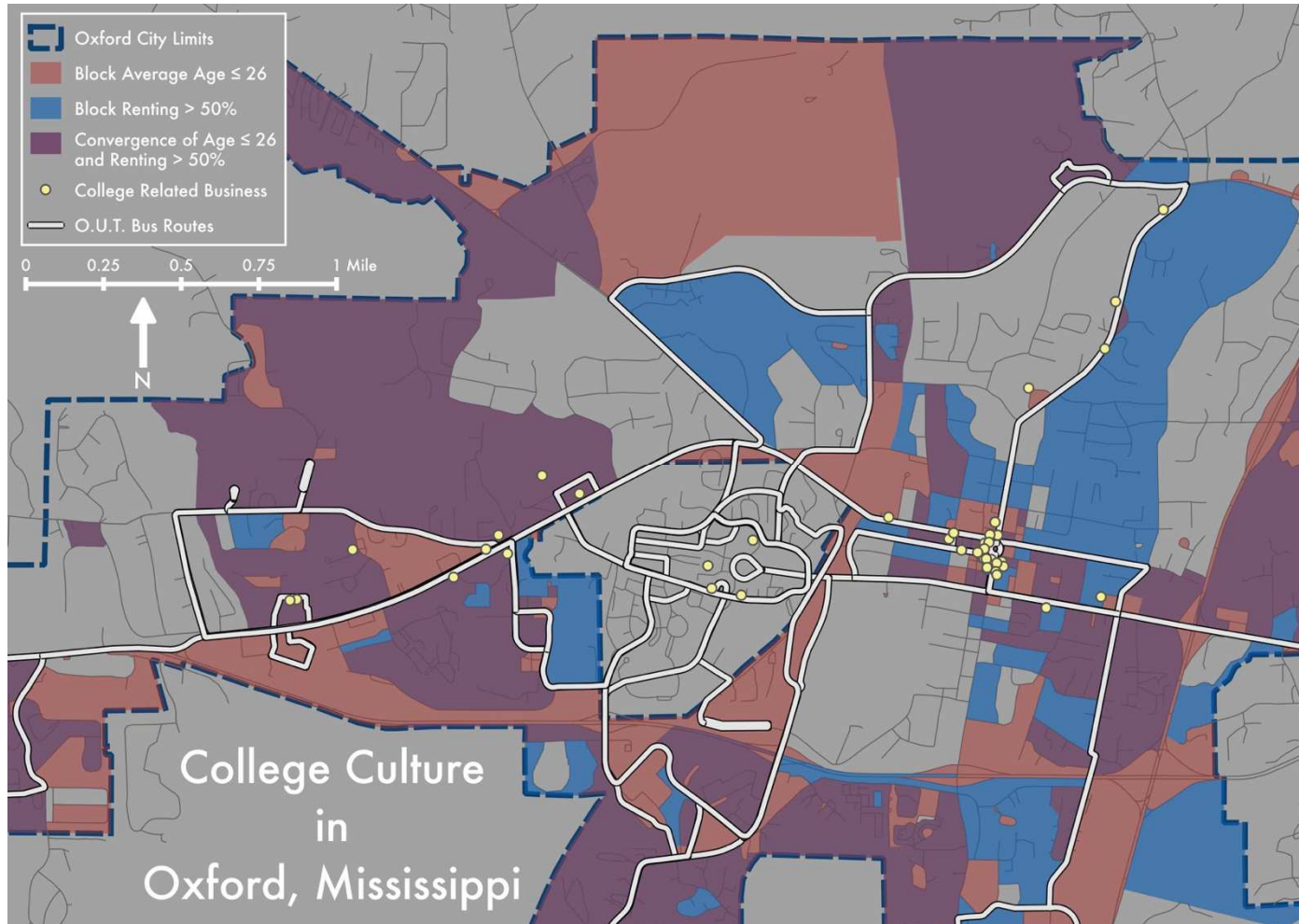


Figure 5. College Culture of Oxford. Selected elements of college culture are highlighted around Oxford, Mississippi. The gray area in the center is the campus of the University of Mississippi (Map by author, data layers provided by M.A.R.I.S.).

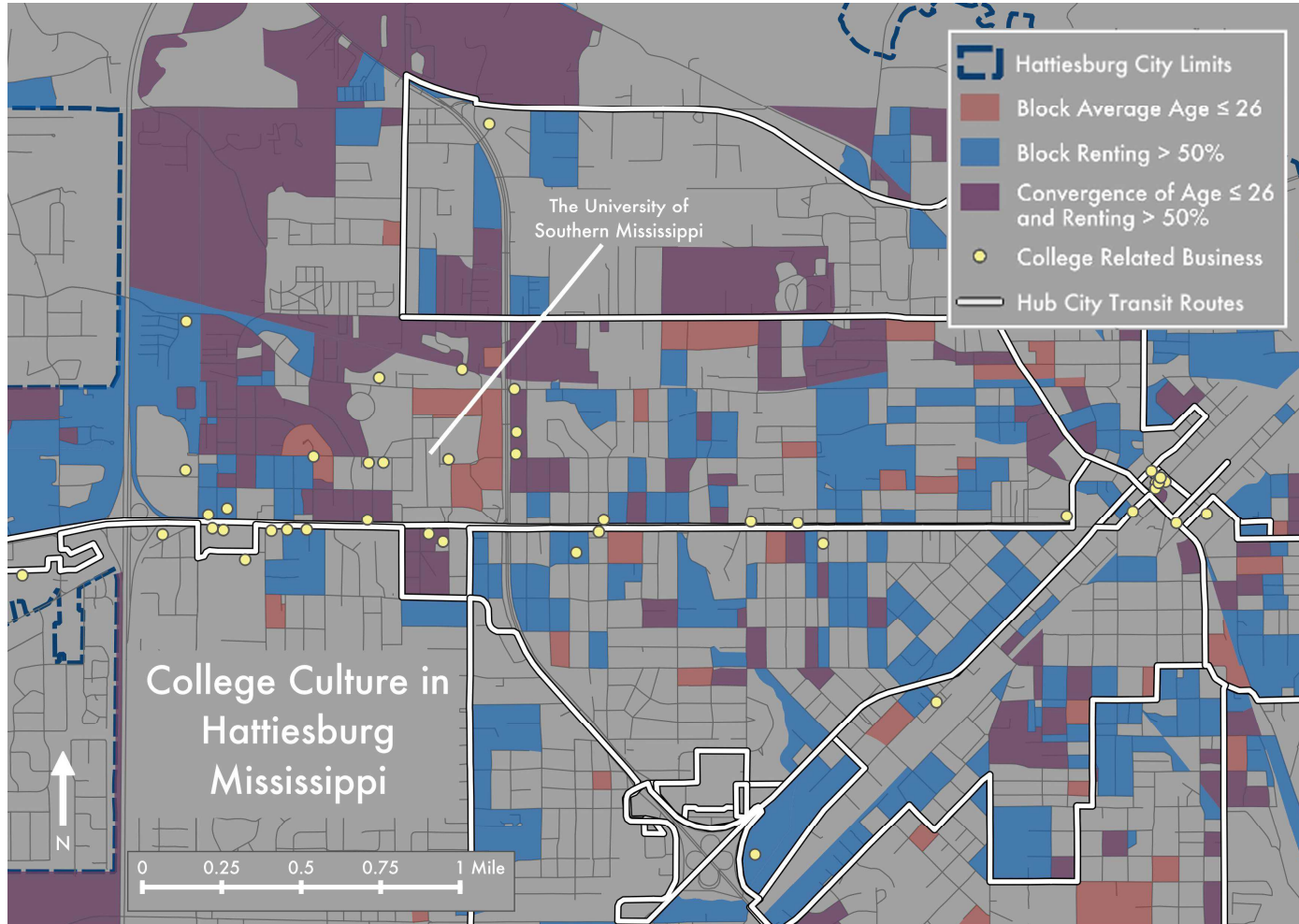


Figure 6. College Culture of Hattiesburg. Selected elements of college culture are highlighted around Hattiesburg, Mississippi (Map by author, data layers provided by M.A.R.I.S., bus routes provided by the city of Hattiesburg).

to be a “growing, thriving metropolis” that purports to be not only “Mississippi’s Premier College City,” but also a top destination for both businesses and the retired (City of Hattiesburg, n.d.).

Furthermore, a closer look at the U.S. Census data shows that the percentage of the workforce in education is lower than five other towns in the study, at around 9%. Clearly in Hattiesburg the overall workforce is not as dominated by education, as it is diluted with other occupational sectors. With a more diverse workforce one could expect to see a diverse town, but it may not necessarily be as connected to the university or the result of collegiate influence. The landscape features here may not be solely related to student populations. In fact, the only landscape feature present here, but absent in all other towns, was a natural food store that closed before the project was completed.

Commuting practice rates by bike or by foot may have some type of relationship in college towns. Where walking is high, biking is low and vice versa. Alternative means of commuting is characteristic of college towns nationwide, but both walking and bicycling rates for the state are far below the national average. Preference to the car is apparent in Mississippi college towns, but when alternative commuting rates are compared to a statewide average the rates for some towns stand out. In an area well-accustomed to the automobile, higher alternative commuting rates could be a reliable predictor of collegiate culture as this surely represents a liberal trend in commuting. Additionally, higher rates of international students who are not as likely to get a car and license as citizens, may also be the reason behind higher alternative commuting rates.

