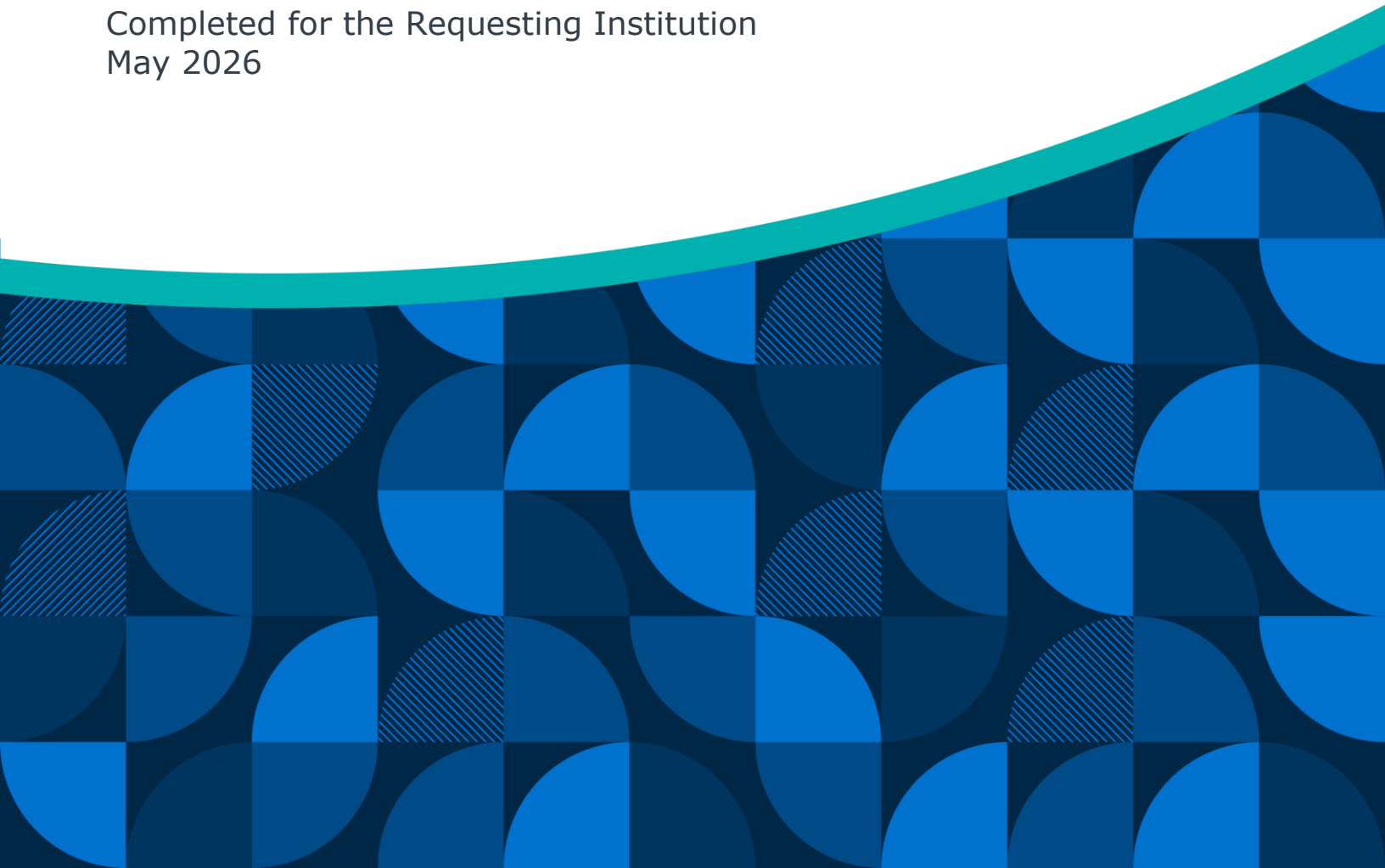




RESPONSIVE RESEARCH

Taxonomy and Considerations for a Satellite Location

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Table of Contents

Executive Overview	4
Satellite Location Taxonomy	5
Satellite Location Spectrum	5
Design and Operations Considerations	7
Approach and Establishment	7
Staffing	8
Location Selection.....	9
Research Methodology.....	11
Project Challenge	11
Research Approach	11
Project Sources	12

Executive Overview

Research Request

In this report, EAB provides:

- Frameworks to define pilot objectives, audiences, and measures of success for the proposed satellite location's focus city.
- Examples of low-risk pilot models (e.g., welcome center, alumni hub, admissions/event space, executive or continuing education touchpoint).

