

**Where They Go and Why, Phase II:
What Has Led College Graduates
to Leave or Stay in Maine for School and Work?**

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Introduction

There is a consensus among most educators, policy makers, and business leaders that an educated workforce is vital to economic development and vitality within the state of Maine. There are several indicators that suggest K-12 education in Maine is making great strides to providing a high quality education at the primary and secondary levels. The State has been successful at keeping Maine’s youth in school and seeing them graduate from high school. In 2003 the graduation rate in Maine was 87.6%. Maine also consistently ranks in the top five in the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Condition of K-12 Public Education in Maine, 2005).

Although the State has been successful in making sure most students attain a high school diploma, Maine has been less successful in increasing the number of students that go on to post-secondary education and earn college degrees. With the number and pay of jobs available for those with only a high school diploma decreasing readily, a college degree is becoming vital, as employers within the State and the Nation look for more skilled workers. Only 26% of Mainer’s aged 25 to 65 have earned a bachelors degree or higher (State report card on higher education). Maine lags behind other New England states, New Hampshire (35.4%), Massachusetts (36.7%), and the rest of the Nation (28%) in its percentage of college educated residents (US Census Bureau, 2004).

Getting young people to go to college and stay for graduation is only half the battle; Maine also needs them to stay in the State to live and work. There has been much concern and talk regarding a “Brain drain” within the State, the idea that Maine’s college educated youth leave the State for school and work and never return. There have been two strategies mentioned to combat the problem of young educated Mainers leaving the state; (1) enticing more to stay for school, and (2) making Maine a more desirable place to live and work.

Retaining young college educated people in Maine is crucial to the economic vitality of the State. It is important that we understand the reality of the situation, only then can we determine what can be done to keep young people in the State. There are other factors at play

besides the movement of Maine high school graduates bound for college and then the world of work. Demographic changes are another set of factor that are contributing to a declining youth population. In the study *Maine's Changing Population* put together by The Maine State Planning Office (2004), the impact of natural increases and net migration on population change is discussed. Maine is aging fast, with a median age of 38.6, making Maine's population the third oldest in the nation. The study points out that young adults now make up a smaller share of Maine's population than in the past. They argue that the decrease in the youth population is due more to the normal aging of the population and less on migration. They also point out the regional population disparities that exist within Maine, as young people move from rural to more urban areas. The study provides evidence that young adults are the most mobile, as well as those that are single, college educated, and between 25 and 39.

In *Maine Youth Migration Profiles 1995-2000*, Colgan suggests making Maine attractive to all young people (2004). The study suggests that instead of focusing just on where Maine high school graduates chose to go to college and ultimately live and work, the State should attempt to make Maine an attractive place for young people to attend higher education and to live and work, including those who are graduating from high school and college in other States.

What is being done?

As a result of these studies, programs have been implemented in attempt to; increase the percentage of Maine high school graduates going on to college, keep more Maine high school graduates in the State for higher education, and find ways to entice these college educated Mainers to stay in the State after graduation. Among the organizations attempting to address the situation are: The Mitchell Institute, Melmac, the Maine Compact for Higher Education, and the Maine Youth Summit.

What we are missing is an understanding as to what leads high school graduates to make their decision about where to go to college. We know that approximately half leave the State to continue their education but we do not know what guides those decisions. We also do not know who ends up staying in the State to live and work. We do not know if, or how many of those that stay for school are staying to live and work or if those that leave for school are returning to finish school or to live and work after graduation. The 2002, *Where They Go and Why*, study attempted to address these questions and came up with some interesting findings. This current study attempts to replicate *Where They Go and Why*, to see if the findings hold true, and

therefore are more generalizable to Maine's college going population. The current study also seeks to add some depth of information to the first study, in hopes of getting more clarity about the current situation and what can be done to keep the college educated in Maine.

Methodology

The 2002 study, *Where They Go and Why*, sought to answer four questions:

1. What factors influence where Maine's high school graduates choose to attend college?
2. What factors influence where Maine's college graduates choose to live and work?
3. How many Maine residents who leave the State for college return to Maine to complete their degrees, and to live and work?
4. Are Maine's best and brightest youth choosing to attend college outside of Maine, and are they choosing to live and work outside of Maine as well?

