

DOES UTAH HAVE A COLLEGE GRADUATE BRAIN DRAIN?

HIGHLIGHTS

- Utah ranks highly on broad measures of education levels in the adult population. However, today's younger adults are falling behind the national average in holding college degrees.
- Utah Foundation surveyed college graduates to assess whether a brain drain is occurring and why they choose to stay in or leave Utah after graduation.
- Utah retains 60% of all graduates from public and private colleges. But the number of non-native students choosing to stay offsets the Utah students who leave, making virtually no net loss of graduates.
- The most important factors in graduates' location decisions include specific job opportunities, attractive communities, future career opportunities, and cost of living.
- Utah's strengths in retaining graduates include affordability, nice communities, good recreation opportunities, and proximity to family.
- Utah's weaknesses in retaining graduates include fewer quality job opportunities, low salary levels, weak employment networking, and limited graduate school opportunities.

Utah Foundation is a nonprofit research organization. Our mission is to encourage informed public policy making and to serve as Utah's trusted source for independent, objective research on crucial public policy issues.

D. Douglas Larson, President
Alan K. Allred, Vice President
Stephen J. Kroes, Executive Director

10 West Broadway, Suite 307
Salt Lake City, UT 84101
(801) 355-1400 • www.utahfoundation.org

“Vibrant.” “Young.” “Well-educated.” These are words that have been used to describe Utah's workforce for many years. However, recent findings show that such praise may only be deserved in part.

In 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 63.1% of Utahns over the age of 25 had at least some college experience or an associate's degree. On the basis of those figures, Utah is certainly one of the most educated states, ranking 2nd in the U.S. (Figure 1). But looking beyond some college experience or an associate's degree, Utah's rank in educational attainment drops significantly. Utah ranks 15th for the percentage of adults over 25 with a bachelor's degree or higher (26.1%) and 23rd for adults with advanced degrees (8.3%).¹

Further analysis of Census figures shows that Utah ranks 32nd among 25-34 year olds who hold at least a four-year degree (Figure 2). Possible explanations for this include: fewer younger Utahns are receiving college degrees; or, more Utah students are leaving after graduation. The lower ranking in this key age group suggests that a “brain drain” phenomenon might be occurring in Utah (i.e., the

Figure 1: Educational Attainment of the Population 25 Years and Over, 2000

	Some College or More Rank	Bachelor's Degree & Higher Rank	Advanced Degree Rank
Alabama	44.9 43	19.0 45	6.9 38
Alaska	60.5 4	24.7 21	8.6 19
Arizona	56.7 12	23.5 25	8.4 20
Arkansas	41.2 49	16.7 50	5.7 50
California	56.7 12	26.6 13	9.5 13
Colorado	63.7 1	32.7 3	11.1 7
Connecticut	55.5 19	31.4 4	13.3 4
D.C.	57.2 9	39.1 1	21 1
Delaware	51.2 30	25.0 20	9.4 15
Florida	51.1 31	22.3 32	8.1 26
Georgia	49.9 36	24.3 23	8.3 23
Hawaii	56.1 16	26.2 14	8.4 20
Idaho	56.2 14	21.7 36	6.8 41
Illinois	53.7 23	26.1 15	9.5 13
Indiana	44.9 43	19.4 44	7.2 33
Iowa	50.0 35	21.2 39	6.5 44
Kansas	56.2 14	25.8 17	8.7 17
Kentucky	40.6 50	17.1 48	6.9 38
Louisiana	42.4 48	18.7 46	6.5 44
Maine	49.2 38	22.9 28	7.9 28
Maryland	57.1 10	31.4 4	13.4 3
Massachusetts	57.5 7	33.2 2	13.7 2
Michigan	52.1 26	21.8 35	8.1 26
Minnesota	59.1 5	27.4 11	8.3 23
Mississippi	43.5 47	16.9 49	5.8 49
Missouri	48.6 40	21.6 37	7.6 29
Montana	55.9 18	24.4 22	7.2 33
Nebraska	55.3 21	23.7 24	7.3 32
Nevada	51.3 28	18.2 47	6.1 46
New Hampshire	57.3 8	28.7 9	10.0 10
New Jersey	52.7 24	29.8 6	11.0 9
New Mexico	52.3 25	23.5 25	9.8 11
New York	51.3 28	27.4 11	11.8 5
North Carolina	49.7 37	22.5 29	7.2 33
North Dakota	56.0 17	22.0 33	5.5 51
Ohio	46.9 41	21.1 40	7.4 31
Oklahoma	49.1 39	20.3 42	6.8 41
Oregon	58.9 6	25.1 19	8.7 17
Pennsylvania	43.8 46	22.4 30	8.4 20
Rhode Island	50.2 34	25.6 18	9.7 12
South Carolina	46.4 42	20.4 41	6.9 38
South Dakota	51.7 27	21.5 38	6.0 47
Tennessee	44.3 45	19.6 43	6.8 41
Texas	50.8 32	23.2 27	7.6 29
Utah	63.1 2	26.1 15	8.3 23
Vermont	54.1 22	29.4 8	11.1 7
Virginia	55.5 19	29.5 7	11.6 6
Washington	62.2 3	27.7 10	9.3 16
West Virginia	35.8 51	14.8 51	5.9 48
Wisconsin	50.5 33	22.4 30	7.2 33
Wyoming	56.9 11	21.9 34	7.0 37
United States	51.8	24.4	8.9