College Town Landscape

One of the most helpful and obvious indications of the influence of collegiate culture on a town, or at least part of a town, was the degree to which students had made a neighborhood their own. The neighborhood landscape category most often had all criteria met and was largely predictable with U.S. Census data. That is not to say that all cities had neighborhood characteristics met, indeed some had none, but that of the landscape categories, the neighborhood category was more likely to have all characteristics met rather than a varied amount of characteristics. Generally it was few, if any, characteristics present, or all six. This trend suggests that student neighborhoods have a consistent concurrent group of features wherein all features are present. An interesting supplement to the suggested characteristics was the presence of ice chests, grills, fold-out chairs, and office furniture on the front porch or in the yard. The front yard, and porch of homes in many of these neighborhoods was clearly organized as an outdoor space, perhaps for gathering, in ways that differed from spaces in non-college student neighborhoods typified by minimal, unworn furniture. From the results, it is safe to say that the front space in student areas is more likely to be used than the front space of family and non-student neighborhoods. Students apparently tend to take some of the backyard activities to the front, “dignified” space, reversing typical placements and creating a unique identifier for student populations. Whether it is the presence of more cars, furniture, or empty beverage containers, the front space of student living areas is apparent (see Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7. Cars in the Yard. Multiple cars are parked in the yard and on the street near a home in Hattiesburg. The house was located in a U.S. Census block characterized by an average age 26 or less and more than half of homes occupied by renters (photo by author).



Figure 8. Porch Furniture. The front space of homes in college neighborhoods often appears well-used and includes items not usually seen outside like office furniture and couches. The house was located in a Census block characterized by an average age 26 or less and more than half of homes occupied by renters (photo by author).

Overall the neighborhood landscape category appeared to be a reliable and consistent predictor of towns with significant influence from collegiate culture.

Unplanned student apartment housing and crowded renting areas alike can create negative issues in towns (Pickren, 2012; Smith et al., 2014). Towns in the state like Hattiesburg, Oxford, Starkville, and surprisingly Itta Bena, have taken measures to handle student populations by building multi-story, high-density student apartments that have smaller footprints than neighborhoods consumed with rentals. In a southern state,

where land is comparatively cheaper, this practice can, and already has, become a factor that shapes the college town landscape (See Figure 9). Though mishandled developments like these can be considered negative (Pickren, 2012), planned and community-oriented developments could help improve relations between the town and the university. For example, consistent campus to apartment complex shuttles keep more students from taking their own cars and adding to an already complicated traffic system in Hattiesburg.



Figure 9. Student Apartments. Multi-story apartments are becoming more of a part of student housing areas in Mississippi. These Hattiesburg apartments were located in a Census block characterized by an average age 26 or less and more than half of homes occupied by renters (photo by author).

Similarly, each town had criteria met in either the business or catering to culture categories, but the amount of features present ranged from one to all— unlike the neighborhood category where essentially one or all features were present. Any town could have from no businesses criteria met to all, with any number of features in between. There was no single business present or absent in every town. Pizza restaurants were the most common with appearances in all but two towns, however the towns without a pizza restaurant (Decatur and Goodman) were the smallest towns in terms of population. It is likely that any town of a moderate size would at least have some type of restaurant serving pizza. Across all towns, the least consistent businesses present were record stores and bike shops. The only towns with bike shops were Hattiesburg, Oxford, and Starkville, while record stores were only found in Hattiesburg and Oxford. These two types of businesses were only found in the top three towns with most demographic and landscape characteristics present. As these businesses are not available to most of the towns, it is clear that they are a result of a distinct population that is associated with the university. While not a single identifier for a college town, these businesses appear to be a marker for college towns with a sizable portion of the population related to the university.

The catering to culture category, which included a mix of businesses, venues, and non-profit organizations, appears to be the most dynamic of the surveyed categories. Before I started, I excluded two features (t-shirt shops and juice bars) as they were either hard to distinguish or not at all common in the state. Even after eliminating these features, independent film theaters, vegetarian restaurants, and natural food stores were absent from all surveyed towns. These absences may speak to the idea that there are

variations in universities by region (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 29) as there are already known variations in towns by region. This may be an example of a difference of cultural preferences in towns completely located within the southern culture area. Hattiesburg is the largest town that was surveyed for characteristics that catered to college students. As it is the largest, it is understandable that it has the most of these features. The culture category, I believe, is the one category that needs the most attention to be adjusted and updated with changes in cultural trends as an old list of features may no longer be popular and what is actually there and a reflection of collegiate culture may be missed by the researcher. Not surprisingly, given the region, a part of every town's landscape was a campus ministry venue. Every town, community college or 4-year, had some type of campus ministry on or off campus.

University and town leaders in each college town will likely have to understand how to work together and improve what is known as the town and gown relationship. The status of that relationship may not be immediately apparent, but one way to measure how the town and university work together is by looking at unified services. In Oxford and Starkville, the transportation system included a bus service with routes that joined the university and the town. Perhaps advantageously, both bus systems were named in a way to refer both to the town and the university, serving as a reminder of the connection between the two. Additionally, both Starkville's S.M.A.R.T. system and the O.U.T system in Oxford are free for students and university employees, the system in Starkville being free to all riders (City of Oxford, n.d.; City of Starkville, n.d.). Only one other studied town had a bus system in place, however the name makes no reference to the university, stops in one lower-traffic area of campus, and provides no discount to students

or faculty. Not many other college town features make reference to this relationship, but for this state these two towns and their bus systems in fact are not a bad measure of the town and gown relationship, as those two towns remained among the most influenced by collegiate culture.

Community Colleges

Towns with community colleges were statistically and visibly less affected by their respective institutions than towns with larger 4-year universities. A variety of factors could hinder influence. If college towns in general are populated with transient people, community college towns not only have a lower population of transient students, but they ideally remain around town for two years instead of four. There were less options for renting in community college towns in Mississippi and therefore less reason and means for staying around, and certainly less to do. A local source directed me to one option for weekend entertainment in Goodman—a student gathering place under a bridge (see Figure 10). However, institutions in smaller towns seemed to have some resources on campus that were unavailable in the town. In Goodman, a library employee stated that many of the users were in fact not students, but people from around the small community. There were not many other places to go for Internet connections, so it is understandable that they would use the campus for business and tasks requiring the Internet.



Figure 10. Goodman Bridge. Many community college towns are less influenced by their respective institutions than towns with 4-year universities. Entertainment options and weekend activities, therefore, are limited. Some students in Goodman spend time here under the MS Highway 14 bridge (Photo by author).

Overall, these results fall in line with previous research on college towns. Though alike in form and function, diversity between college towns exists because of different culture regions and local context. However, much of the appearance of college towns is based on the preferences and attitudes of the student body and faculty that the university attracts with its programs (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 22). Southern institutions, and by extension their host communities, further solidify the culture region of the South as they are different from institutions and communities in other parts of the country. This

distinction, evident by the overall low number of criteria met according to Gumprecht's national "standard" of college towns, points to a need to evaluate these towns with at least a regional basis of comparison in mind.

Oxford, home of the state's flagship university (University of Mississippi, 2016), consistently ranked the highest on both types of collegiate influence measurements. Compared to college towns with other types of universities, the flagship university town typically should have most of the studied characteristics and be the most "set apart" of types of college towns (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 23). Clearly Oxford was the town set apart that had most of the elements that make a typical college town (see Figure 11 for comparisons). The next town, Starkville, is a land-grant institution with a mission that differs from the flagship university. This and other differences attract another group of people who are more likely to be conventional and from nearby areas, thus encouraging a more conventional surrounding town compared to the more liberal flagship town (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 25). Even Hattiesburg, previously the site of a "normal" school and teachers college, now reflects the effects of a regional state university. Hattiesburg was third in the list of towns influenced by college culture. It exemplifies the concept that towns with regional type universities tend to have students from the surrounding area who travel home on the weekends, thus influencing the town little and leaving it looking more like other towns in the region and less like other college towns (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 26). The University of Southern Mississippi's provinciality is reflected in its lower percentage (20.2%) of non-resident students than four other universities in the state, including Mississippi State University (33.1%) and The University of Mississippi (45.8%) (Boyce, 2015, p. 11). The degree of diversity in the student body shapes the

appearance of the surrounding community. Finally, Itta Bena is the home of an historically black college. Itta Bena's consistent low score affirms that college towns with historically black colleges and universities differ from a typical college town and are even exceptions (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 28).