The current study's first goal was to replicate *Where They Go and Why*, to determine if the findings remain constant and therefore are more generalizable. In order to replicate the first study, 7,115 surveys were sent out to Maine residents who had earned a college degree in either 1997 or 1999. The sample was drawn, as it was in the first study, from loan borrowers who had at least one loan guaranteed from the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME).

The current survey consisted of the same sections with identical wording. It also included a few questions not included in the original survey, intended to provide a greater depth of information regarding respondent's reasons for choosing where to go to school as well as where to live and work. Sections dealt with demographics, education, post-graduation work experiences, and future plans of respondents. Again, key sections dealt with the reasons behind decisions regarding where to attend school, and where to ultimately live and work. The surveys were customized to fit each sub-category but essentially ask the same questions. The sample was divided into the same four sub-categories as in the 2002 study:

1. Stay/Stay Sub Sample: Maine residents who: (a) chose to attend college in Maine; and (b) chose to live and work in Maine after graduating from college.
2. Stay/Leave Sub Sample: Maine residents who: (a) chose to attend college in Maine; but (b) chose to live and work outside of Maine after graduating from college.

3. Leave/Return Sub Sample: Maine residents who: (a) chose to attend college outside Maine; but (b) chose to return to live and work in Maine.
4. Leave/Leave Sub Sample: Maine residents who: (a) chose to attend college outside Maine; and (b) chose to live and work outside Maine.

Table 1 reports the survey distributions and return information. The 2002 information is also included. As in the 2002 study, survey respondents could either complete the survey online or they could return the completed survey by mail in the pre-addressed, stamped envelope provided. The return rate was less than that of the 2002 study. A total of 3,330 surveys were mailed to 1997 college graduates, of those 696 were sent back as undeliverable. Of the 2,634 surveys that were deliverable, 454 surveys were returned and used for the study, for a return rate of 17.2%. A total of 3,785 surveys were mailed to the 1999 sample, of which 616 came back as undeliverable. Of the 3,169 that were delivered 624 surveys were returned, a rate of 19.7%.

Table 1
Survey Distributions and Return Samples

1997 Graduates	Stay/Stay	Stay/Leave	Leave/Return	Leave/Leave	Totals
Population Samples	2465	1003	721	606	4795
Surveys Mailed	1000	1003	721	606	3330
Total Deliverables	811	778	586	459	2634
Returned Surveys	121	126	96	111	454
Percent Return Rates	14.9%	16.2%	16.4%	24.2%	17.2%
1999 Graduates	Stay/Stay	Stay/Leave	Leave/Return	Leave/Leave	Totals
Population Samples	2991	1378	796	611	5776
Surveys Mailed	1000	1378	796	611	3785
Total Deliverables	869	1135	702	463	3169
Returned Surveys	178	192	122	132	624
Percent Return Rates	20.5%	16.9%	17.4%	28.5%	19.7%

FAME Survey 2002 Counts:

1998 Graduates	Stay/Stay	Stay/Leave	Leave/Return	Leave/Leave	Totals
Population Samples	2773	1238	595	535	5141
Surveys Mailed	1000	1238	595	535	3368
Total Deliverables	889	988	535	416	2828
Returned Surveys	228	228	86	169	711
Percent Return Rates	25.6%	23.1%	16.1%	40.6%	25.1%

After compiling the data from 1997 and 1999, the researchers attempted to determine whether the three sample years were statistically equivalent. The researchers compared demographic information such as high school grades, decision to attend a private or public college, college GPA, and parent’s education. After running analyses on each of these demographic determinants the three survey years were found to be statistically equivalent. Because the groups were found to be equivalent, the three data sets were than merged into one. The findings section describes the results of the analyses done on the merged data set, which included the data from the 2002 study.