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census (Census)

Figure 2: Percent of Population 25-34 Years old with at Least a Bachelor's Degree

	1990	Rank	2000	Rank	Growth
United States	22.7%		27.5%		4.8%
Utah	20.9%	25	25.4%	32	4.5%

Source: Census

most educated people in Utah's workforce are leaving the state for better opportunities elsewhere).

Comparisons of the 1990 and 2000 Census reveal that Utah's growth in the percentage of adults with bachelor's degrees and advanced degrees was below the national average, that Utah ranked 31st in percentage growth for bachelor's degrees, and 25th for advanced degrees (Figure 3).²

Figure 3: Increase in Percentage of the Population 25 and Over with Degrees, 1990 to 2000

	Bachelor's Degree & Higher	Rank	Advanced Degree	Rank
Alabama	3.3	39	1.4	32
Alaska	1.7	51	0.6	51
Arizona	3.2	41	1.4	32
Arkansas	3.4	38	1.2	41
California	3.2	41	1.4	32
Colorado	5.7	3	2.1	9
Connecticut	4.2	25	2.3	5
Delaware	3.6	35	1.7	20
D.C.	5.8	2	3.8	1
Florida	4.0	28	1.8	16
Georgia	5.0	8	1.9	13
Hawaii	3.3	39	1.3	38
Idaho	4.0	28	1.5	25
Illinois	5.1	5	2.0	11
Indiana	3.8	31	0.8	48
Iowa	4.3	20	1.3	38
Kansas	4.7	14	1.7	20
Kentucky	3.5	37	1.4	32
Louisiana	2.6	47	0.9	46
Maine	4.1	26	1.8	16
Maryland	4.9	10	2.5	3
Massachusetts	6.0	1	3.1	2
Michigan	4.4	19	1.7	20
Minnesota	5.6	4	2.0	11
Mississippi	2.2	50	0.7	50
Missouri	3.8	31	1.5	25
Montana	4.6	16	1.5	25
Nebraska	4.8	12	1.4	32
Nevada	2.9	45	0.9	46
New Hampshire	4.3	20	2.1	9
New Jersey	4.9	10	2.2	7
New Mexico	3.1	43	1.5	25
New York	4.3	20	1.9	13
North Carolina	5.1	5	1.8	16
North Dakota	3.9	30	1.0	45
Ohio	4.1	26	1.5	25
Oklahoma	2.5	48	0.8	48
Oregon	4.5	17	1.7	20
Pennsylvania	4.5	17	1.8	16
Rhode Island	4.3	20	1.9	13
South Carolina	3.8	31	1.5	25
South Dakota	4.3	20	1.1	42
Tennessee	3.6	35	1.4	32
Texas	2.9	45	1.1	42
Utah	3.8	31	1.5	25
Vermont	5.1	5	2.2	7
Virginia	5.0	8	2.5	3
Washington	4.8	12	2.3	5
West Virginia	2.5	48	1.1	42
Wisconsin	4.7	14	1.6	24
Wyoming	3.1	43	1.3	38
United States	3.1		1.7	

Source: Census

To try to answer whether Utah is indeed experiencing a brain drain, Utah Foundation has recently completed a survey of students who graduated from Utah colleges and universities in 2004. The Utah Foundation survey is the first attempt in Utah to measure the loss of Utah-based college graduates and analyze the reasons for their departure as well as Utah's strengths in retaining its graduates. Utah Foundation conducted an internet-based survey of 900 graduates who attended college in Utah, at both public and private schools,

and graduated in the spring or summer of 2004 with degrees ranging from bachelor's levels to Ph.D.s. The survey was modeled after similar surveys conducted in the Greater Boston and Greater Philadelphia regions.³

RETENTION: IS UTAH EXPERIENCING A BRAIN DRAIN?

According to the Utah Foundation survey, Utah retained 71% of its home-grown students who graduated in 2004 (Figure 4). Home-grown students, or natives, include all students who were from Utah before they began their college career. In addition, 39% of those students who came to Utah from out of state (non-natives) remained in Utah after graduation. Overall, 60% of all students in Utah colleges and universities remained in the state after graduation. Because some of the non-natives decided to stay in Utah after graduation and effectively replace the native students who left, the net effect was no measurable net loss or net gain of graduates (the difference is within the margin of error).