Research Approach

Researchers conducted secondary research on universities' existing satellite locations, including their functions, audiences, partnerships, staffing, and locations. *Researchers removed research on the Requesting Institution's focus city to maintain anonymity in this version of the report.*

Key Findings

Universities' satellite locations typically align with one or more of the following models:

- **Welcome center,**
- **Alumni hub,**
- **Educational (e.g., experiential learning) site,**
- **Urban extension campus,**
- **Full satellite campus, or**
- **Global satellite campus.**

Welcome centers, alumni hubs, or educational sites that do not confer degrees require less financial and academic investment. These locations typically serve as a way for the university to increase visibility or provide students with access to learning opportunities not available at the flagship; for example, Washington, D.C. campuses often prioritize federal government internships and experiential learning. Institutions are increasingly launching urban extension campuses to access the adult learner population, prioritizing accessibility. Finally, full satellite campuses or global satellite campuses require high financial investment, and, when international, substantial collaboration with foreign government authorities.

Leverage existing partnerships or identify new opportunities when designing the satellite location to ensure its sustainability. Most universities advertise existing partnerships (e.g., corporate, government) that lead to the development of their satellite location, or leaders build new partnerships to realize their satellite location goals.

Ensure the proposed site is accessible by public transportation and near relevant amenities (e.g., dining). Most hubs/campuses promote easy access for their students and alumni, whether by public transportation or easy driving access and parking. Additionally, campuses advertise nearby amenities (e.g., restaurants) to ensure students see an attractive destination.

Satellite Location Taxonomy

Satellite Location Spectrum

A Welcome Center or Alumni Hub Requires the Least Investment While Offering a Physical Anchor in a New Location

Universities may launch satellite welcome centers or alumni hubs to extend their influence into target regions. However, these centers appear to be less common than educational sites and urban extension campuses. They tend to serve as a permanent space for the discretionary use of the university that requires lower-intensity inputs than an office with regular academic or experiential programming.

Examples of welcome centers or alumni hubs include:

- **Office and meeting space locations:** Duke University maintains a permanent location in Washington, D.C. with the Duke in D.C. office. The center employs several full-time [staff members](#) (e.g., Program Manager, Communication Manager) and serves as a hub for D.C.-based university faculty as well as for alumni receptions. Additionally, alumni may reserve [office or small event spaces](#) at the center. The office does not advertise courses or academic programming.
- **Community engagement locations:** The [University of Michigan Detroit Center](#) serves as a connection between the university and the city of Detroit. The Center particularly emphasizes [community engagement events](#), including collaborations with city government and neighborhood organizations. The Center offers [event spaces for rent](#) for the University of Michigan community and organizations in and around Detroit, and the website provides information on transportation, such as [regional transit options](#).
- **Alumni club locations:** The [Harvard Club of New York](#) is one well-known model for alumni hubs, serving as a membership-based center of Harvard University with spaces for private gatherings, guest rooms, and fitness centers. The Club is operated and funded by alumni, rather than by the university, as are similar New York City alumni club models for [Yale University](#) and the [University of Pennsylvania](#).

An Educational Site Delivers Non-Degree Programming but Only as an Extension of the Main Campus

We define educational sites as physical learning hubs that offer regular programming but do not confer degrees. Some universities develop educational sites to deliver experiential learning, and these can often function collaboratively with research centers or alumni-focused goals. Many of these sites operate in Washington, D.C.

For example, the [University of Southern California's Capital Campus](#) reports the following three purposes: experiential learning, improving research opportunities, and alumni networking. Similarly, [Syracuse University in DC](#) hosts classes, receptions, and speakers, as well as several university offices. Both the Capital Campus and Syracuse in DC offer experiential learning opportunities to undergraduates ([USC in DC Summer Program](#) and [DC Immersion Week](#), respectively).