Findings

As shown in Table 2, 59.9% of the survey respondents stayed in Maine to earn a 2 year or a 4 year degree (stay/stay and stay/leave), while the remaining 40.1% left the State to attend school (leave/return, leave/leave). At the time surveyed 53.6% of respondents were living and working outside the state (stay/leave, leave/leave), leaving 46.4% in the State (stay/stay, leave/return). Table 2 also breaks down the data by survey year. Looking at the profile, the percents within each sub-category remain fairly consistent comparatively by survey year.

Table 2
Profile of Graduates

	Stay/Stay	Stay/Leave	Leave/return	Leave/leave
Total (n=1,789)	526 29.4%	545 30.5%	205 17.0%	413 23.1%
1997	121 26.7%	126 27.8%	96 21.1%	111 24.4%
1998	227 32.0%	227 32.0%	86 12.1%	170 23.9%
1999	178 28.5%	192 30.7%	123 19.7%	132 21.1%

Research Question 1: What factors influence where Maine high school graduates choose to attend college?

Table 1 shows that the following factors were the most important for both those who chose to stay in Maine for college and for those who left the State for school: (1) Good program, (2) Reputation, and (3) size. It is noteworthy that the analysis revealed that the only factors in which there were significant differences in the responses between those that left Maine for school and those that stayed were for the factors of Affordable, Cultural/social, and commuting distance. Affordability and commuting distance were more important factors for those that chose to stay in the State for school and cultural/social reasons played more of an impact for those that chose to leave for school.

As in the previous study several factors were shown to play a less critical role in the decision about where to attend college. The role of the individual; the parent, teacher, and school counselor, were shown to be less important factors. In fact a large percentage of those surveyed indicated that these factors were not applicable (parents 62.7%- NA, school counselor 50.1%-NA, teacher 55.4%- NA). Among those that did rate these factors for importance the majority rated them to be of little or no importance.

Table 3
Reasons for Choosing to Attend a Particular College
 Percentage who thought reason was important/very important
 (Where (n) is shown indicates a large percentage reported factor N/A)

Reasons for choosing a school	Stay	Leave	All
Good program	79.2%	77.1%	78.6%
Reputation	71.5%	79.0%	74.5%
Size	66.9%	74.8%	70.2%
Wanted to stay/leave Maine	67.1%	68%	67.4%
Financial aid	60.9%	68.4%	64.0%
Affordable	71%	50.6%	63.1%
Cultural/social	46.2%	59.8%	51.9%
Commuting distance	53.3%	23.2%	43.5%
Classes at Convenient times	38.7%	20.8%	32.1%
Had a Job in the area (n=749)	38.9%	15.6%	31.5%
Guidance counselor recommended (n=865)	30.9%	29.3%	30.3%
Friend or Spouse attending (n=766)	27.1%	25.0%	26.3%
Athletic program (n=918)	13.3%	27.6%	25.2%
Alma mater of my parents (n=859)	20.9%	26.1%	22.9%
Teacher recommended (n=89)	25.1%	26.4%	18.9%
Parents persuaded me to stay/leave (n=647)	18.4%	13.7%	16.4%

Best & brightest, type of school and 1st generation

Table 1 gives us a good idea of what factors influence decisions of where to attend college. The following tables examine which students stay and which leave the State for college. By looking at what type of college students stayed and left, we can see that a greater percentage of those that stayed for school went to a public college (63%), compared to the percentage that left the State and when to a public school (29.9%). So, students that left the state were more likely to go to a private school (70.1%) and those that stayed for school were more likely to attend a public institution. When looking at the first generation college students surveyed, we found that of those that stayed for school 32.1% of them were first generation. Comparatively, of those that left for school only 16.8% were the first in their families to attend college. So, of the 456 first generation college students the majority of them 337 stayed for school, while only 119 left for school. This seems to provide evidence that first generation college goers are more likely to stay in the State for college.