Figure 4: Retention of Utah College Graduates

	Percent Retained	Utahns Retained	Non-Utahns Retained	Net Gain or Loss
Overall	60%	71%	43%	-2%
Public Schools	70%	76%	46%	-13%
Private Schools	46%	54%	42%	36%

Source: Census

The figures cited above include students from the public higher education system and private colleges (Brigham Young University and Westminster College were included in the survey). However, many are interested in how Utah's public system performs in retaining graduates, since taxpayers invest a great deal of money to provide education for those in the public colleges and universities. Some taxpayers and policymakers are concerned that tax funds are spent to benefit many students who then leave the state and provide economic benefits to regions outside of Utah.

Looking solely at Utah's public colleges, Utah retained 76% of native students after graduation. Of the non-native students, 46% stayed in Utah after graduation. Overall, 70% of all students graduating from Utah's public colleges remained in the state after graduation. Considering the number of non-natives who stayed and thus offset some of the native students who left, the net effect is that the number of graduates staying in Utah equals 87% of the number of native students who graduated from public colleges in 2004.

Is Utah experiencing a brain drain from our public colleges? Seventy-six percent of home-grown students stay in Utah after graduation, an attrition rate of 24%. But as shown above, this is moderated by the non-native students choosing to stay in Utah. Add them to the mix and Utah experiences a net attrition rate of only 13%, probably not large enough to be considered a brain drain.

Private colleges contribute a net influx of graduates to the Utah economy. Utah retained 54% of home-grown students graduating from BYU or Westminster College, while 42% of non-native

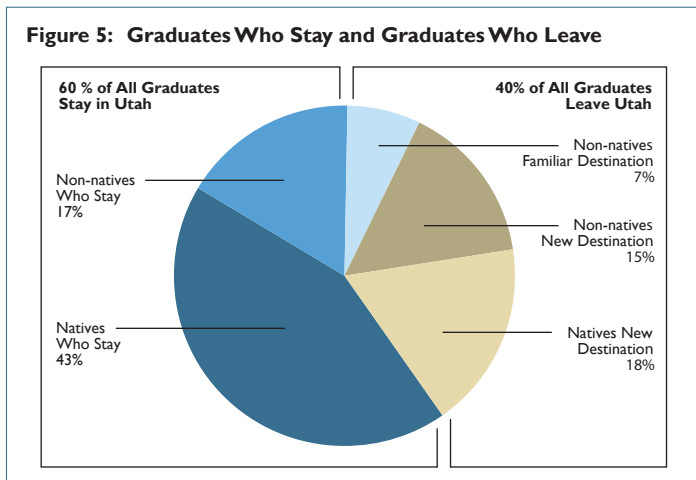
students stayed in Utah. However, according to the survey, 66% of the students graduating from these private schools were non-natives, which makes the actual number of non-native graduates who stay larger than the number of home-grown graduates who leave. This creates a net gain of 36% of private-school graduates retained in Utah compared to the number of native Utah students graduating from these schools.

Some of the students included in these statistics are now pursuing advanced degrees, so it is not clear whether they will stay in Utah when their schooling is done, or, if they have left the state for graduate school, whether they will return to Utah when their schooling is done. It is worth noting, however, that 80% of native Utah students who graduated in 2004 with advanced degrees from Utah public colleges did choose to stay in Utah after graduation, and 40% of non-native graduates with advanced degrees chose to stay. These are high retention rates compared to the overall numbers cited above.

While results from the Greater Boston and Greater Philadelphia studies are not fully comparable with Utah Foundation's survey, looking at the Boston and Philadelphia surveys can provide a general idea of Utah's competitiveness for recent graduates. Comparisons show that Utah lies somewhere between Philadelphia and Boston in retaining graduates. The Boston region retains 76% of its native student population, while retaining 42% of its non-native population, combining for a 50% retention rate overall.⁴ Philadelphia, at 86%, does a better job of retaining its native population but is at a disadvantage compared to Boston in retaining its non-native population (29%).⁵

WHERE STUDENTS ARE GOING

Of all students graduating from Utah-based colleges, 40% are headed somewhere new after graduation (Figure 5). Among non-native graduates, a minority are headed back home (7% of total graduates), while the majority are headed to a new destination (15% of total graduates). Also, 18% of the graduates are native Utahns who have decided to head somewhere new, either to gain new experiences elsewhere or to pursue better career and educational opportunities.



When students leave Utah after graduation, they are headed all across the U.S. and even overseas. The majority of them are headed to very large metropolitan areas such as Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area. Figure 6 lists the most popular destinations for those graduates who leave Utah for somewhere new.