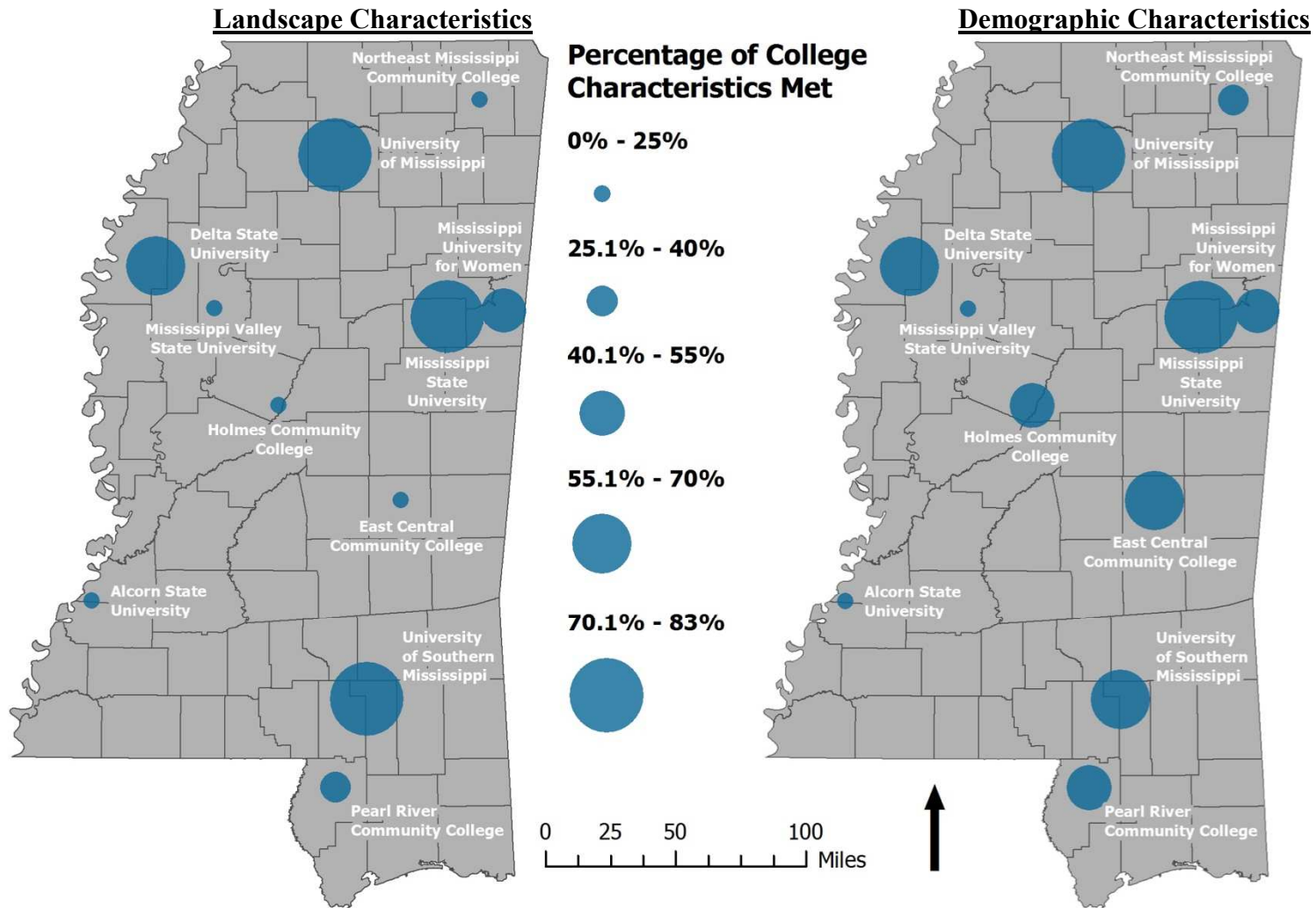


Figure 11. College Town Comparison. Graduated symbols show how towns compare to each other in a variety of characteristics (Map by author, data layers provided by M.A.R.I.S.).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Using demographic characteristics and landscape features to understand how Mississippi higher education institutions shape their respective towns is possible. Though the results are not particularly groundbreaking, they do show that different types of college towns exist. The results are useful for seeing the effects of institution and municipality/community cooperation in the different types of college towns. When an institution in Mississippi has a large student body, the effects on the surrounding area are greater and more apparent. Those effects may not always be positive, and, in fact, increasing enrollment solely to provide benefits to the community could have negative consequences if the effects of studentification on the land and people are not first understood (Munro & Livingston, 2012, p. 1685; Pickren, 2012). In essence, it is through collaboration and cooperation that issues can be avoided or solved and the positive economic development benefits of university presence shared among the local community (Kemp, 2014; Nunery, 2003, p. 9).

Not only are the negative impacts, though similar in nature, interpreted and addressed according to the local situation (Munro & Livingston, 2012, p. 1691), but evidently, the students and faculty that the local institution attracts have an influence on and distinguish the college town. As a result of this study, it is apparent that there are clear differences in the towns based on the type of institution. If a typology of college towns exists, a broad set of general college town characteristics may not be sufficient for comparing towns. As such, it would be wise in future evaluations of college towns for researchers, planners, and developers to seek out and use a specific definition to

categorize towns by institution type (Land Grant, Flagship, Regional, and otherwise) as the student and faculty population will be unique for each one (Gumprecht, 2009, p. 22). More useful results could come from comparison to a list of features and demographics that typically can be expected from a specific type of institution. Other studies trying to distinguish college towns or types of college towns could use U.S. Census data and look further into demographic categories to make comparisons to similarly sized cities without universities within and outside of the state. Detailed comparisons to similar sized cities without universities would solidify what is considered a college town. Using these approaches, a host community wanting to add the benefits and avoid the negative consequences of catering to the institution can understand the type of institution and its associated population.

Though the different types of towns are ranked and compared, this is not a simple study of what college town is the “best,” but rather a study of how the towns are shaped and influenced by the institution’s presence. Rankings of the best college town are frequently published, and while similar criteria are used, the results are often interpreted based on generalized opinions about the effects of student presence and college culture (Livability, 2014; Skrmetta, 2015). Some towns better respond to the needs of this unique culture group and are more influenced than others, and as such “best” in this study is whatever town most suits and responds to the cultural preferences, personalities, and interests of students and faculty. One clear result is that Oxford, of all the studied college towns in the state, best meets the needs and responds to the population associated with a typical flagship university as outlined in Gumprecht (2009). Starkville, ranked second, caters to land-grant collegiate culture, but likely in different manifestations than Oxford.

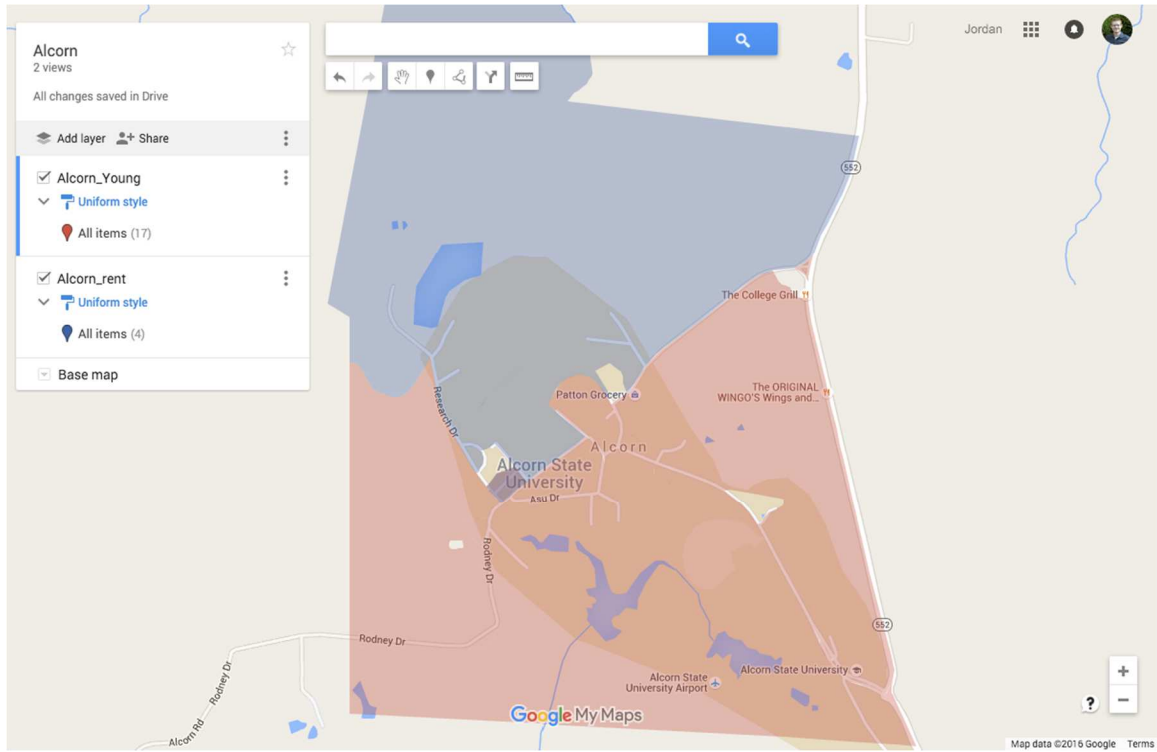
Less-influenced Itta Bena may not necessarily need a used bookstore to be a better college town, but it may benefit from more establishments that cater to students, especially if that is indeed what the students desire when they travel to nearby Greenwood, Mississippi for services. However, Itta Bena, working with Mississippi Valley State University (among other partners), has recognized the importance of re-development with emphasis on designing and providing for the needs of students and faculty. When a university is involved with solving community problems, the results can be positive and beneficial to the whole community (Kemp, 2014, p. 27; McGrail, 2013; Nunery, 2003, p. 13; Ortiz, 2007). A 2015 federal EPA grant award, aimed at turning brownfields in Itta Bena's inactive downtown into student-oriented areas, attests to the confidence of area leaders in the potential dividends of economic growth and new jobs when investing to improve and attract the creative economy (EPA, 2015; *Mississippi's Creative Economy*, n.d., p. 2; Ortiz, 2007, p. 50). Indeed, attracting and retaining a more educated population, a hallmark of successful college towns, lead to economic growth (Florida, 2003, p. 6), more human capital, and a subsequent higher quality of life through reduced crime, increased political participation, and additional consumer services (Winters, 2011, p. 447).