An Urban Extension Campus Confers Degrees in an Urban/Downtown Area to Access Adult Learners

To target adult learners seeking in-person classes and expand visibility, universities may launch urban extension campuses in nearby urban areas. Examples include [Virginia Tech's Arlington Research Center](#), [Pepperdine University's West Los Angeles Graduate Campus](#), and [UCF Downtown](#). Common features of extension campuses include public transportation access, industry relevance, and [partnerships](#) with government offices or other universities.

[Pepperdine University’s West Los Angeles Graduate Campus](#) targets working professionals, serving as the headquarters for the Graduate School of Education and Psychology and the Graziadio Business School. Nearly all available degree programs use part-time schedules with evening, weekend, and sometimes afternoon classes. The campus gives working professionals the opportunity to take in-person courses in a more convenient location, compared to the University’s main campus, one hour away in Malibu. Additionally, the Graziadio Business School webpage emphasizes the campus’s proximity to thousands of [businesses and industry leaders](#).

A Full Satellite Campus Offers Full-Suite Services and Expands Institutional Footprints

Universities may seek to expand their footprint by acquiring or developing full degree-granting satellite campuses. These duplicate a full-suite main campus’s academic structures and student services to offer location-specific opportunities (e.g., media education in Los Angeles) or to bring more accessible education to student populations (e.g., place-bound students hours away from the main campus).

Sample Full Satellite Campuses

Arizona State University in California

- ASU attributes its satellite campus in Southern California to its [existing ties](#) with the area: enrollment funnels, partnerships (e.g., with NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory), civic engagement, and [more](#).
- ASU uses the Los Angeles campus as a hub for undergraduate and graduate media programs, including film and journalism.
- The campus website emphasizes [experiential learning](#) opportunities only available in Los Angeles (e.g., LA Content Studio).
- The campus allows the university to increase its [visibility](#) in a market it already heavily recruits from.

Pennsylvania State University

- The Pennsylvania State University system has one of the most extensive satellite campus networks with [24 physical campuses and affiliates](#) and one [World Campus](#) for online learners.
- Pennsylvania State University-Main Campus maintains the strongest enrollment numbers with over [50,000 students](#).
- However, university leaders announced recently that [seven of its Commonwealth Campuses will close](#) after the spring semester of the 2026-2027 academic year, after analyses of enrollment trends, demographics, and finances.

A Global Satellite Campus Grants Degrees Internationally and Faces Unique Legislative Challenges

Some universities launch degree-granting satellite campuses internationally, which present unique challenges due to differing regulations (e.g., Congressional laws, Department of Education policies, foreign government legislation) and other obstacles that may arise from operating in a foreign country. Examples include the following:

- New York University in [Abu Dhabi](#) and [Shanghai](#)
- Carnegie Mellon University in [Qatar](#)

While this category primarily refers to full-suite, degree-conferring international campuses, any of the smaller-scale satellite location types may be established internationally.

Design and Operations Considerations

Approach and Establishment

Satellite Locations May Fill Several Non-Classroom Roles

A report published by [Bolan Smart Associates and Alvarez & Marsal](#) for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission outlines various motives for a university's development of a satellite location. Motives on the left directly relate to shared aspirations with the Requesting Institution's satellite presence, and those on the right may present additional opportunities and considerations for the proposed location:

Motives for Developing a Satellite Location¹

Related to the Requesting Institution's Aspirations	Additional Opportunities/Considerations for the Proposed Location
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to additional enrollment• Desire to leverage alumni base, primarily for funding• Advancement of brand and reputation• Establishing a physical presence and enhancing visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to faculty and research staff• Enhancing graduate job placement• Retaining talent in a target economic location• Desire to attract research funding and contract resources• Availability of funding support• Opportunities to help seed entrepreneurial spinoffs and partnerships• Remaining competitive with other universities• Locational limitations of existing main campus• Proximity to different and/or desired industry sectors• Support of local economic development• Extension of existing relationships and partnerships

The same research report outlined several success factors relevant to the Requesting Institution's initiative. Perhaps the most relevant is that while the role of physical learning spaces has been called into question since the pandemic, the [need for specialized lab, support, and student gathering space continues](#). University leaders appear to focus particularly on opportunities for [new education and research formats](#) such as "non-traditional partnerships, consortiums, and colocation that afford some level of collaborative cross-industry interface".