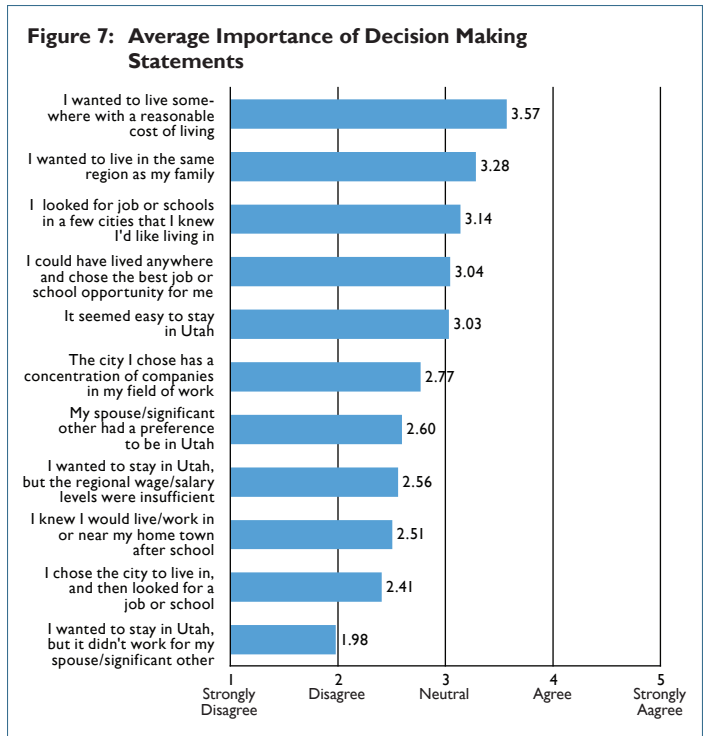
Figure 6: Where the Leavers are Going

All Leavers		Leavers other than those Furthering Education	
City	Percent	City	Percent
SoCal	8%	D.C.	10%
D.C.	7%	SoCal	8%
Outside U.S.	6%	Bay Area	5%
Las Vegas	5%	Las Vegas	5%
Bay Area	4%	Outside U.S.	5%
Phoenix	4%	Phoenix	5%
Rochester-Syracuse-Buffalo	4%	Seattle	4%
New York	3%	Houston	3%
Seattle	3%	Boston	3%
Boston	2%	Chicago	2%
Chicago	2%	New York	2%
Denver	2%	Elsewhere	48%
Houston	2%		
Elsewhere	48%		

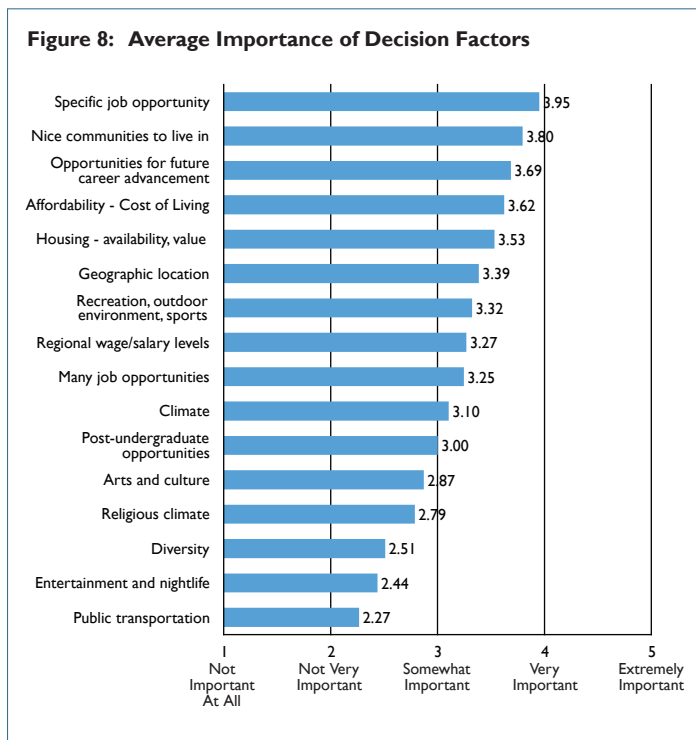
HOW STUDENTS DECIDE WHERE TO LIVE

Near or upon graduation, most college students are faced with a myriad of options. They will need to make decisions such as where they would like to live, what kind of career they will seek, whether or not they will further their education, and if so, whether or not they would like to gain some job experience first. For some graduates, the decision on where they will live is quite clear. However, for most, this decision is not clear and various criteria factor into where they will finally end up living.

The Utah Foundation survey asked 2004 graduates to rate how well some statements characterize their decision about where to live after graduation (Figure 7). These questions were asked to get a sense of

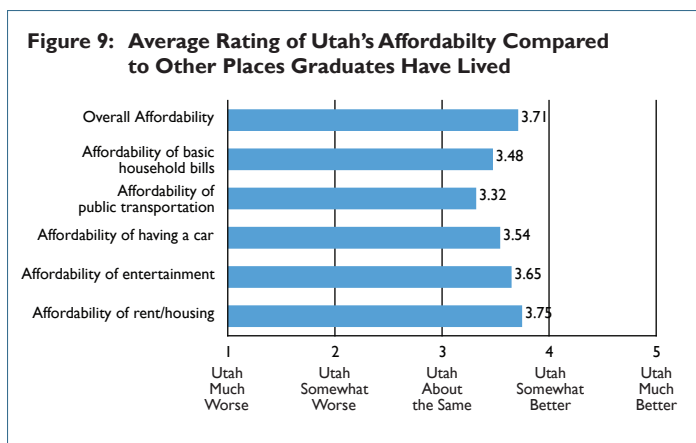


the process that students went through in deciding where to live after graduation. To further refine our understanding of their decisions, the students were also asked how important certain factors were in making their decision about where to live (Figure 8).