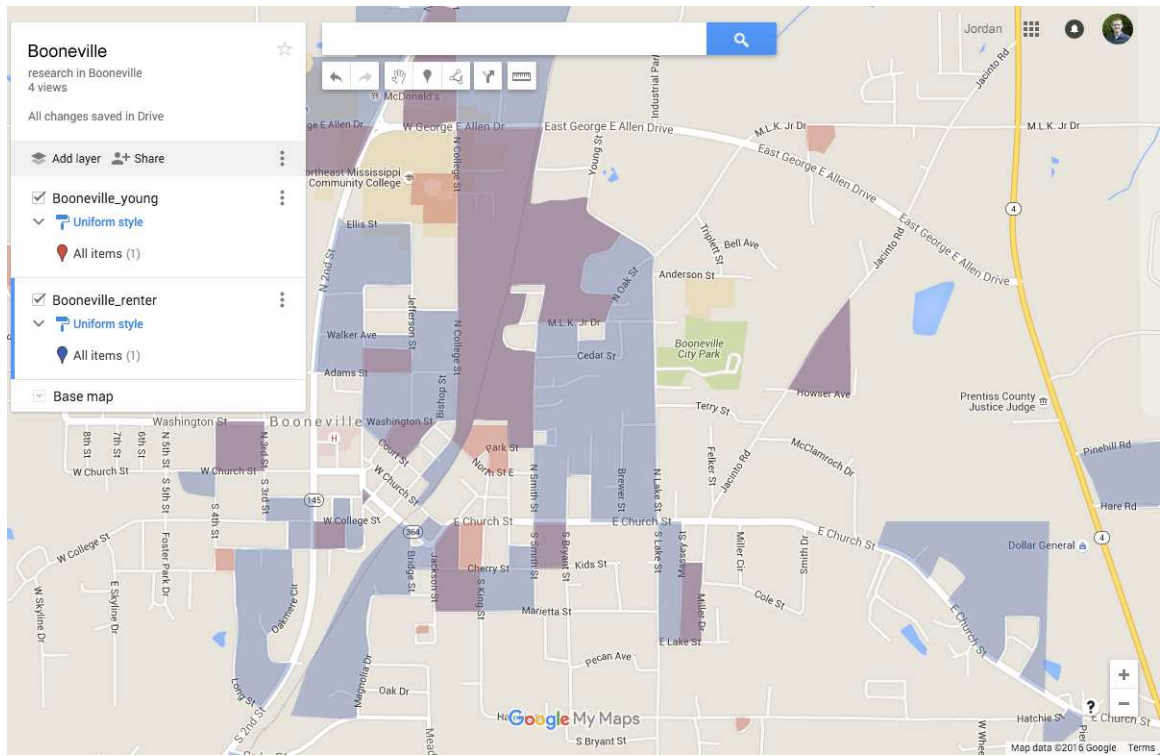
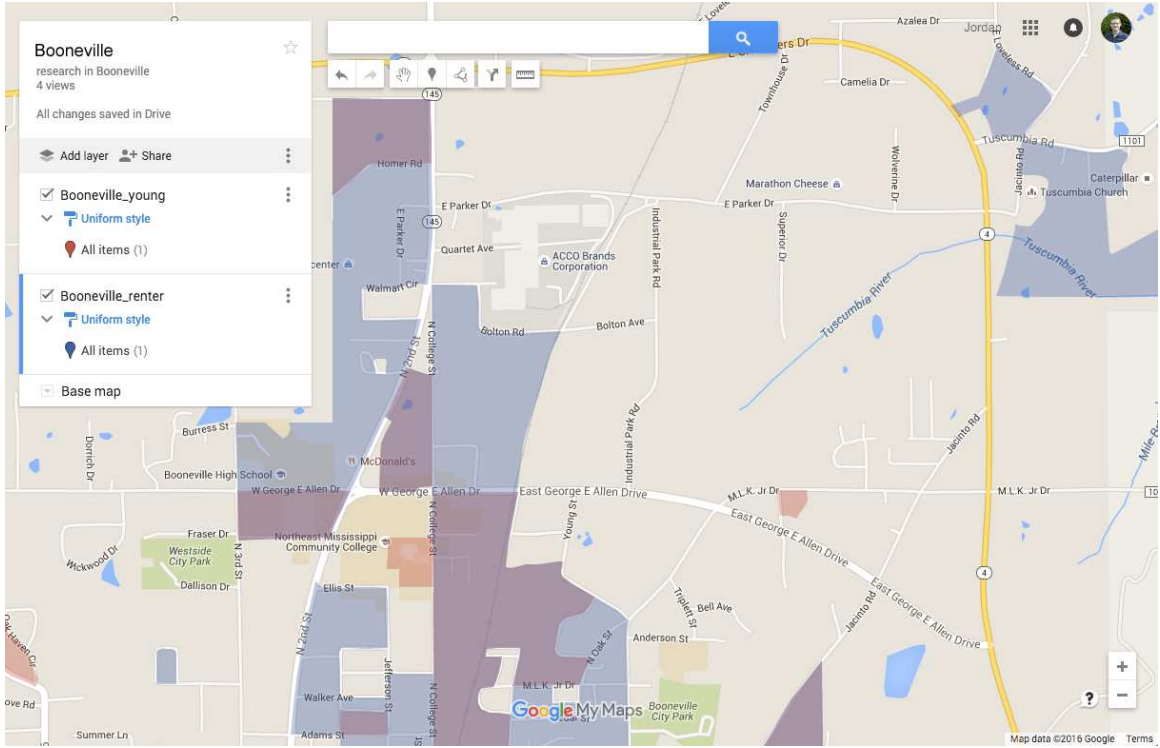
From an economic development and student recruitment standpoint, it is still important to ask whether an increase in students leads to expanded services and options for both them and the surrounding community or if an increase in the availability of establishments catered toward college culture make the community/school more attractive for potential students and faculty. Communication and collaboration between the community and institution, as mentioned earlier, may be one solution for deciding

