



The Research Bureau

Central Massachusetts Talent Retention Project: A Survey of the Class of 2014

Report 14-04

August 2014

Research in the Public Interest

Worcester Regional Research Bureau, Inc.

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“The best local economic development strategy...is to work on attracting smart, entrepreneurial people and then, more or less, get out of their way.”

—Edward Glaeser, Fred and Eleanor Glimp Professor of Economics at Harvard University and Worcester Regional Research Bureau 2013 Annual Meeting Speaker¹

Civic and business leaders across the nation and around the world compete for a skilled workforce. An educated labor pool is as important to economic growth as limited barriers to entry, access to markets, and available space.

The City of Worcester, home to nine colleges and universities, has an opportunity to capitalize on nearly 6,500 graduates each year from Assumption College, Becker College, Clark University, College of the Holy Cross, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences University (MCPHSU), Quinsigamond Community College (QCC), University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), and Worcester State University. In Greater Worcester, Anna Maria College, Nichols College, and Tufts’ Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine annually produce nearly seven hundred additional graduates. In May 2006, The Research Bureau released a report entitled “Central Massachusetts Talent Retention Project.”² This report, based on a 2005 survey of students at 15 area colleges and universities, found that more local college graduates leave the Central Massachusetts region than remain. In 2014, The Research Bureau replicated that survey at a smaller scale. While nearly a decade has passed, the outcome of the most recent survey was remarkably similar.

Cities must both retain and recruit young talent in order to leverage economic growth. To retain is to keep current residents within the city while to recruit is to attract individuals from outside the region to live and work in the area. Colleges and universities provide a unique opportunity to both retain and recruit; college students may call other parts of the country home, but they spend a significant period of time exposed to and generally integrated into the local community. In order to capture this educated workforce, a city must offer and connect students with economic, social, and cultural opportunities. A city must offer jobs in a wide variety of professional fields.

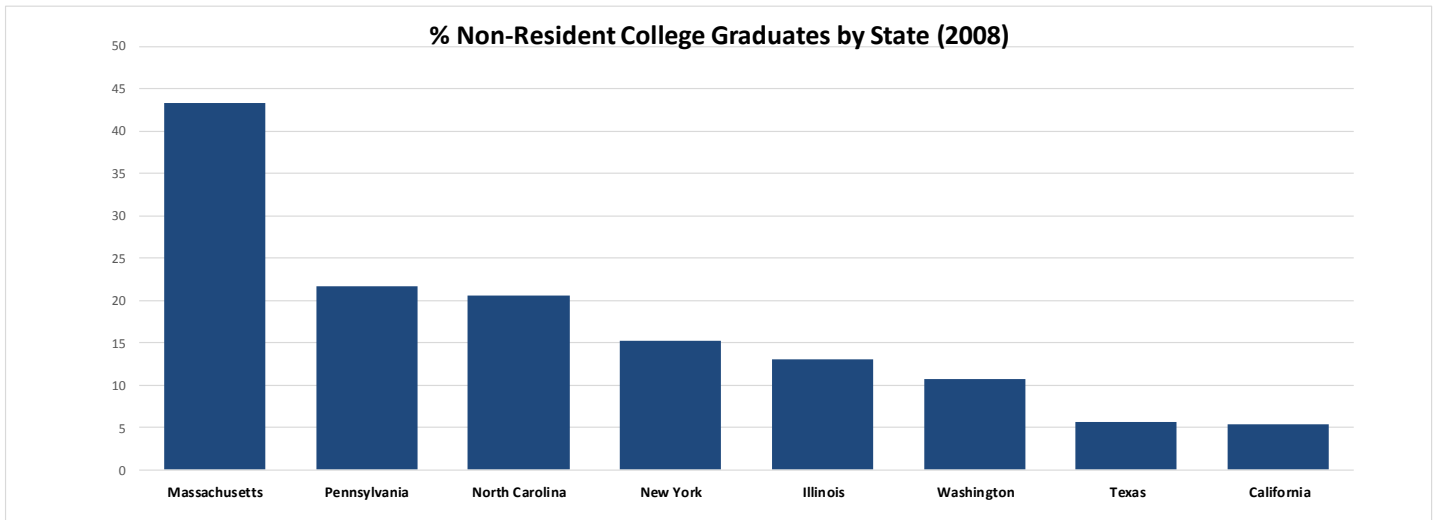
With over 30,000 college students at more than a dozen area colleges, Worcester is a college town. Worcester’s colleges, and Worcester’s college students, possess a wide variety of skills and are geographically diverse.