AFFORDABILITY AND LIVABILITY

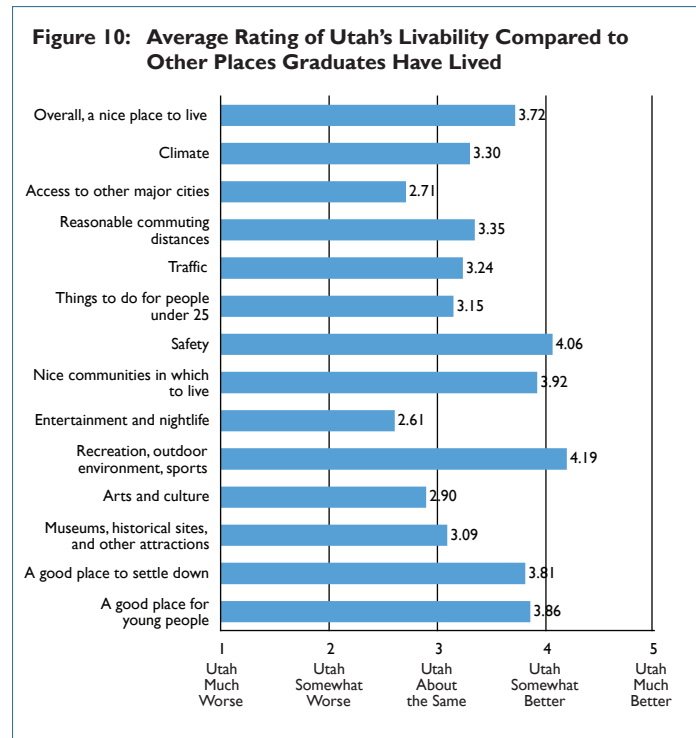
First and foremost, students expressed a strong desire to live somewhere with a reasonable cost of living. This finding applied both to “leavers” and “stayers,” although more strongly for those who stayed than for those who left. The perceived overall affordability of living in Utah seems to match graduates’ desires. Figure 9 details how graduates think Utah’s affordability compares with other places they have lived. Native Utah graduates favorably rate Utah’s affordability in all areas.



However, when graduates were asked to rate the importance of individual factors in their actual decisions, affordability took a back seat to specific job opportunities, nice communities in which to live, and opportunities for future career advancement. The Boston study

also found that students overstated the importance of affordability. Boston graduates expressed a strong desire to live somewhere affordable, but few had actually acted on that desire. For Boston graduates, job opportunities, feel of a city, geography, and housing were much stronger factors than affordability.⁶

As mentioned above, graduates do care about living in nice communities. Even in Boston, the feel of a city was more important in deciding where to live than the affordability of an area. Regardless of how individuals define a “nice community in which to live,” graduates strongly feel that Utah has communities that compare very favorably with other states. Of course, graduates that leave feel slightly less so than those who stay (Figure 10).



WORK OR FURTHER EDUCATION

Part of the decision making process for graduates, especially those who seek the best opportunity, is deciding whether to work or further their education. Figure 11 breaks down what the 2004 graduates are doing a year after graduation. Overall, after one year, 73% of graduates have entered the labor force with the majority of them finding full-time employment. Those graduates who stayed in Utah entered the workforce at a much higher rate (82%) than those graduates who left (61%).

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Of all graduates in 2004, 22% decided to pursue further education. Most of these students as undergraduates studied engineering, various physical and life sciences, social sciences, or business and administration. With the exception of engineering graduates, the majority of graduates in the sciences left Utah to pursue their graduate degrees.

Figure 11: Status of 2004 Graduates

Status	Overall	Stayers	Leavers
Employed full-time	64%	70%	56%
Employed full-time and furthering education	1%	2%	0%
Employed part-time	5%	7%	2%
Self-employed	2%	2%	2%
Unemployed - looking for work	1%	1%	1%
Furthering education - bachelor's degree	0%	0%	0%
Furthering education - business school	1%	1%	1%
Furthering education - master's degree or PhD	12%	10%	16%
Furthering education - dental school	1%	0%	3%
Furthering education - law school	2%	1%	4%
Furthering education - medical school	4%	2%	8%
Furthering education - professional school	0%	0%	1%
Furthering education - postdoctoral fellowship	0%	0%	1%
Total Furthering education	22%	16%	31%
Homemaker	5%	3%	6%
Military	1%	0%	2%
Volunteer Service	0%	0%	0%

Unfortunately, there are only a limited number of opportunities to pursue advanced degrees in Utah, especially in medicine and law. Potential graduate students not only must compete with students in Utah, but with students from all over the world. In many cases, students have no choice but to leave Utah to further their education. However, many of the brightest students may also leave for better educational opportunities elsewhere.