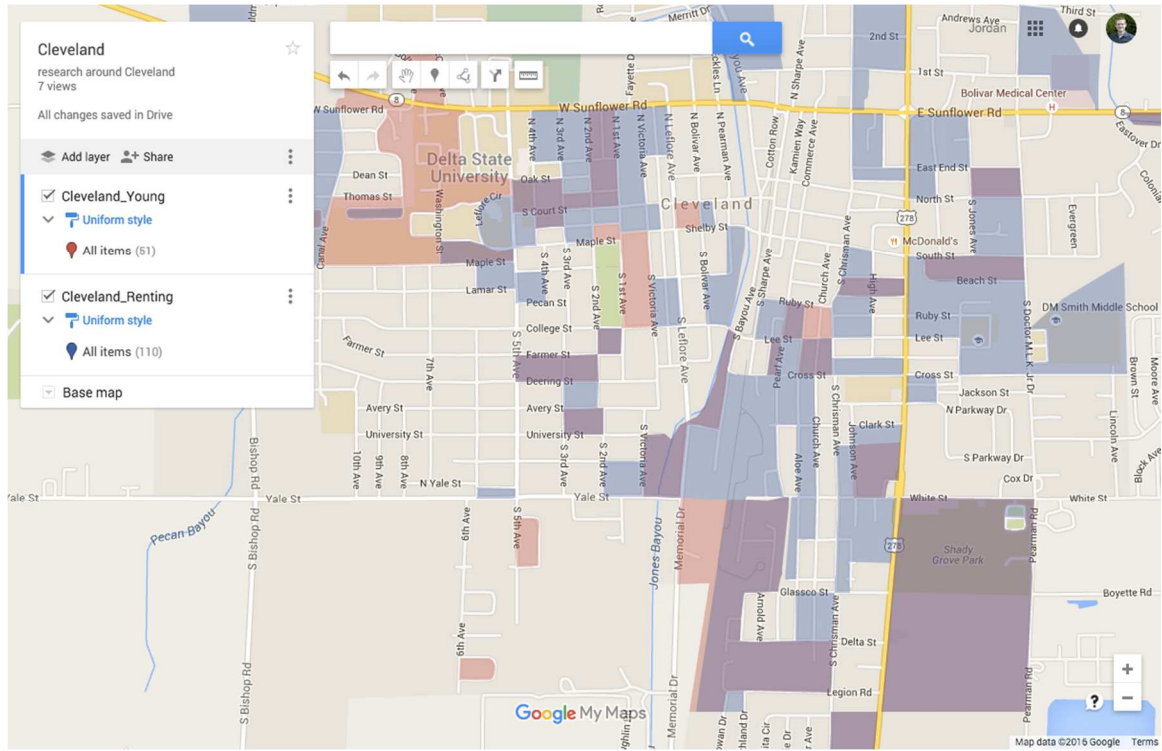
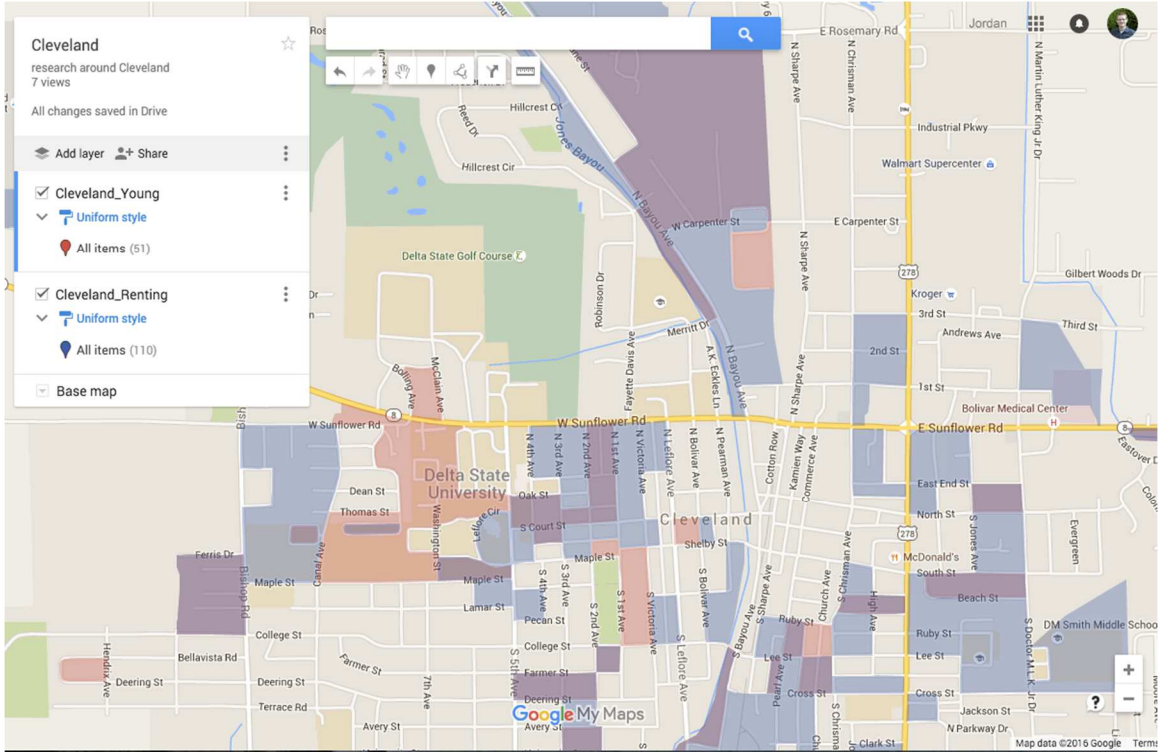
what to pursue first. In reality, not every community needs a pizza shop or independent film theater to successfully function, but college towns are convincing examples of the myriad benefits of appealing to and accepting the culture of the town, especially when the campus acts as a “cultural center” by hosting more cultural activities and entertainment options (Gumprecht, 2007, p. 86; *Mississippi’s Creative Economy*, n.d., p. 5). This can also be seen when the town acts as a tolerant home to members of the more liberal creative class (Florida, 2003, p. 10). The implications are not solely intended for college towns as communities without higher education institutions that are focused on development could also use principles from this study. Knowing the community– its demographic composition and assets present on the landscape– could help leaders in any type of town make more informed decisions that respond to the needs of that community.

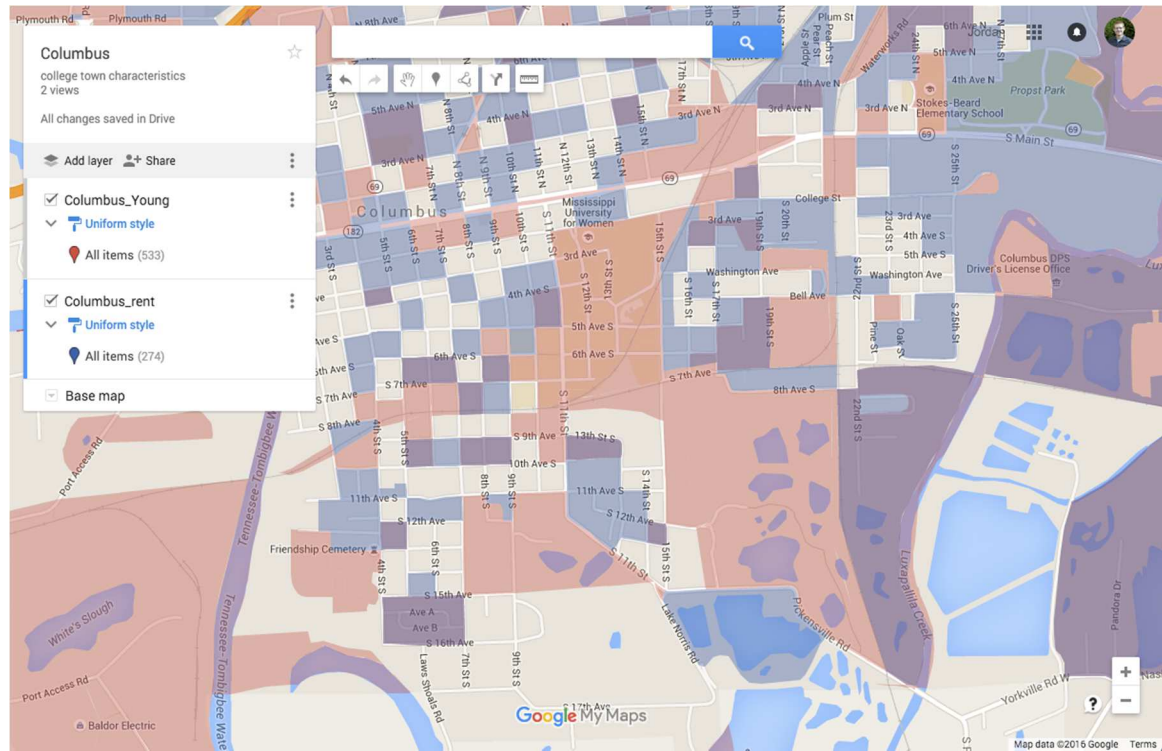
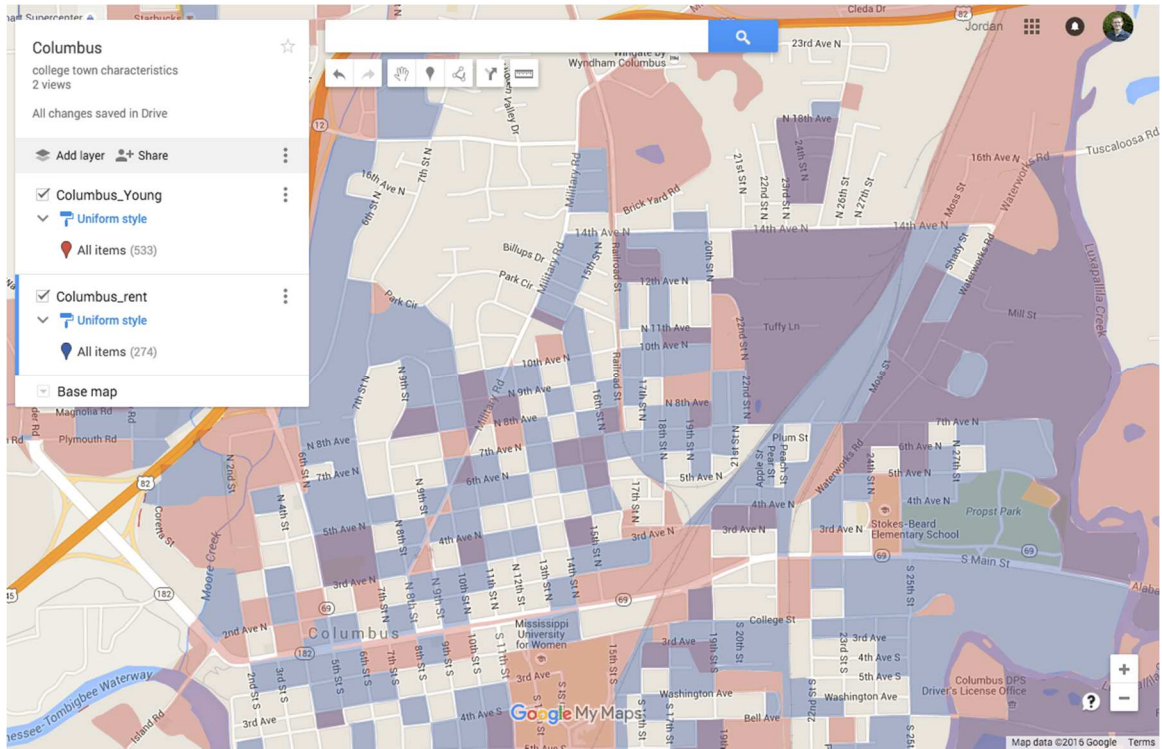
APPENDIX A