While some colleges retain their historic focus on the liberal arts (e.g., Anna Maria, Assumption, Clark, Holy Cross, Worcester State University), others boast strong technical programs (e.g., Becker College, Nichols College, QCC, WPI). Three institutions specialize primarily in post-graduate programs: MCPHSU, Tufts’ Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, and the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

CLASS OF 2014 GRADUATES	
College	# Of Graduates
Anna Maria College	231
Assumption College	715
Becker College	381
Clark University	969
College of the Holy Cross	675
MCPHSU (Worcester Only)	282
Nichols College	347
Quinsigamond Community College (includes summer and fall 2013 graduates)	1268
Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine	101
University of Massachusetts Medical School	227
Worcester Polytechnic Institute (includes fall 2013 graduates)	1,575
Worcester State University (includes summer and fall 2013 graduates)	756
TOTAL	7527
Information provided by the Registrar’s Office of the individual institutions.	



Worcester's college students come from all fifty states and dozens of countries. More than half the students at Clark University (66%), Holy Cross (63%), and Worcester Polytechnic Institute (55%) hail from states beyond Massachusetts. In fact, Massachusetts as a whole hosts a significantly higher percentage of non-resident students than many economic competitor states such as California, Illinois, Texas, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Washington.³ The student body of Worcester's public institutions, however, include less than 5% out-of-state students.



Source: See Endnote 3.

What Do The Experts Say?

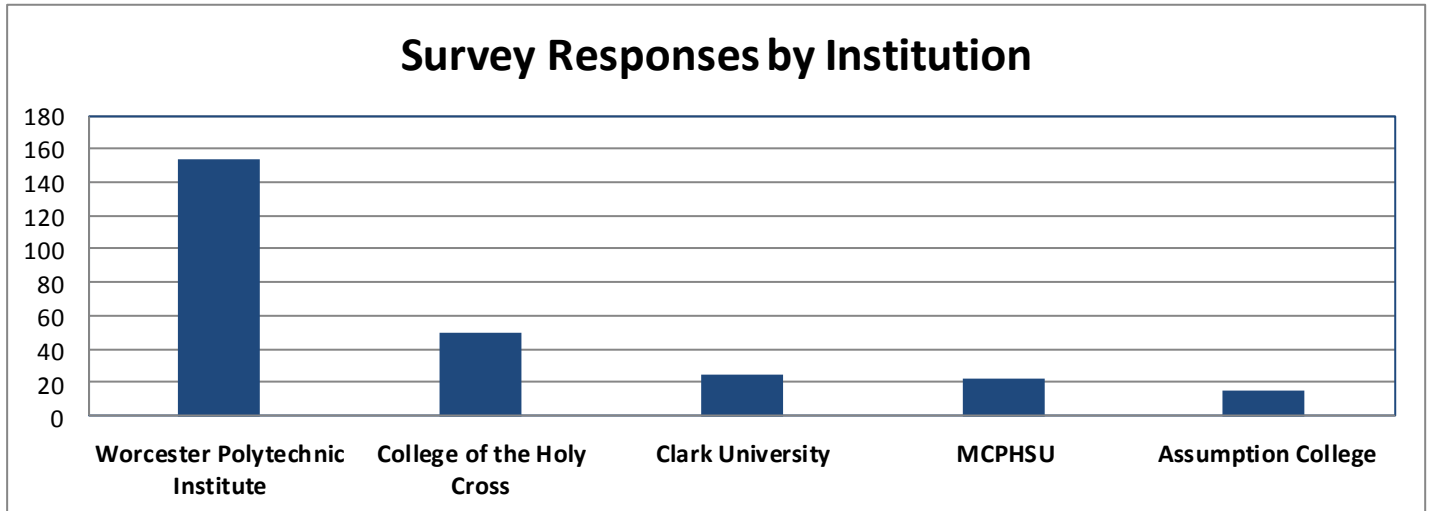
Out-of-state students provide an opportunity for the recruitment of new talent, however the emotional attachment of home and family can be a strong factor in locational decision-making. Regions hosting large out-of-state student populations are less likely to retain as many graduates. According to a May 2013 Federal Reserve Bank of Boston study, New England ranks last in the nation in the percentage of graduates living in the same state as their baccalaureate institution one year after graduation. Massachusetts, in particular, retained only 52% of its college graduates one year after graduation, ranking 38th out of 48 states with data.⁴