Table 4
 Characteristics of those that stayed and left for school

	Percentage of Best & Brightest	Percentage of 1 st generation
Stayed for school	26.7% (n=285)	32.1% (n=337)
Left for school	42.2% (n=303)	16.8% (n=119)

Public/Private- Stayed/Left for school

	Public	Private
Stayed for school	65.3% (n=682)	34.7% (n=362)
Left for school	29.9% (n=210)	70.1% (n=492)

Examining Transfer Student's influences

The following table looks at the reasons transfer students choose both their original college and the college to which they transferred. Selecting a school with a good program remained the most important reason for choosing both the original and transfer colleges. A higher percentage rated good program, affordability, commuting distance, having a job in the area, and classes at convenient times as being important to very important in selecting their transfer college, as compared to their reasons for selecting their original college.

Table 5
 Transfer student reasons for choosing transfer and original college
 Percentage who thought reason was important/very important

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Transfer college</i>	<i>Original college</i>
Good program	84.5%	73.3%
Affordable	74.9%	66.3%
Wanted to stay/leave ME	67.2%	65.8%
Commuting distance	65.9%	50.7%
Size	57.1%	58%
Reputation	56.6%	58.7%
Had a job in the area	51.7%	39.8%
Financial aid	48.5%	57.9%
Classes times convenient	48.2%	34.8%
Cultural/Social	47.6%	48.2%
Friend/spouse attending	36.5%	26.8%
Teacher recommended	26.1%	30.0%
Counselor recommended	21.4%	40.7%
Parents persuaded to stay/leave	19.6%	17.4%
Alma mater of parents	18.9%	18.7%
Athletic Program	17.1%	23.3%

Research Question 2:

What factors influence where Maine’s College graduates choose to live and work?

Unlike Table 3 which showed that the reasons influencing decisions on where to go to school were basically the same for those who chose to stay and those that chose to leave the State, Table 6 shows that the reasons for staying in the state to live and work are quite different from the reasons for leaving the state to live and work. For those who chose to stay in the state being closer to friends and family, recreational activities, and cultural social reasons were the most important. For those who chose to leave the state the most influencing factors were career opportunities, as well as pay and benefits. The responses indicated that those that choose to stay in the state do so to be close to family and because of the quality of life in Maine. While, those that leave the state are motivated to do so for career opportunities and for better pay and benefits.

Table 6
Reasons for Choosing Place to Live/Work
Percentage who thought reason was important/very important

Reasons	Percentage	Compare: reasons for those who left
Closer to Friends and Family <i>(Closer to friends and family)</i>	92.2%	33.6%
Recreational activities in Maine <i>(Recreational activities outside Maine)</i>	77.7%	24.5%
Spouse/partner wanted to live in ME <i>(Spouse/partner wanted to live outside ME)</i>	74.0% (n=458)	51.1%
Cultural/social life in Maine <i>(Cultural/social life outside Maine)</i>	72.3%	54.3%
Found a job I wanted in Maine <i>(Job found outside Maine was better)</i>	71% (n=542)	78.5%
Always planned to live in Maine	70.7%	
Cost of living <i>(Cost of living outside Maine)</i>	65.7%	15.7%
Spouse/partner found employment in ME <i>(Partner found employment outside ME)</i>	63.3% (n=390)	67.7%
Continuing education in Maine <i>(Attending school outside Maine)</i>	40.2% (n=346)	59.7%
Specific employer in Maine <i>(Specific employer outside Maine)</i>	37.1% (n=456)	36.3%
Spouse/partner attends school in Maine <i>(Partner attends school outside Maine)</i>	32.2% (n=277)	39.2%
Pay/benefits better in positions in Maine <i>(Pay/benefits better outside Maine)</i>	22.9% (n=453)	75.4%

Reasons	Percentage	Compare: reasons for those who left
Career opportunities better in Maine <i>(Career opportunities better outside ME)</i>	22.8%	84.8%
<i>Could not find a job I wanted in Maine</i>		64.6% (n=597)
<i>Pay back student loans</i>		44.8% (n=584)
<i>Returning to location lived in before</i>		37.9% (n=343)
<i>Prefer weather outside ME</i>		32.6%
<i>Transferred out of ME by employer</i>		18.4% (n=152)

The comments from the respondents reveal the importance of family and quality of life for those who choose to stay in Maine, and the importance of job opportunities and better pay and benefits for those who choose to leave the State.

