



The Research Bureau

Recommended... adopted!

Whenever The Research Bureau issues a report or presents a forum, it usually makes headlines – as well it should because that is our mission – to conduct independent, non-partisan research that will promote informed public debate and decision-making. In the last year alone, our reports on Worcester’s Responsible Employer Ordinance, casino gambling, and recommendations for reducing expenditures, certainly generated considerable debate. But I am frequently asked, “What has become of the recommendations you made? Have any been adopted?” The answer is a resounding YES! Here is one example.

In 2005 The Research Bureau, with the cooperation of the fifteen colleges and universities in the region, the Colleges of Worcester Consortium, the City of Worcester and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, launched the Central Massachusetts Talent Retention Project. It was supported financially by the Commonwealth’s Executive Office of Economic Development, Fallon Community Health Plan and the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. The project was an outgrowth of former Governor Romney’s Regional Competitiveness Councils designed to attract more jobs and economic development to the Commonwealth’s regions outside of Boston.

The Central Region’s Regional Competitiveness Council identified education and knowledge creation as one of our key clusters with the potential to grow. Since policy makers, business, and community leaders were concerned that the region was losing its young and better educated population, the Talent Retention Project was undertaken to determine if the premise was correct and, if so, what to do about it.

The project consisted of two major parts: a survey of 2005 college graduates in the region to determine their career plans and location decisions, and the factors influencing those decisions. The survey was developed by The Research Bureau and posted online by Assumption College for use by all the colleges. The second part consisted of in-depth interviews with 25 employers representing a wide range of businesses in this region. The purpose was to assess business-hiring practices, business relationships with colleges and universities in the region, and qualifications these employers need in recent-college graduates. The findings from these two parts suggested a number of opportunities for colleges, business leaders, and community organizations to work together to enhance talent retention and the economic prosperity of the region. Based on one of the major survey findings that the more students are engaged in the community while attending college, the more likely they are to remain in the area following graduation, The Research Bureau developed several recommendations.

Over the past 18 months, the Colleges of Worcester Consortium has adopted three of the four recommendations in The Research Bureau report.

First, The Research Bureau recommended the development of a website to serve as an “internship clearinghouse” for all students and employers in the Region. The website would enable any employer in the Region to post internship opportunities online and search student resumes. For students, the website would provide expanded access to internship opportunities and employer profiles, and the ability to both submit and post a resume online.

Through the Consortium’s Career Services Committee, a number of national firms already providing this service to individual colleges and universities were interviewed. College Central Network was selected as the vendor. The website was launched in March 2007, and to date 1,000 students and some 200 employers have registered.

Second, The Research Bureau recommended providing opportunities for students to meet with local employers early in their college careers to inform students about career and employment opportunities in the Region. These opportunities could consist of colleges hosting informal gatherings for employers to meet with students at their campuses and the employers opening their facilities to students. At these events, there could be panel discussions including senior management and recently-hired college graduates that address various facets of the company and working environment. This could be followed by informal networking and a tour of the facility.

In November 2007, the Consortium hosted a “Working in Worcester” Open House for college students. The event provided information and networking sessions held at the offices of leading Worcester companies. The open house portion of the day was followed by an evening out in downtown Worcester. Throughout the day, Consortium students were able to connect with Worcester employers and learn about available career and internship opportunities within the city. In addition to career opportunities, they also received a taste of Worcester's cultural and entertainment offerings. The Consortium is currently planning for the next event in the fall.

Third, The Research Bureau recommended providing opportunities for college and university career services staffs and other college administrators and professors to become more familiar with the Region’s employers, employment opportunities, and the skills and qualifications employers need in candidates. Employers could host such individuals on-site at their facilities for this purpose.

Again, the Consortium’s Career Services Committee is working closely with larger local employers in an effort to build professional networks for their students. Both Intel and the Fallon Community Health Plan have hosted college career staff members for a day of professional workshops and networking opportunities. The committee is currently planning next year’s programs for this as well.

In March of 2007, the Consortium’s Board of Directors adopted a new vision statement: *“To enhance and promote Worcester and the region as a premier destination for college students.”* This new statement enabled Consortium staff to facilitate committee discussions that would support this new vision. The most successful of these discussions was held by the student activities directors who have methodically invested in what is called “intercollegiate social programming.” By committing to off-campus social programming, the Consortium has begun to establish new social and cultural traditions that are acquainting students with Worcester and the region, anticipating that the additional engagement will result in higher graduate retention rates. In addition, eleven of the Consortium

members have committed almost \$1 million over the next five years to support the \$30 million renovated Hanover Theatre in downtown Worcester.

The Research Bureau is both proud and pleased to know that the work we completed almost three years ago is having a beneficial effect on our college students and on the broader community.

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The Research Bureau