According to Richard Florida, Director of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto and Global Research Professor at New York University, “technology, talent and tolerance” drive the great cities of the world.⁵ The basic economic value of human capital, and the importance of an educated workforce to economic growth, is well-defined.⁶ With advanced communication and transportation technologies, cities compete at national and even international levels, to attract skilled talent. Richard Florida's recent study on population migration in the year 2012 indicated that college graduates tend to move to different cities than people with a high school diploma or the equivalent. The top five destination cities for those with graduate or professional degrees were Seattle, San Francisco, Washington (DC), Denver, and San Jose, while the top five cities for those whose highest level of education was a high school diploma are Atlanta, Cape Coral (FL), Houston, Tampa, and North Port (FL). Metropolitan areas that attract educated workers are generally knowledge and technology hubs, while metropolitan areas that attract less educated workers are generally Sunbelt tourist destinations with thriving service economies.⁷

It is important to note that the population migration study showed that the Worcester metropolitan area fares well in terms of attracting educated talent with a 2012 net gain of over 600 new residents with graduate or professional degrees, over 100 new residents with bachelor's degrees, and nearly 75 new residents with associate's degrees settling in the region.⁸

The Research Bureau's 2014 Talent Retention Survey

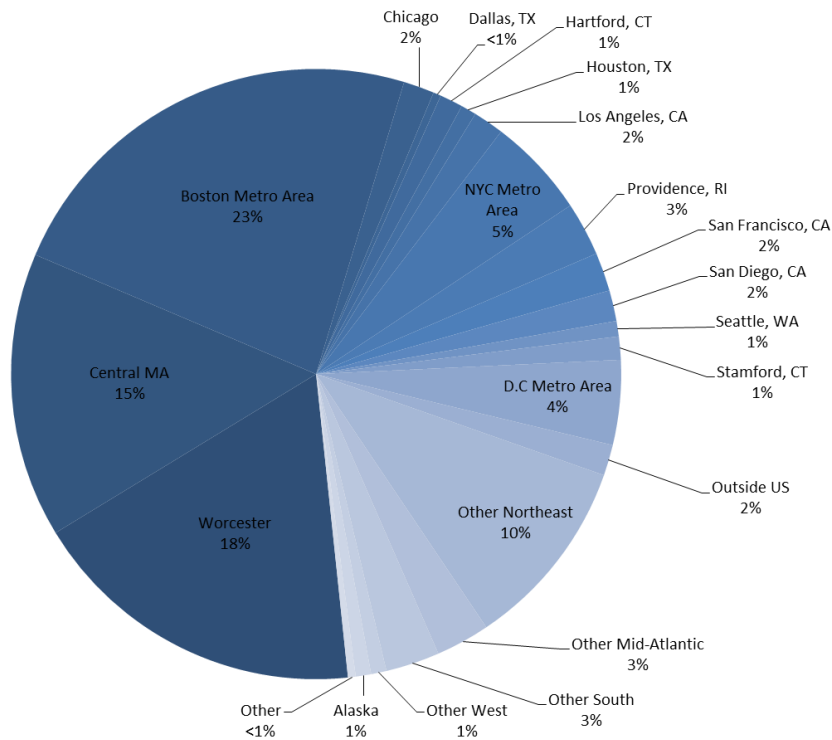
In April 2014, The Research Bureau distributed a survey to graduating students at nine area colleges and universities. Over 260 students from five institutions responded. 49% of respondents were completing a bachelor of science degree, 34% were completing a bachelor of arts degree, and the remainder anticipated graduate and professional degrees (19%).



34% of the respondents had already accepted full-time employment in their field of study. An additional 27% of the respondents were planning on continuing their academic studies, whether in business school, law school, a masters program, a doctoral program, medical school, or veterinary school. At the time of the survey, 38% of the students were still seeking full-time employment.

Only 22% of the respondents were originally from Central Massachusetts.