Identify Existing or Potential Partnerships to Help Focus Development and Reduce Costs

Universities' satellite locations advertise relationships with local organizations or companies. Partnerships are critical to the [establishment and sustainability](#) of a satellite location because they can save costs via shared facilities, resources, or intellectual property.

1) From [Research University Satellite Campuses: Case Study Analysis](#) by Bolan Smart Associates and Alvarez & Marshall. See Project Sources for the full citation.

Partnership Examples at Satellite Locations

Organization or Corporate Partner

Carnegie Mellon University’s [Silicon Valley campus](#) was built from an [existing relationship with NASA](#). The new campus further strengthened the University’s relationship with NASA.

Government Partner

The [University of Houston-Downtown](#) established a Memorandum of Understanding with the [Texas Department of Transportation](#) to acquire 11.93 acres of land in 2025.

Other Educational Institution Partner

The [University of Central Florida Downtown](#) holds a shared-space partnership with [Valencia College](#), and also takes part in an [urban development initiative](#) in downtown Orlando.

Industry Partner

Creighton University’s [Phoenix campus](#) originated from industry partners asking Creighton to open a campus to meet the growing need for health care professionals.

Staffing

Even Low-Touch Satellite Locations Employ Full-Time Staff

Low-touch welcome centers, alumni hubs, and educational sites still employ full-time staff members. Duke in D.C., which serves as the University’s base in the District and may be the most direct match to the Requesting Institution’s proposed hub, employs an Executive Director, Communications Manager, and Program Manager; however, the Executive Director also plays a role in Duke University’s government relations. Consider identifying existing staff who may be interested in also playing a role in the proposed hub or center but expect to hire some staff members who will dedicate their full role to its operations.

Staffing Among Sample Low-Touch Satellite Locations

Satellite Location Name	Number of Full-Time Staff	Advertised Roles
Duke in D.C.	Three ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Director, Office of Government Relations and Duke in D.C. Communications Manager Program Manager
The University of Michigan Detroit Center	Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty Director Associate Director Administrative Assistant Senior Facilities Coordinator Associate Project Manager

2) Excludes three employees not based in D.C.: Regional Director, Director of Sanford Duke in D.C., and the Director of Externships.

The University of Southern California Capital Campus	Four ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director • Director of Academic Programs • Director of Building Operations & Community Outreach • Director of Events and Communications
Syracuse University in D.C.	Six ⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Alumni Engagement, D.C. • Director of the Institute for Democracy, Journalism & Citizenship and Professor of Practice • Assistant Dean and Adjunct Professor • Director, Washington Programs and Professor of Practice • Senior Director, SC Operations and Government Affairs • Director, Facilities Operations

Location Selection

Transportation Convenience and Nearby Amenities Drive Specific Site Selection

For some universities, [proximity to major corporations or relevant public agencies](#) drives site selection. Virginia Tech’s [Arlington Research Center](#), for example, offers greater opportunities for partnerships because of its proximity to federal government agencies and other relevant organizations, especially compared to the main campus’s location over 200 miles away in Blacksburg, Virginia.

Universities also frequently address public transportation accessibility, nearby amenities such as restaurants, and parking for those who drive to the campus (depending on the city’s transportation norms). Pepperdine University’s West Los Angeles Graduate Campus website emphasizes its location near the 405 freeway, [convenient for nearby commuters](#), as well as amenities at a nearby shopping center.

The Requesting Institution may be able to acquire less expensive [office space](#) due to softening demand in urban areas but should consider the space’s functionality in terms of future expansion. For example, the Institution may need large theater-style spaces to hold admissions events, but typical office spaces are likely unable to accommodate such rooms.