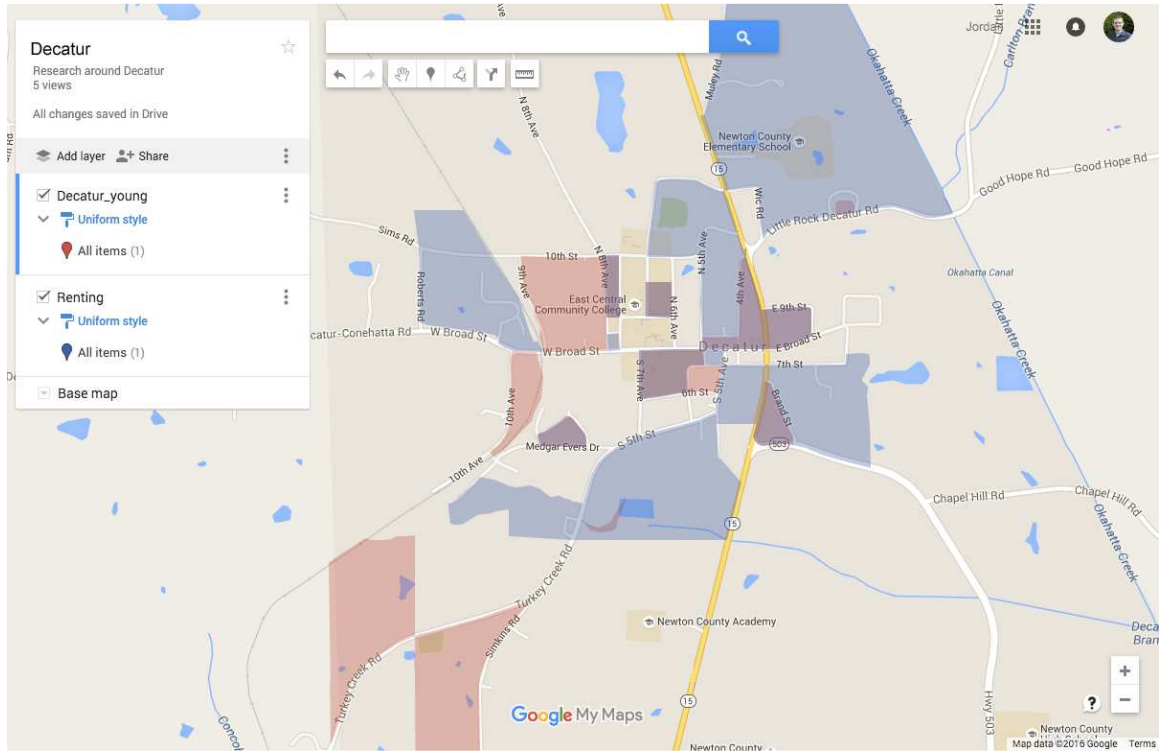
TOWN DEMOGRAPHIC FIELD MAPS

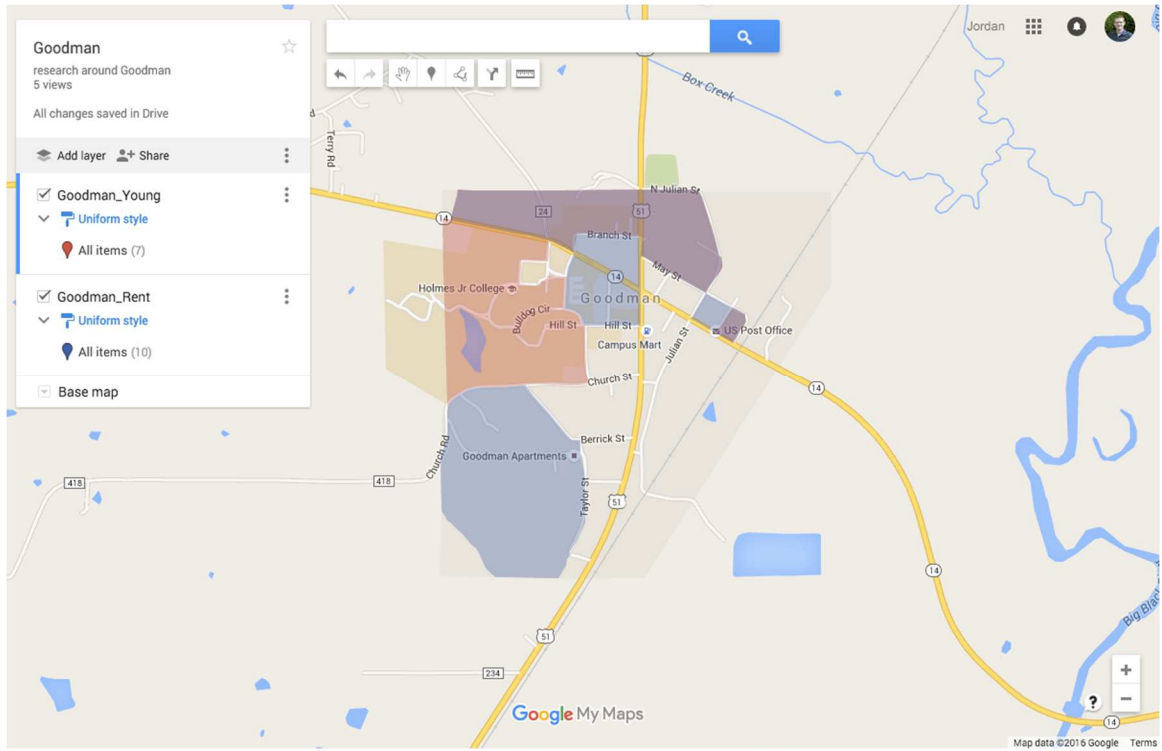


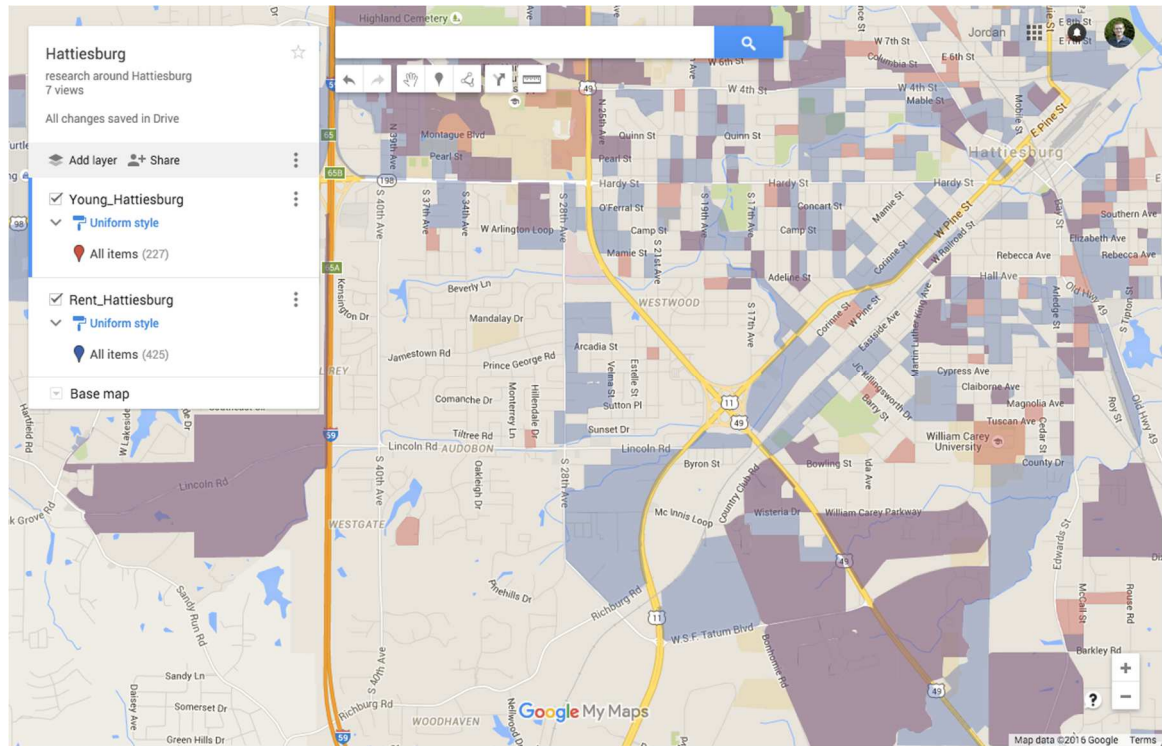
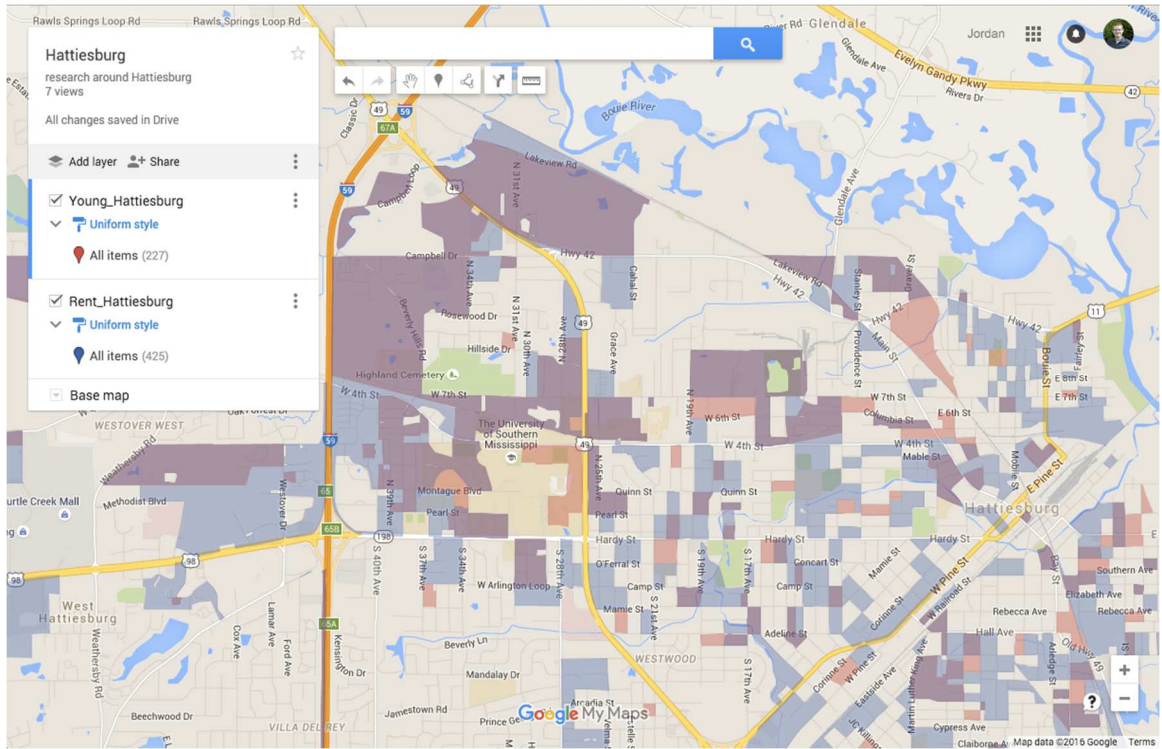