Overall, 57% of students who decide to further their education leave the state. Of all the students who left Utah, 31% chose to further their education, whereas only 16% of stayers sought advanced degrees. Hence, the conclusion could be drawn that education plays a much larger role in the decision process for those who decide to leave Utah than it does for students who decide to stay. Figure 12 details the retention rates by field of study for graduates who leave to further their education.

Figure 12: Retention by Field of Study for Those Furthering Education

Field of Study	Stayers	Leavers
Agriculture	100%	0%
Architecture	33%	67%
Area, Ethnic and Cultural Studies	40%	60%
Biological and Life Sciences	30%	70%
Broadcast Journalism	0%	100%
Business and Administrative	50%	50%
Computer and Information Sciences	50%	50%
Education	43%	57%
Engineering	65%	35%
English and Literature	33%	67%
Foreign Languages and Literatures	11%	89%
Geology	0%	100%
Health Professions and Related Sciences	25%	75%
Law and Legal Studies	0%	100%
Liberal Arts, General Studies and Humanities	38%	63%
Marketing and Communications	50%	50%
Mathematics	25%	75%
Natural Resources & Mining	0%	100%
Nursing	33%	67%
Parks, Recreation, Leisure and Fitness	0%	100%
Philosophy	100%	0%
Physical Sciences	42%	58%
Psychology	67%	33%
Public Administration and Services	25%	75%
Social Sciences and History	43%	57%
Visual and Performing Arts (including design)	14%	86%

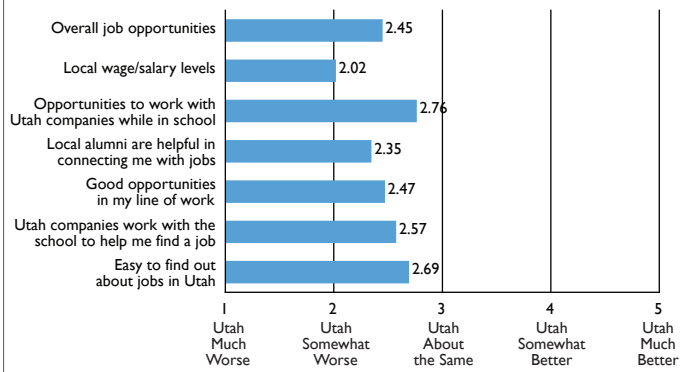
JOB OPPORTUNITIES

In the spring and summer of each year, thousands of college graduates enter the workforce en masse. In 2004, 15,000 of Utah's 23,000 graduates (inferring from the Utah Foundation sample) decided to work instead of furthering their education. Most of these graduates were not previously employed full-time and were seeking their first career job. It is no wonder then that job opportunities play a large role in determining whether or not college graduates choose to stay in Utah or leave. Opportunities for specific jobs and for future career advancement were the most highly rated factors related to job opportunities and were significantly more important than regional wage/salary levels or having many job opportunities. Seventy-two percent of graduates stated that a specific job opportunity was at least a "very important" factor in deciding where to live (30% said "very important" and 42% said "extremely important").

UTAH'S JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Overall, graduates do not have a favorable perception of job opportunities in Utah. When asked to compare Utah's job opportunities to other places they have lived, most graduates felt that Utah was at least somewhat worse than other areas they have lived (Figure 13). In fact, graduates on average did not rate any of the surveyed job opportunities in Utah equal to those of other areas they have lived. However, even though graduates do not feel positively about Utah's job market, 67% of those students who chose to work after graduation decided to stay in Utah.

Figure 13: Average Rating of Utah's Job Opportunities Compared to Other Places Graduates Have Lived



EMPLOYMENT

Between February 2004 and February 2005, Utah experienced a net gain of 40,000 new jobs. The percentage increase in jobs (3.7%) was the second highest in the U.S. and the largest in Utah since 1997. While that figure is positive for the state, the reality is that there were still not enough jobs created to guarantee the employment of all 15,000 Utah college graduates that chose to work. College graduates with their new degrees would be overqualified for many of the new jobs, and other jobs would fall outside of students' fields of study. In addition, graduates would be competing for many positions with more qualified residents as well as graduates from non-Utah colleges and universities. In many cases, students will look for jobs in other states, and many will stay in hopes of eventually finding work.

A year after graduation, most graduates who sought work were successful in securing full-time employment. Eighty-nine percent of students who chose to work after graduation are currently employed full-time, while 10% are either employed part-time or self-employed.

Overall, leavers have had more success in finding full-time employment than stayers (91% and 87% respectively of those who sought work). Therefore, the part-time employment rate for stayers is higher than for leavers (11% and 7% respectively). Additional comments by the respondents suggested that the majority who work part-time are doing so because of a failure to find full-time employment. Only 1% of all 2004 graduates were unemployed and seeking a job.