Consider the following questions when determining the proposed satellite location’s site:

- How will visitors access the campus?
 - If by public transportation, what networks should be within a short walk’s distance?
 - If by car, how much parking should be available?
- Which neighborhoods do recent graduates move to? In which neighborhoods are alumni likely to work?
- Are there amenities nearby that visitors can attend, such as coffee shops for networking or restaurants for post-event meals?
 - Alternatively, are there amenities nearby that could simplify the catering process?

3) Excludes the Executive Director, Principal Gifts (University Advancement team).
4) Excludes the Executive Director for Mid-Atlantic Regional Advancement.

- Does the proposed space allow for large gatherings?
- Does the proposed space allow for future expansion?

Satellite Locations' Approximate Distances from Flagships⁵

Satellite Location Name	Satellite Location	Flagship Campus Location	Approximate Distance Between Campuses ⁶
The University of Houston-Downtown	Houston, TX	Houston, TX	4 mi
UCF Downtown	Orlando, FL	Orlando, FL	16 mi
Pepperdine University's West Los Angeles Graduate Campus	Los Angeles, CA	Malibu, CA	26 mi
University of Michigan Detroit Center	Detroit, MI	Ann Arbor, MI	36 mi
Virginia Tech's Arlington Research Center	Blacksburg, VA	Arlington, VA	214 mi
Duke in DC	Washington, D.C.	Durham, NC	225 mi
Syracuse University in DC	Washington, D.C.	Syracuse, NY	290 mi
ASU in California	Los Angeles, CA	Tempe, AZ	365 mi
Creighton in Phoenix	Phoenix, AZ	Omaha, NE	1,035 mi
Carnegie Mellon University Silicon Valley	Moffett Field, CA	Pittsburgh, PA	2,249 mi
USC Capital Campus	Washington, D.C.	Los Angeles, CA	2,295 mi

5) Researchers excluded the Harvard Club of New York, the Yale Club, and the Penn Club from this table.

6) Distance measured as the crow flies, except for UCF Downtown and the University of Houston-Downtown, which use driving distance.

Research Methodology

Project Challenge

This phase of the research seeks to address:

- Frameworks to define pilot objectives, audiences, and measures of success for the proposed satellite location’s focus city.
- Examples of low-risk pilot models (e.g., welcome center, alumni hub, admissions/event space, executive or continuing education touchpoint).

Research Approach

Researchers conducted secondary research on universities’ existing satellite locations, including their functions, audiences, partnerships, staffing, and locations. *Researchers removed research on the Requesting Institution’s focus city to maintain anonymity in this version of the report.*

Profiled Institutions

Selected for relevant satellite locations

Institution	Location	Enrollment (Undergraduate / Total)	Carnegie Classification
The University of Houston-Downtown	South	12,600 / 13,700	Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Master's Large/Medium
The University of Central Florida	South	59,600 / 69,700	Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Large
Pepperdine University	Pacific West	3,600 / 9,000	Professions-focused Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Medium
The University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	Midwest	34,500 / 52,900	Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Large
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	Mid-Atlantic	31,000 / 38,900	Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Large
Duke University	South	6,500 / 17,500	Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Medium
Syracuse University	Northeast	16,000 / 22,600	Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Large
Arizona State University Campus Immersion	Mountain West	65,500 / 79,800	Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Large
Creighton University	Midwest	4,400 / 8,600	Professions-focused Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Medium
Carnegie Mellon University	Mid-Atlantic	7,400 / 15,900	Special Focus: Technology, Engineering, and Sciences
The University of Southern California	Pacific West	20,600 / 46,600	Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Large

Project Sources

Beyond institutional webpages, researchers consulted the following sources for this report:

- Bolan Smart Associates, and Alvarez & Marsal. *Research University Satellite Campuses: Case Study Analysis*. Mar. 2020, <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MNCPPC-Report--Research-Universities-Case-Studies.pdf>
- *College Navigator*. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>. Accessed 8 May 2026.
- Kiger, Patrick J. "Satellite Campuses Expand Footprint for Universities into Urban Downtowns." *Urban Land Magazine*, Urban Land Institute, 5 Sept. 2023, <https://urbanland.uli.org/economy-markets-trends/satellite-campus-expand-footprint-for-universities-into-urban-downtowns>

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