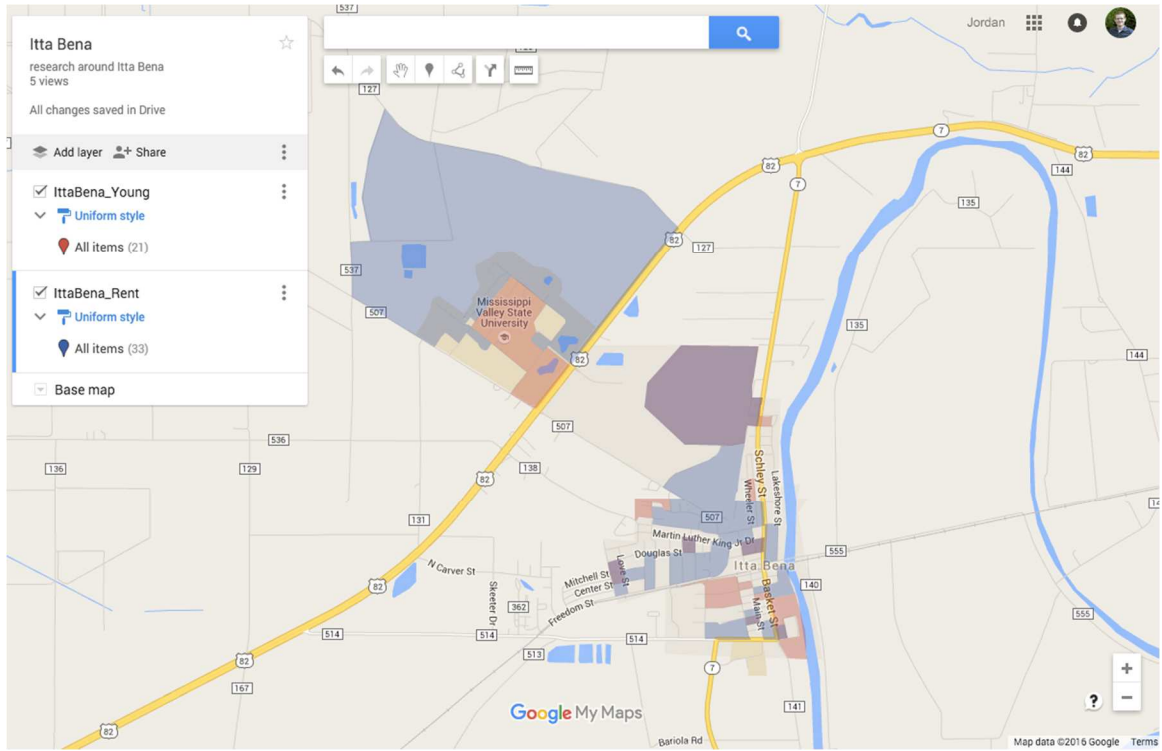


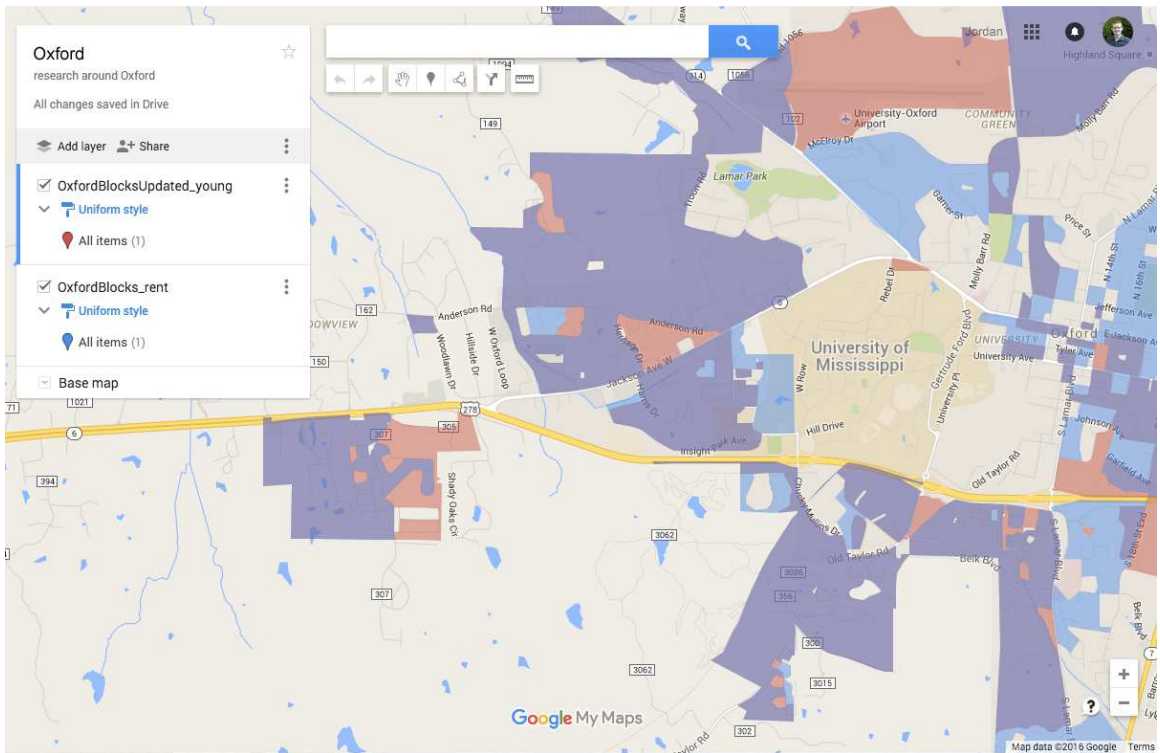
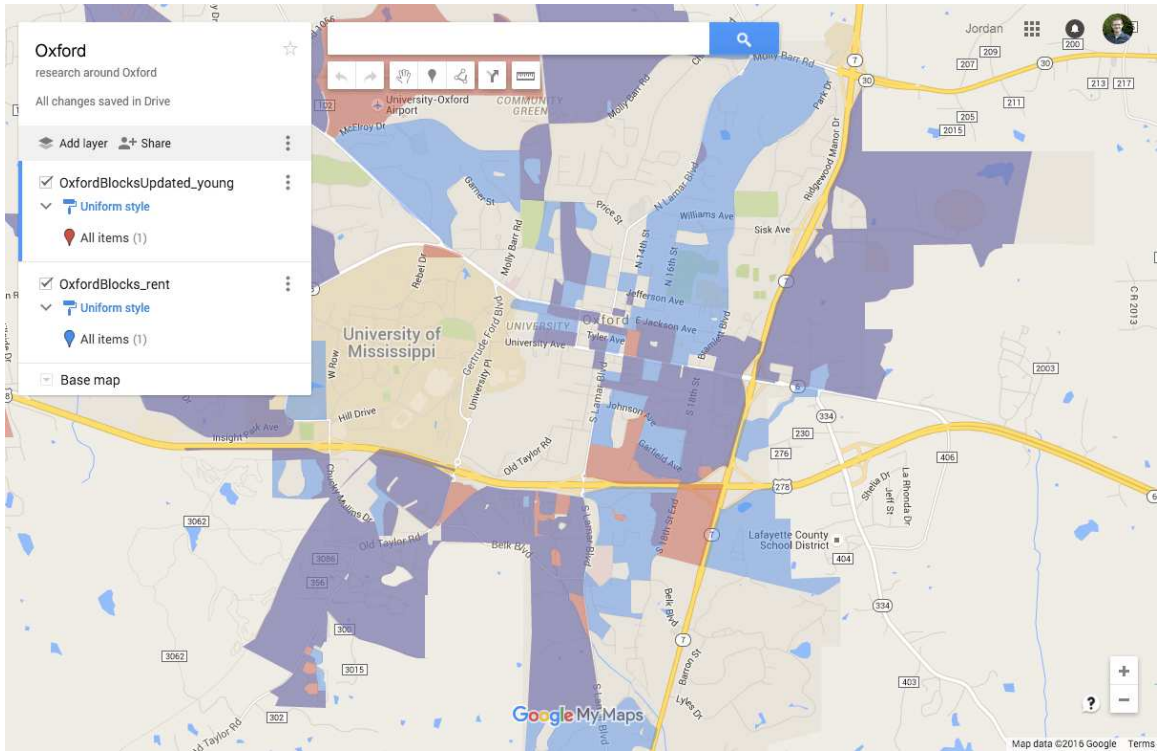