“I wanted to leave Maine to attend college, and I wanted to experience life in a large city. I stayed outside of Maine because of higher pay, better career opportunities in my field, and advancement opportunities.”

“I chose my undergraduate college because it was not in the state of Maine. I returned to be close to my family after the birth of my child.”

“I do love the State of Maine. I am extremely proud that I was born and raised there. I would like to give my daughter the same chances during her youth. But my husband and I could not afford to move back. Lower incomes, high taxes, and no public transportation makes living there a hard sell.”

“I've sacrificed to be able to move back to Maine. I don't earn as much as friends in other areas, and I haven't been able to get a job in my field. I do love living here, but I recognize there may come a time when I'll have to choose between a more fulfilling career, or living in this area. Unfortunately, the more fulfilling career will probably win out.”

“If I were to make the decisions I made at 18 with what I knew today, I would have considered U Maine more seriously. The 'Brain drain' is less a reflection on the quality of Maine education as it is a reflection upon the lack of "good" jobs in Maine. Health care benefits, salary growth, job security -- these things will bring back those who have left for southern ME and NY.”

Professions

Table 4 shows the type of organizations that survey respondents were employed in at the time of the survey. A majority of those surveyed, 46.1%, were in the helping professions; health care, education, and government or public agency. A quarter of those surveyed were in a business or technology organization. Smaller percentages of those surveyed were in the Other/temporary, retail/hospitality, or construction/manufacturing fields (10.5% ,10.3% , & 7.1%). When separating out each organization by those that chose to stay or leave for work we see that the majority (66.7%) of those that indicated they were in the business or technology fields work and live outside the state. Out of those that indicated they worked in the helping professions a slightly greater percentage (53.3%) worked and lived within the state. This data shows that, within the study sample, people in the business and technology field are more likely to be living and working outside the State, while those in the helping profession are fairly equally represented both within and outside the State.

Type of Organization grouped

1. *Helping Professions*: Health care, Education, Government/public agency
2. *Business/Technology*: Finance/Insurance/Real Estate, Professional/Business service provider, Technology company, self-employed
3. *Construction/Manufacturing*: Construction, Manufacturing, Farming, Transportation/Public utilities
4. *Retail/Hospitality*: Entertainment, Hospitality, retailer
5. *Other*: Other and Temporary Employment agency

Table 7
Type of organization worked in

	Helping Professions	Business/Technology	Other/Temp	Retail/Hospitality	Construction/Manufacturing
All Surveyed	46.1% n=739	26% n=417	10.5% n=168	10.3% n=166	7.1% n=114

Percentages of those in each type of organization that Stayed/left for work

<i>Type of Organization</i>	<i>Stayed for work</i>		<i>Left for work</i>	
Helping Professions	53.3%	n=394	46.7%	n=345
Business/Technology	33.3%	n=139	66.7%	n=278
Other/Temp	41.1%	n=69	58.9%	n=99
Retail/Hospitality	47%	n=78	53%	n=88
Construction/Manufacturing	57%	n=65	43%	n=49

First Generation and Best & Brightest and Organization

The following tables show the percentage of respondents in each organization that were identified as first generation college students or the best and brightest. Both first generation and best and brightest appear to be equally represented in each field, with a slightly higher percentage of first generation in the helping professions, and a slightly higher percentage of the best and brightest in the business and technology fields.

