Michigan’s Recent Graduates: Mobility and Jobs

Executive Summary, May 2013

Economic growth of regions, states, and countries is related to the educational attainment of the workforce. Outmigration of recent college graduates – commonly referred to as “brain drain” – continues to be a concern for many states and countries, with Michigan being among them. The state’s 15 public universities have conferred more than 60,000 degrees over each of the past 5 years with increases each year (figure 1), and almost one-third of those degrees are in critical skill areas such as medicine, engineering, mathematics, technology, and other sciences.

In response to the need to understand more about the young talent of the State of Michigan, a study was convened by the Detroit Regional Chamber with funding support from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation; Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan; and the Michigan Municipal League. Between January and March 2013, iLabs, the University of Michigan-Dearborn’s Center for Innovation Research, surveyed 7,054 of the May 2012 graduates from the 15 public universities in Michigan.

Young Mobile Talent
Recognizing that certain factors impact a person’s mobility, the full sample was sorted based on several demographic factors. The target group is defined as single, 28 years of age or younger, not currently pursuing another degree, and born in the United States. The assumption is that those who meet all four of the criteria have fewer constraints when they consider where to live after graduation and are referred to as “young mobile talent” in this summary.

Current Location
Within the young mobile talent group, 63% are still living in Michigan, while 37% have left the state. In a similar study done in 2007, 51% of the young mobile talent group indicated they were living in Michigan approximately six months after graduation.

The current residences of young mobile talent include zip codes from across the state. However, the most common Michigan cities they are now calling home are the larger cities within the southern half of the Lower Peninsula (figure 2). Almost one-fifth (19%) of those living in Michigan indicate their current zip code is in Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids, or Lansing.

Looking nationally, 35% of the young mobile talent moved elsewhere in the United States, less than 2% moved to another country. While the young mobile talent live in 49 of the 50 states, 38% of those who left Michigan have moved to Illinois, California, and New York (figure 3).
Employment and Income

Comparing location and employment, the young mobile talent living in Michigan are less likely to be employed full-time, as compared to those who live in another state. Less than 70% of those in Michigan have full-time employment, while almost 90% of those who live elsewhere in the United States have full-time employment (figure 4). Among those employed full-time, incomes for the young talent living in Michigan are also lower than those living elsewhere in the United States. More than a third (35%) of those in Michigan have annual incomes under $30,000, while 16% of those living elsewhere in the United States have incomes under $30,000 (figure 5).

Motivations for Leaving or Staying

Recent alumni were asked questions about factors that caused them to stay in or leave Michigan. The young mobile talent who reside elsewhere in the United States were more likely to agree they left for career opportunities (85%), urban experiences (38%), and public transportation (23%), as compared to those who stayed in Michigan. However, the opinions of those who left are very similar to those who stayed with respect to ideas of climate and cultural and social opportunities, with those staying in Michigan agreeing slightly more than those who left (figure 6).

With regard to mobility and where people live, 86% of the young mobile talent agree that when they look for their next job, they will look for a job in a place they would like to live. In comparison, 56% agree they will look in the place they currently live, and 56% agree they will look for the best job regardless of location (figure 7).

Conclusion

While the percentage of young talent staying in Michigan has increased to 63% this year, more than one-third still leave the state. Career opportunities is the most frequently cited reason for leaving, but income levels and employment rates should inform further discussion. Opportunities exist to retain and attract young mobile talent, as they indicate communities with urban experiences and transportation offerings do have a role in their location decisions. This group will look for their next job in places they would like to live and not just the place they currently reside.

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1 Michigan Higher Education Institutional Data Inventory data search on degrees conferred for all 15 public universities in the state of Michigan.