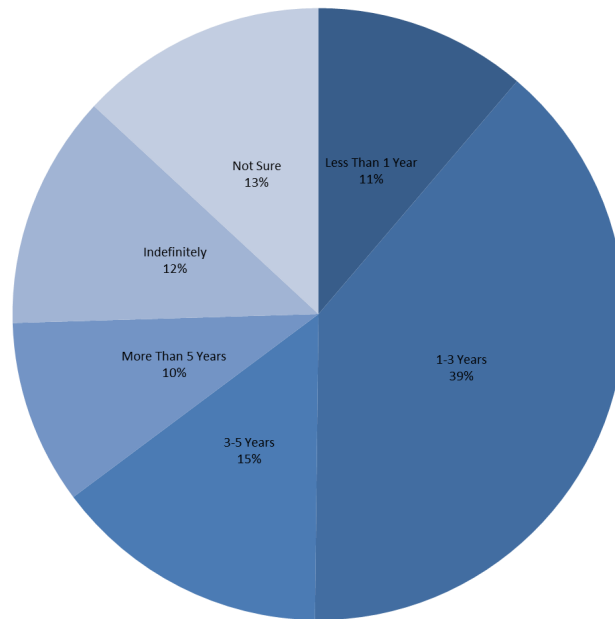
Where do you plan to live following graduation?



When asked about post-graduation location plans, a majority (56%) responded that they anticipated staying in Massachusetts. 23% of respondents planned to locate to the Boston metropolitan area while only 18% planned to locate in Worcester. An additional 15% of respondents anticipated living somewhere in Central Massachusetts. Most respondents anticipated staying within the northeast United States, with only a few looking at the Mid-Atlantic, the South, or the West.

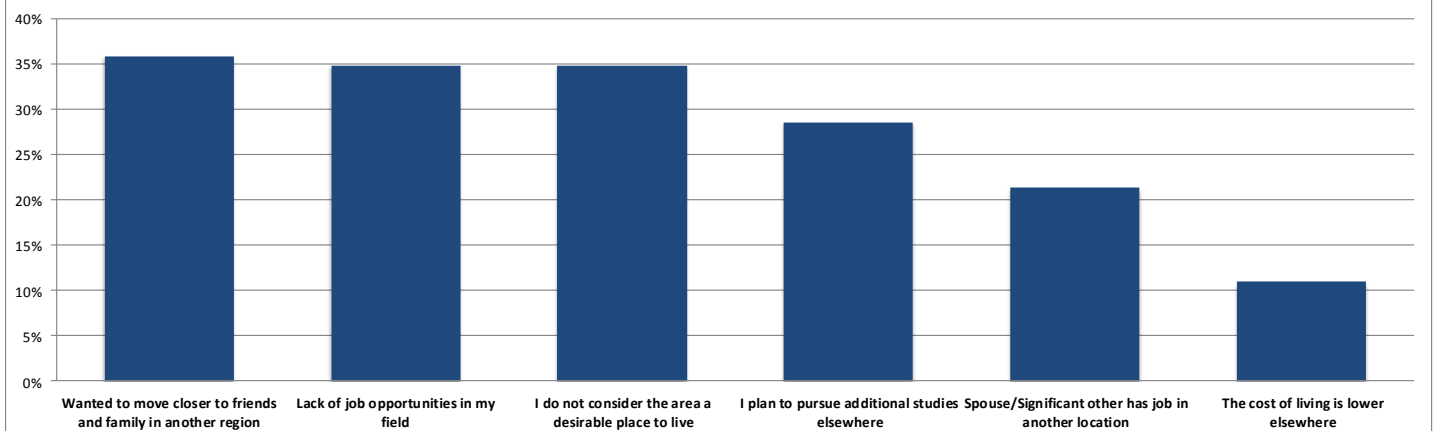
While the majority of the participants in the survey are leaving Worcester for other destinations, it should be noted that 50% of the respondents intended to change location within three years of moving there. Only 10% believed they would remain in their new location for longer than five years.

How long do you anticipate staying at this location?