Table 8
Percentages of 1st generation and best and brightest within each field

Type of organization	1st generation	Best & Brightest
Helping Professions	27.1% n=200	32.9% n=243
Business/Technology	22.3% n=93	36.9% n=154
Other/Temp	22.6% n=38	35.1% n=59
Retail/Hospitality	26.5% n=44	32.5% n=54
Construction/Manufacturing	23.7% n=27	28.1% n=32

Future Plans

Table 9 looks at where respondents anticipated being 5 years from the time they completed the survey. A fairly large percentage, 21.4%, of respondents indicated that they were unsure about where they would be in 5 years, while 39.8% anticipated being in Maine and 38.7%, only slight lower, anticipated being outside of Maine. Only 8% of those that had stayed in Maine for school and to live and work indicated that they would be living outside of Maine in 5 years. Those that had left Maine to live and work had a higher percentage of respondents indicating they were unsure about where they would be in 5 years (25.9% and 29.0%), compared to those who stayed in Maine to live and work (13.1% and 17.9%). A fairly significant percentage of those who left for school and then returned to live and work, indicated that they would be living outside of the State in 5 years (21.6%).

These findings seem to indicate that those living outside the State were more uncertain about where they would be living in the future, perhaps because those living outside the State are more influenced by job opportunities and pay and therefore more likely to go where the best jobs are. These finding also seem to indicate that those who were currently living in the State but had gone outside Maine for school were more likely to envision themselves outside of Maine in the future, possibly because they had experience outside the State in the past.

Table 9
Where Respondents said they would be living 5 years from now

	In Maine	Outside of Maine	Don't know
Total	39.8% (n=694)	38.7% (n=674)	21.4% (n=375)
Stay/Stay	78.8% (n=402)	8.0% (n=41)	13.1% (n=67)
Stay/Leave	12.8% (n=68)	61.4% (n=327)	25.9% (n=138)
Leave/Return	60.5% (n=179)	21.6% (n=64)	17.9% (n=53)
Leave/Leave	11.1% (n=45)	59.9% (n=242)	29.0% (n=117)

What can be done?

What survey respondents say should be done:

Lower taxes on individuals and small businesses:

“Taxes in Maine are oppressive -- regulation is excessive. The drive to socialized medicine will lead to move taxation and be a further restraint on economic development. In sum, Maine does not embrace economic development as the positive goal that 6000 years of history have shown it to be.”

“Suggestion: cut the size of the legislature. Reduce property and income tax. Reduce the petty taxes, i.e. snack tax. I have a hard time supporting a state that raises taxes so high that people are forced to move.”

“This state is great and has good schools but needs more jobs with higher pay and the state needs to lay off taking everything and having taxes so high.”

Business climate:

“I own 2 businesses and run a third. The biggest deterrent to returning to Maine are the taxes and, secondly, the limited business opportunities.”

“Policy of the state government in Maine appears to be very restrictive to incoming business and industry. Most of that attitude seems to stem from the idea that business and industry will "ruin" Maine -- but without it, people like myself will have no choice but to leave for jobs that pay well, with companies that are growing.”

More affordable housing:

“The relatively high cost of real estate also makes moving back more difficult.”

More cultural and social opportunities:

“I believe that if the State of Maine is serious about attracting a broader, more diverse culture and community, the state must invest (long term!) in cultural opportunities and institutions. And then pick out the most talented and experiences creative people to fill the leadership positions in those institutions and expand the consciousness and humanity of the people of Maine.”

“The reason I don't live there now is because it is difficult socially to find enough to do and I miss the cultural diversity of living in urban areas.”

“I think population density is the biggest reason people leave Maine. They want more career and social opportunities.”

“My main reason for leaving Maine had to do mainly with the homogenous culture. So many people are the same, and there's not enough diversity or culture of my liking.”

“Maine is a beautiful state, but it does not offer a lot to its citizens -- a lot of state funds and attention are more focused on attracting tourists and outsiders. Maine needs to enrich the cultural offerings (outside of Portland!) and open its doors to more diverse cultures in general.”

Lack of good jobs:

“I couldn't find a job I wanted. Find me a good one and I'll move back in a second.”

“The reason for the "brain drain" in Maine is simple: the state of Maine does not possess enough high paying jobs. The reason is \$.”

“The biggest problem facing the state is that there is very limited opportunity for the "best and brightest" young adults to earn a living in the state. So they all leave to other parts of the country. In effect, the levels of the state have "culled the hard" of the hardest workers and brightest minds because they do not have an economic policy to engage business growth within the state. Until this changes, you will continue to hemorrhage the talented young people from the state of Maine.”