A major influence in a graduate's decision on where to live depends on his or her field of study and what kind of employment is sought. Figure 14 details the average retention rates for graduates seeking employment by field of study.

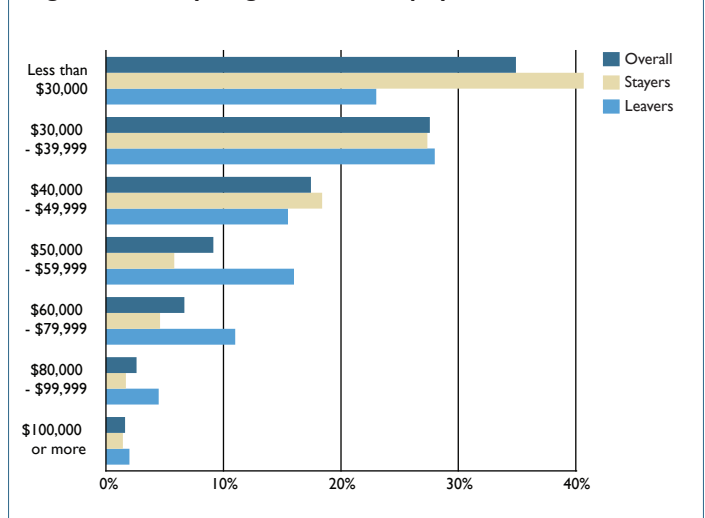
Figure 14: Retention Rates by Field of Study for those Seeking Employment

Field of Study	Stayers	Leavers
Agriculture	50%	50%
Architecture	50%	50%
Area, Ethnic and Cultural Studies	22%	78%
Biological and Life Sciences	55%	45%
Broadcast Journalism	0%	100%
Business and Administrative	68%	32%
Computer and Information Sciences	71%	29%
Education	74%	26%
Engineering	57%	43%
English and Literature	74%	26%
Foreign Languages and Literatures	80%	20%
Geology	50%	50%
Health Professions and Related Sciences	61%	39%
Law and Legal Studies	23%	77%
Liberal Arts, General Studies and Humanities	68%	32%
Marketing and Communications	74%	26%
Mathematics	33%	67%
Natural Resources & Mining	75%	25%
Nursing	55%	45%
Parks, Recreation, Leisure and Fitness	83%	17%
Philosophy	33%	67%
Physical Sciences	75%	25%
Psychology	62%	38%
Public Administration and Services	50%	50%
Social Sciences and History	77%	23%
Visual and Performing Arts (including design)	74%	26%

LOCAL WAGE AND SALARY LEVELS

Surveyed graduates felt strongly that local wage and salary levels in Utah were well below average, and their experience shows this perception to be true. The differences between the wage and salary levels of stayers and leavers are a cause for concern (Figure 15). Among graduates who were employed, 41% of stayers are earning less than \$30,000 in their jobs, while only 23% of leavers are earning less than \$30,000, and the percentage drops to 17% for new leavers (those out of state students who leave for a different location than their home). Also, only 14% of graduates who stay are earning \$50,000 or more, whereas that figure more than doubles to 34% for graduates who leave. Graduates who stay are clearly earning less than graduates who leave.

Figure 15: Salary/Wage Levels for Employed 2004 Graduates



There are several possible explanations for the disparity in salary levels between stayers and leavers. First, the regional wage/salary levels in Utah are simply lower than in many other areas. According to 2002 Bureau of Labor Statistics figures, Utah ranked 34th in average annual pay (\$30,585 as opposed to the national average of \$36,764). Second, many leavers expressed a strong desire to seek out the best job opportunity regardless of location, whereas many stayers did not consider opportunities elsewhere; by limiting their potential job opportunities, many of these stayers probably also limited their salary potential.

DIFFERENCES IN DECISION MAKING

ORIGINAL STAYERS

Original Stayers refers to the segment of graduates who lived in Utah before attending college and chose to remain in Utah after graduation. Many of the original stayers agreed with the statement "it seemed easy to stay in Utah." It is apparent that a perceived convenience to remain in Utah played a large part in the decision making process. They also stated a relatively strong desire to live in the same region as their family and to live or work near their home town.

As for job or educational opportunities, original stayers also said that a specific job opportunity was very important to them and rated it as their most important factor in making their decision. However, given how the statements were prioritized and rated, it appears that most original stayers only seriously looked for job or school opportunities within Utah and felt little desire to move elsewhere.

NEW STAYERS

New Stayers are graduates who are originally not from Utah but chose to attend college in Utah and remain after graduation. New stayers also felt that it was convenient to stay in Utah after graduation, but significantly less so than original stayers. New stayers more than any other segment felt that they could have lived anywhere and chose the best job/school opportunity for them. In fact, many more new stayers strongly agreed with the statement that they could have lived anywhere (24%) than new stayers who strongly agreed with

the statement that it was convenient to stay in Utah (13%). Even though new stayers decided to remain in Utah, it was a much more deliberate decision than for the original stayers.