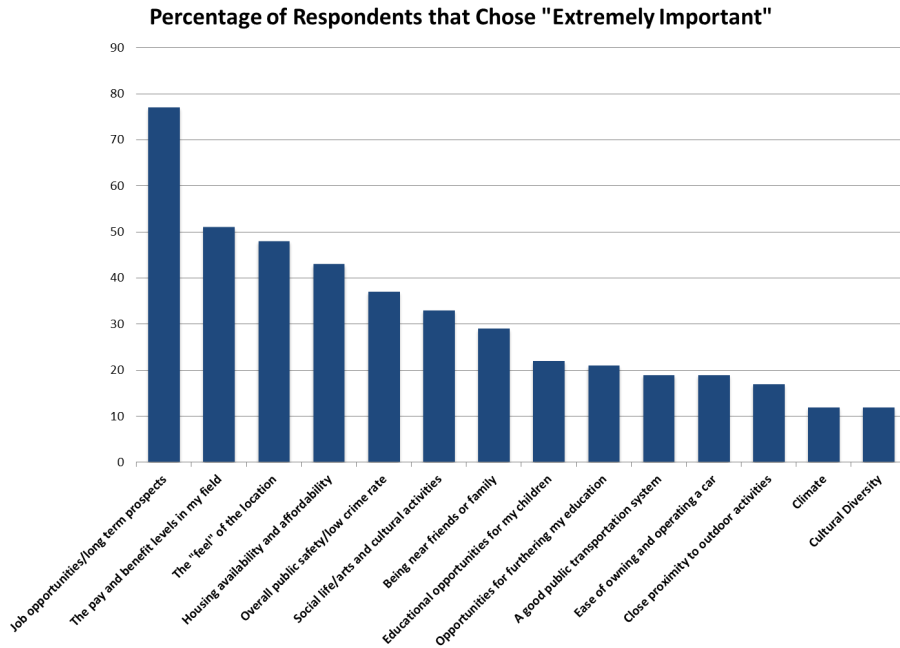


The survey gave six different options as factors contributing to a respondent’s decision to leave the area. The factors presented were: to be closer to family and friends; to move for the job of a significant other/spouse; for personal job opportunities; because the area is not a desirable place to live; to find a lower cost of living; and to pursue further studies elsewhere. 36% of the 193 responded that they were moving to be closer to family and friends, while 28% were planning on pursuing further academic opportunities elsewhere. Only 10% responded that they were going to leave the area to find a lower cost of living.

If you have decided to leave the area, which of the following factors contributed to your decision (choose all that apply)?



The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of various factors that influence their post-graduation location decisions. The factors were split evenly between economic interests and social/cultural interests. The highest rated factors that influenced the respondents' decision-making were job-related, with 77% of the respondents saying that job prospects were "extremely important" and 51% of the respondents saying pay and benefits were "extremely important." The "feel" of a location (e.g., neighborhoods, culture, atmosphere) garnered the third highest response at 49%. When "somewhat important" responses are factored in as well, the "feel" of a location surpasses pay and benefits as the second most important issue.



The factors that did not appear to influence the respondents' decision-making, receiving the most "indifferent" responses, were "cultural diversity" and "climate." "Educational opportunities for my children" received the most "not important at all" ratings with 32%.

In order to understand student social and community interactions, the survey asked about off-campus activities during a student's time in Worcester. Outdoor activities were the least represented categories; 62% of the respondents reported that they had never gone skiing/snowboarding and 61% of the respondents said they had never participated in any water sports. In addition, entertainment and museums did not have a very large role in the lives of the students surveyed. 37% of the survey participants said they had never attended a concert in Worcester, 31% of them had never been to a museum, and 38% report that they had never been to a sporting event during their time as a student in Worcester. The most popular activities were shopping and dining out. 73% of the respondents said they "dined out (including restaurants, cafes, coffee houses, bars, etc.," either "at least once a month" or "at least once a week". Additionally, 74% of the students said that they had shopped for food/grocery either "at least once a month" or "at least once a week."

Survey participants were asked about their relationships to Central Massachusetts. 55% of the students disagreed with the idea that Central Massachusetts was their home. While it undoubtedly reflects the large number of students that come from outside Central Massachusetts, it may also indicate that there is limited emotional connection between some students and the region. The City of Worcester and Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce are exploring ways to better engage college students in the community. The first step is aligning local amenities with student interests. The City and Chamber recently completed their own survey of 1,128 college students from nine area colleges and universities. When asked whether downtown Worcester "offers the amenities necessary for the city's student population," 39.2% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.⁹

What to Do?