“I would like to see the government officials stop complaining how students go out of state to college and how that's why they don't come back. Even if I went to college in Maine, if Maine doesn't have a job for me, I have to look elsewhere. The state needs to work on bringing in more high tech jobs that need college degrees in order to keep college graduates living and working in Maine.”

Maine business recruiting, information about jobs in Maine:

“If Maine wishes to keep students, they should actively recruit at the colleges. If I had found a job before graduating, I would have stayed. I think the cost of living is very reasonable and Maine is VERY beautiful. Also, perhaps offering home buyer's assistance would keep people there longer.”

“I wish the state of Maine offered more opportunities for young adults who decide to reside in Maine. Many of my college and high school friends have left the state of Maine for higher wages and better benefits. I believe that at least half of them would return if it weren't for the lack of jobs.”

Transportation:

“The transportation system of highways and air service must be expanded statewide north to south in order for businesses to locate here and grow and hire young people. The state economic developers must work aggressively to attract new industries to the state by attending trade fairs nationwide and selling the benefits of Maine.”

Discussion Section

Given that the findings for this study match those of the previous study and are therefore strengthened and more generalizable, what policy implications do these findings suggest? What programs can be instituted that will help keep Maine high school graduates in the state for both higher education and to live and work? The list of strategies is similar to those from the previous study our hope is that they will now hold more clout and lead to a comprehensive plan to increase the percentage of college educated Mainers.

- ***Increase the quality of the programs available at Maine institutions for higher education and institute public relations strategies that market those strengths.***

The findings of this study suggest that Maine should put its emphases in providing quality programs within the state. Where quality programs do exist public relations should be increased so that Mainers, especially Maine high school students, know the strength of these programs and what they have to offer. Survey respondents indicated that they might have attended Maine colleges or universities had they known about the strength of those programs. Increasing the information about the quality of Maine's college and universities could also bring high school grades from other states into the State.

- ***Increase levels of grant financial assistance and develop more targeted student loan forgiveness programs.***

Affordability remains a primary concern for Maine students entering into or continuing higher education. It is necessary for the State to provide sufficient non-loan financial assistance to keep Maine institutions of higher education competitive. As college costs continue to rise and students are faced with increasing debt to finance their education, the availability of need-based grant aid will become a significant factor in determining not only educational opportunity but also choice of institution. Increasing levels of grant financial assistance could also have an effect on those who leave Maine for higher earning power to re-pay student loan debt.

Policy makers should also consider targeted student loan forgiveness programs in partnership with private business seeking to bring qualified employees to Maine. This will assist in keeping college graduates in the State after they receive their diploma.

- ***Increased employment opportunities***

The findings from this study provide further evidence of the link between economic viability and keeping Maine's educated youth within the State. Although many of those surveyed indicated that they would like to have stayed in or returned to Maine after graduating from college, many felt that the job opportunities and pay in the State were simply not competitive with the rest of the Nation and therefore chose to leave. Those that do stay point out that they are sacrificing better career opportunities and pay in order to stay in Maine. Survey respondents repeatedly mentioned the lack of business and technology opportunities in Maine. While those in the helping professions, specifically nursing and teaching, pointed out the lower pay and lack of decent benefits within the State. As was suggested in the previous study, Maine needs a comprehensive plan for increasing employment opportunities. This plan needs to address tax burdens, for individuals as well as businesses, the wage structure, and look to promote more extensive connections between higher education institutions and businesses.

- ***Increased Cultural opportunities***

This survey provides evidence that both those that chose to leave the state to live and work, as well as those that stay, value cultural and social opportunities. Many respondents indicated that Maine's lack of cultural opportunities and diversity played a role in their decision to leave the State to live and work. Strategies for expanding the arts and cultural opportunities in Maine could be linked with a comprehensive plan to increase employment opportunities. By focusing on cultural opportunities as well as increasing employment opportunities, Maine could become a more welcoming place for people of diverse backgrounds.

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