ORIGINAL LEAVERS

Original leavers are the small segment of graduates who (7%) leave Utah to return near their home after graduation. Original leavers, more than any other segment, felt a very strong desire to live near their family after graduation. Unlike all the other segments, the desire to live near home was even greater than the desire to live in a place with a reasonable cost of living. There is little that could be done to convince these students to stay in Utah.

NEW LEAVERS

New leavers are the graduates of Utah-based schools, both from Utah and elsewhere, who decide to leave Utah for a new destination. They decide for various reasons that they will explore options outside of Utah and not return home. The new leavers group did not agree as strongly about any certain statement as the other segments did. New leavers have significantly less desire to live near their families. Also, they did not feel at all that it was convenient to stay in Utah. In prioritizing the statements, 47% of new leavers indicated that they could have lived anywhere and chose the best job/school opportunity for them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

The findings of this survey should alleviate some concerns that Utah is spending a significant amount of taxpayer money to subsidize education for people who then leave the state and provide benefits to economies elsewhere. In fact, since out-of-state students pay much higher tuition rates than Utah students, and many of the out-of-state students choose to stay in Utah after graduation, Utah may be receiving a greater “bang for its education buck” than previously thought.

Still, we should be concerned about highly talented, well-educated people who leave Utah because there are not enough opportunities here that are commensurate with their abilities. The survey clearly shows that students who leave Utah receive higher salaries than those who stay. Fostering an economy that provides more high-paying jobs would help in the long term to stem this flow. The survey also shows that graduates pursuing advanced degrees, especially medical and other professional degrees, are leaving the state in larger numbers than those who stay for those types of degrees. Some of those graduates will surely come back to Utah after their education is complete, but providing more opportunities for advanced education in Utah would help retain more of them.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, in sheer numbers, Utah did not seem to have experienced a brain drain among its 2004 college graduates. While the state could not retain all its graduates, the number that decided to stay after graduation was almost an exact match for the number of in-state students who graduated from college. This is due to the fact that

Figure 16: Utah's Strengths and Weaknesses in Retaining Recent College Graduates

Strengths	Weaknesses
Affordability / cost of living	Fewer quality job opportunities
Nice communities in which to live	Low wage / salary levels
Excellent recreation and outdoor environment	Weak network for finding job opportunities
Proximity to family	Limited opportunities for advanced degrees

many out-of-state students decided to stay in Utah after graduating, replacing the native students who left.

While numerically Utah might not have experienced an overall brain drain of recent graduates, it seems that Utah lost many highly motivated students to large metropolitan areas outside of Utah. Leavers were more likely than stayers to have sought out and considered the best opportunities, furthered their education, and found higher paying jobs. This is not to say that all the best graduates have left the state. However, many of those who chose to stay in Utah did so because of family considerations and the convenience of their decision to remain in Utah.

Graduates have clearly said that Utah is a great a place to live, with good, affordable communities in which to live, and excellent recreation and outdoor opportunities. These strengths will continue to help retain native college graduates as well as attract non-native graduates.

However, there are some opportunity costs in choosing to live in Utah after college. Educational and occupational opportunities are limited and can only absorb a limited number of new college graduates each year. Thirteen percent of the graduates who have entered the workforce in Utah have yet to find full-time employment. Also wage levels are low and networking opportunities are limited. By choosing to stay, some students have reduced their chances of finding higher paying jobs that make use of the college-level skills they have developed.

ENDNOTES

¹ The 1990 data comes from the 1990 Census of Population: Education in the United States report and can be found at www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cp3/cp-3-4.pdf. The 2000 data come from Summary File 3, a Census 2000 product that can be accessed through American FactFinder, available from the Census Bureau's website, www.census.gov.

² U.S. Census Bureau. Educational Attainment: 2000. August 2003. Available from: www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-24.pdf.

³ The Boston study was conducted by the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce and The Boston Foundation and the study was entitled: Preventing a Brain Drain: Talent Retention in Greater Boston. The study is available at: http://www.bostonchamber.com/policy/talent_retention.pdf.

The Philadelphia study was conducted by the Knowledge Industry Partnership and was entitled: Should I Stay or Should I Go? Survey of Recent Graduates. The study is available at: <http://www.kiponline.org/survey.pdf>.

⁴ Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce and The Boston Foundation. Preventing a Brain Drain: Talent Retention in Greater Boston. October 2003. p. 9

⁵ Knowledge Industry Partnership. Should I Stay or Should I Go? Survey of Recent Graduates. June 2004. p. 8

⁶ Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce and The Boston Foundation. Preventing a Brain Drain: Talent Retention in Greater Boston. October 2003. pp. 9-10

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This research report was written by Research Analyst Richard Pak. Mr. Pak and Executive Director Steve Kroes may be reached for comment at (801) 355-1400. They may also be contacted by email at: rich@utahfoundation.org or steve@utahfoundation.org. For more information about Utah Foundation, please visit our website: www.utahfoundation.org