Worcester is not alone in its efforts to attract talent. Government officials, business leaders, and academics have various opinions and strategies to attract and retain recent graduates. The two primary schools of thought focus on the economic factor of employment and the social factor of community life. The Research Bureau's survey results argue for both approaches.

Worcester's college graduates are generally confronted by the need to secure a job and generate income almost immediately following graduation. From 2003 to 2012, the share of 25-year-olds with student debt has increased from 25% to 43%. The average student loan balance grew by 91% over that same period to \$20,326.¹⁰ As illustrated by Richard Florida's findings, talent will often travel to employment. Our survey indicated that jobs, and career potential, were the top concerns for Worcester's graduating collegians.

Yet a community's sense of place, its "feel," was the next most important consideration. Social and cultural experiences establish an emotional connection and build the impression of "home." The survey responses indicated a lack of student ownership of Worcester—a lack of connection to the city or the region.

Retention and recruitment of graduating college students will require the cooperation of educational institutions, the business community, local not-for-profits, and government. A number of colleges are actively working to connect students with local employers. At Assumption College, for example, 72% of the Class of 2014 (full-time undergraduate day students) completed at least one internship during their matriculation.¹¹ Organizations like the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce are expanding efforts to encourage local business recruitment of area graduates and to link these businesses with qualified young individuals, but there continues to be an information gap between employers and local graduates, as well as a gap between the number of available jobs and the number of local prospects.

In 2013, the Colleges of Worcester Consortium, Inc. reorganized, forming the Massachusetts Education & Career Opportunities, Inc. (MassEdCO), focused on education and career readiness for young people and adults, and the Higher Education Consortium of Central Massachusetts (HECCMA), focused on institutional collaboration and promotion. In the process, coordinated efforts to support student engagement, internships, and eventual job placement waned until the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce established the position of Director of Higher Education-Business Partnerships in spring 2014. InternHub, an online platform originally developed for the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce and Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, is intended to provide streamlined access between area employers and area students. According to an Internships.com survey, 69% of companies with 100 employees or more offered full-time employment to interns in 2012.¹² The Chamber, HECCMA, and the individual colleges and universities should expand participation in internships with both local employers—large and small—and local students. Additionally, the Chamber should host a permanent job posting board for Worcester-based employment opportunities. Drawing from such sources as membership, other local organizations, career service professionals, the *Telegram & Gazette*, and career sites like Monster.com, the Chamber's website could serve as a portal connecting college students and permanent local employment options. The colleges themselves should consider establishing a shared career services function. While certain institutions, such as UMass Medical School, have unique placement needs, the majority of institutions prepare students for common employment opportunities. By pooling career services functions, and student populations, greater employer interest and involvement may follow. Coordinated on-campus recruiting and joint career fairs would prove easier for local employers to accommodate compared with multiple college visits. While corporations (and alumni) could still target, and even recruit from, specific institutions, a common professional staff could handle both general employer interest and targeted efforts on behalf of all institutions, while providing basic career training to all students in career development, resume drafting, interviewing, and the like.

In order to attract the 86% of respondents interested in the “feel” of a location, Worcester must also improve its urban appeal. In The Research Bureau’s survey, respondents disagreed most with positive statements relating to public transportation, public safety, and climate. While there is little to be done about the weather, it is important to note that few respondents actually indicated an interest in moving to Sunbelt states. The state of public transportation and public safety, whether real or perceived, creates a negative impression on Worcester college students.

Colleges should work with the Worcester Regional Transit Authority to reestablish a shuttle linking individual campuses with each other, the Downtown, Union Station, and other employment and entertainment centers. The original shuttle system had limited hours and destinations, contributing to low ridership. While intercity connections to Boston have improved over the last decade, connections within the region and to other major metropolitan areas remain weak. As noted in MassINC’s March 2013 study on regional transit, improved public transportation systems result in expanded ridership, improved resident participation in the labor force, lower growth in public assistance and unemployment, and higher population and employment growth overall.¹³