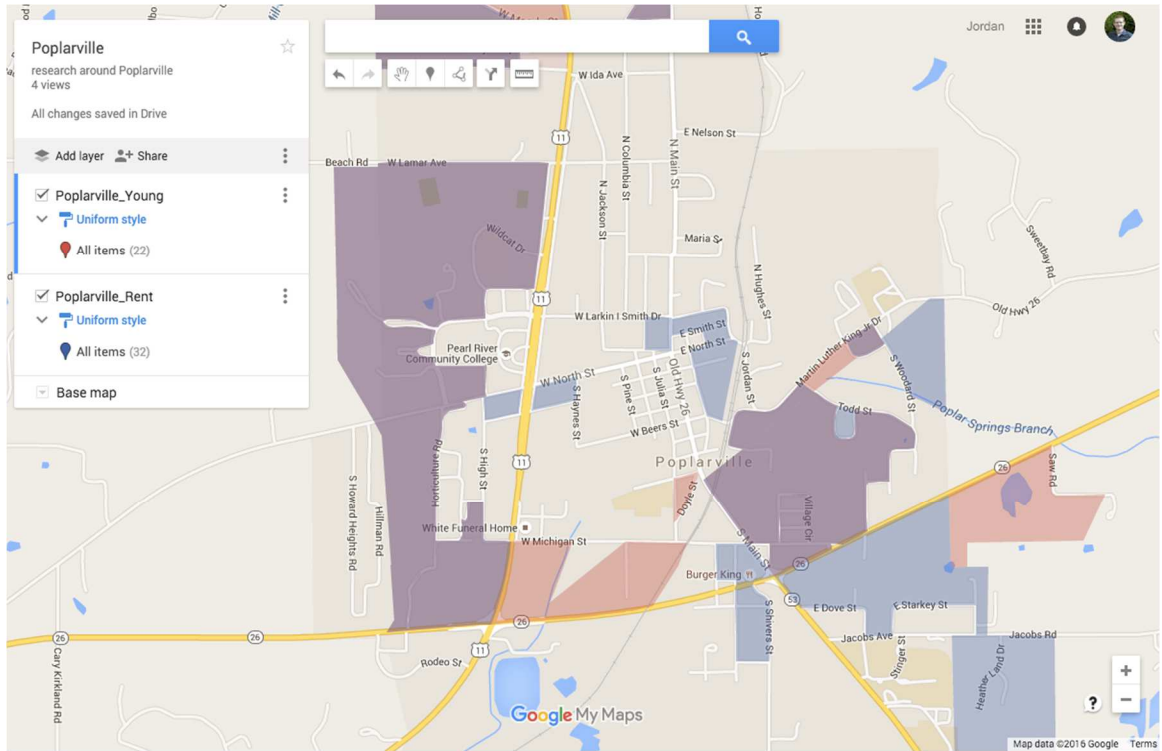


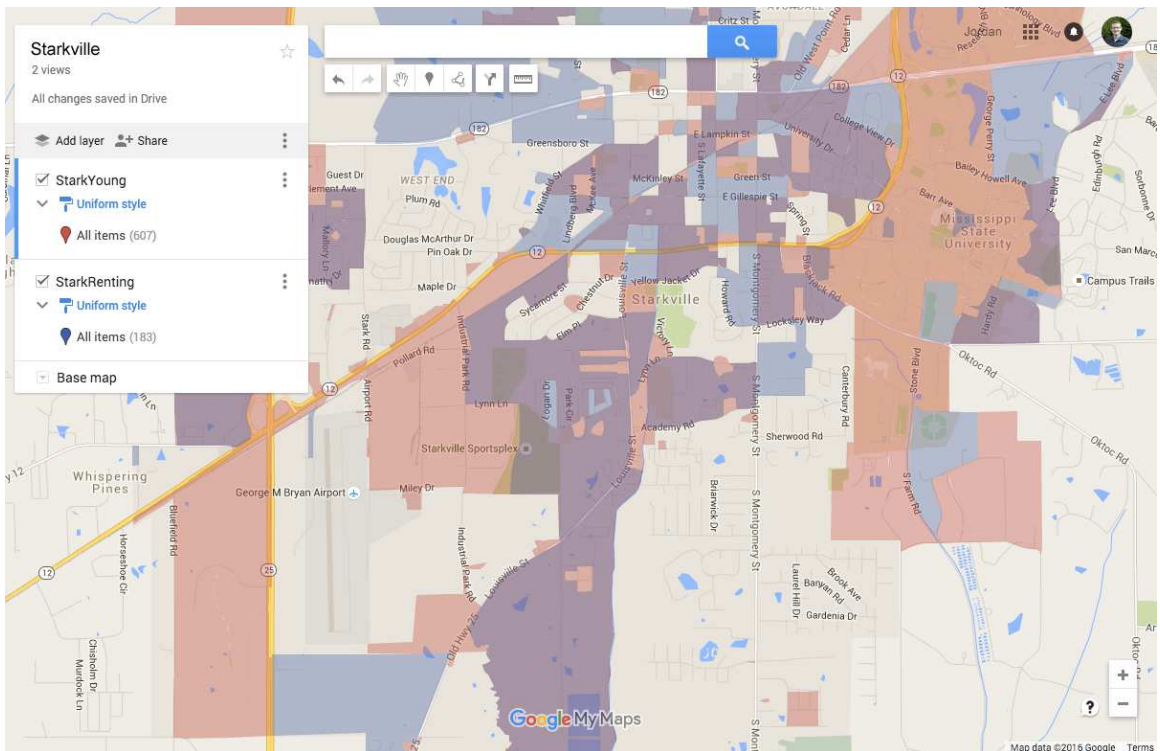
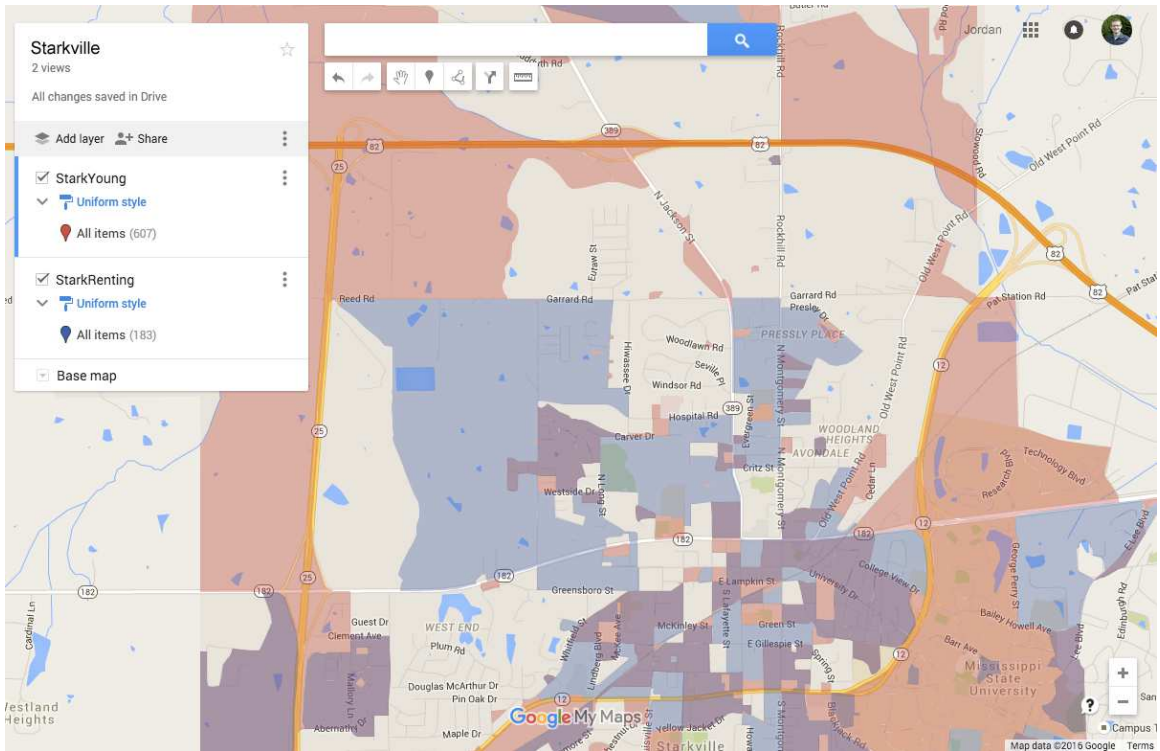












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