Safe, accessible neighborhoods are important criteria for livable communities. Compared to many competing locales, Worcester is a safe and affordable alternative. The region must improve access to its social and cultural opportunities, broadly defined to include shopping, nightlife, theater, etc. Both The Research Bureau survey and the City/Chamber 2014 Student Survey identified a desire for additional retail and cultural amenities, with some specific recommendations provided in the City/Chamber study. As part of a talent retention effort, Worcester should use this information to prioritize economic development initiatives and business recruitment. Civic leaders should form a joint initiative with the student-run Worcester Student Government Association¹⁴ to market the city’s significant existing local eating, shopping, cultural, and social opportunities directly to students. The colleges should work to connect students to the city through joint programming and events in the Downtown and in key commercial and neighborhood centers, similar to the intercollegiate talent show at the Hanover Theatre or the Shrewsbury Street Shuffle. With MCPHSU, QCC, and Becker College all expanding within the city center, there is an opportunity for additional shared student educational and recreational programming in the Downtown. City leaders should review the City of Boston’s “ONEin3” effort for ideas to improve engagement and attraction of young adults.¹⁵ According to the Research Bureau survey, new graduates are transient in their first years after college. The region has an opportunity to convince students and young people to “try Worcester” for their first post-college experience.

Talent drives economic growth. Ultimately, in order to attract and retain financially insecure recent graduates, cities like Worcester must offer competitive wage jobs, affordable living in safe and desirable locations, a vibrant social network, and a strong public transportation system. Worcester will never retain 100% of its graduating collegians. Career, family, and even wanderlust will draw many students away. That said, Worcester is an attractive location for college-educated individuals. Nearly 40% of the City of Worcester population between the ages of 25 and 34 years old has a bachelor’s degree or higher.¹⁶ Clearly, college educated young adults are being retained or recruited into the city, whether local residents returning after college or graduates of Worcester institutions remaining in the city. The Research Bureau’s 2014 talent retention survey indicates that Worcester has the potential to capture and leverage even more talent—a chance to better connect graduating collegians with jobs and community. There is much to do, but also much to build on.

Endnotes

- ¹ David Leonhardt, “A Conversation with Edward L. Glaeser,” *The New York Times*, February 15, 2011.
- ² Worcester Regional Research Bureau, *Central Massachusetts Talent Retention Project*, May 2006, available at http://wrrb.org/files/downloads/reports/eco_dev/2006/Talent_Retention.pdf as of July 31, 2014,
- ³ Alicia Sasser Modestino, “Retaining Recent College Graduates in New England: An Update on Current Trends,” New England Public Policy Center at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Policy Brief 13-2, May 2013.
- ⁴ Alicia C. Sasser, “The Future of the Skilled Labor Force in New England: The Supply of Recent College Graduates.” (NEPPC Research Report 08-1, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, September 2008).
- ⁵ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class—Revisited: 10th Anniversary Edition*, New York: Basic Books, 2011.
- ⁶ Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2011.
- ⁷ Richard Florida, “Two Very Different Types of Migrations Are Driving Growth in U.S. Cities,” The Atlantic CityLab, April 21, 2014.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ City of Worcester Executive Office of Economic Development & Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, “Worcester Student Survey 2014,” released May 29, 2014, www.worcesterchamber.org/survey-results-college-students-and-downtown-Worcester as of July 31, 2014.
- ¹⁰ Meta Brown & Sydnee Caldwell, “Young Student Loan Borrowers Retreat from Housing and Auto Markets,” Federal Reserve Bank of New York, April 17, 2013.
- ¹¹ Information provided by Career Development & Internship Center, Assumption College.
- ¹² Jacquelyn Smith, “Internships May Be the Easiest Way to a Job in 2013,” *Forbes.com*, December 6, 2012, www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2012/12/06/internships-may-be-the-easiest-way-to-a-job-in-2013/ as of July 31, 2014.
- ¹³ Gateway Cities Innovation Institute, *Reinventing Transit: A Blueprint for Investing in Regional Transportation Authorities for Strong Gateway City Economies*, MassINC Gateway Cities Innovation Institute Concept Paper, March 2013.
- ¹⁴ Worcester Student Government Association, www.worcestersga.org/, as of July 31, 2014.
- ¹⁵ ONEin3 Boston, www.onein3boston.com, as of July 31, 2014.
- ¹⁶ Worcester Regional Research Bureau, *Worcester’s Demographic Trends: 2010 Census*, February 2013.

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