

News Release
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New Knight-Funded Study Reveals that 1 in 4 Graduates from Tallahassee's Three Major Colleges and Universities Are Still Living in the Region

Amelia Island, Florida – August 8, 2009. A recently completed research study commissioned by Leadership Tallahassee will be released today that provides significant new insight into the region's ability to retain graduates from its three major colleges and universities.

Among the key findings:

A representative sampling of 1,408 area college graduates from 2004 to 2006 reveals that 27% are still living in Tallahassee as of summer, 2009. This will serve as a baseline graduate retention figure for the region against which any future gains or losses can be compared.

Based on an estimated 14,000 degrees conferred each year by the three institutions (source: National Center for Education Statistics), this 27% figure equates to an annual yield of 3,700 new graduates who choose to remain in Tallahassee either to join the local workforce (85%) or pursue further education (15%).

Of the 27% who chose to remain in the region, 45% lived outside of the region's four counties (Leon, Gadsden, Wakulla, and Jefferson) prior to enrolling, showcasing a respectable net-gain of college-educated residents generated by the area's higher education institutions.

Closer inspection also revealed that 69% of "native" students (those who graduated high school within the four counties and stayed for college) typically choose to remain after earning their degree, while only 19% of "non-native" students (from elsewhere in Florida and out-of-state) choose to stay in Tallahassee after graduating.

Leveraging a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, more than 2,500 currently enrolled and recent graduates from Florida State University, Florida A&M University, and Tallahassee Community College were surveyed by Collegia, a Massachusetts-based consulting firm that specializes in developing regional student surveys and talent retention programs.

"This study is an important component of a community-wide campaign to attract and retain more young professionals," declares Mike Pate, Knight Foundation's Tallahassee program director. "It is very clear that our region's economic future is directly tied to the quality and quantity of our workforce. Fortunately for us, we have three highly respected colleges and universities that draw talented students from all over the world. Now, we just need to figure out how to get more of them to see Tallahassee as not only a great place for college, but as a great place to launch their career."

Chapin Frazee, Vice President at Infinity Software and chair of Leadership Tallahassee's Retention Study Committee, adds: "During most of the year, one out every five Tallahassee residents is a college student. So we're all well aware that one of this region's greatest strengths is the size of our local college population. What we haven't quite understood until now is how many we actually hold on to long-term or what we as a community might do to influence that number for the positive."

In addition to providing a definitive set of graduate retention figures, this study probed for insights into specific factors that may influence the typical Tallahassee student's eventual decision to stay or leave the area. Most noticeable were:

Those who interned locally were 4x more likely to remain in the region than those who interned elsewhere (35% vs. 9%);

Of those graduates who are currently employed full-time in Tallahassee, 53% had interned locally while in college;

3 in 5 graduates (57%) who left Tallahassee did not return home, choosing instead to move somewhere new. Many of these “explorers” might have otherwise chosen to stay in Tallahassee if they felt more positively about personal and professional opportunities here;

Of the currently enrolled students surveyed, half (51%) already have plans to leave the region when they graduate. When prompted, the top reasons given were: “job prospects are better elsewhere” (32%) and “to live in a more vibrant city” (24%).

Additionally, 1 in 5 (22%) of the current students surveyed shared that they are planning to stay in Tallahassee, while 1 in 4 (27%) are, as yet, undecided.

From online surveys and in-person interviews with 793 currently enrolled students at the three schools, additional insights into prevailing student issues and perceptions were uncovered. Key among them:

Students definitely rate Tallahassee as an outstanding place to be a college student, but just as strongly disregard it as a great place for young professionals;

They are generally uninformed about the local economy, major employers or local career opportunities. As a result, they assume that the area does not offer the same professional possibilities as, say, Tampa, Miami, or Atlanta;

The fact that Tallahassee is the state capital has little perceived value, so they don’t fully appreciate, or take full advantage of, the professional and personal development resources that this represents.

There’s no strong connection to downtown Tallahassee or other off-campus resources. As one student commented: “We don’t stick around because we don’t know Tallahassee.”

Building on the many findings captured in this report, a set of recommendations will be presented that would facilitate and augment community-wide efforts to help students develop stronger, personal and professional bonds with the region. The recommendations also include ways to leverage existing activities such as the Knight Creative Communities Institute, The Network of Young Professionals, and Workforce Plus.

A full copy of the report, titled “Growing Tallahassee’s College Educated Workforce” can be downloaded at www.talchamber.com and www.collegia.com.

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Leadership Tallahassee (LT), a division of the Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce, has for over 25 years provided leadership development training for individuals that have resulted in them becoming agents of change in the area of economic development. With over 700 graduates in the Tallahassee area, these individuals have used the relationships formed and the information and skills acquired through the LT class year to create initiatives and foster a business climate that has contributed to increased economic development in the area. Visit www.leadershipallahassee.com for more information.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promote excellence in journalism worldwide and invests in the vitality of the U.S. communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation focuses on projects with the potential to create transformational change. For more, visit www.knightfoundation.org.

Collegia, Inc. has a decade of experience working with regional stakeholders (government, civic, corporate, academia),

helping them leverage their higher-education clusters to improve the economic well-being and vibrancy of their respective regions. Serving as strategist, catalyst, and facilitator, Collegia has launched several higher-ed / community collaborations that serve as models for other regional revitalization efforts around the country. Of the successful partnerships that Collegia has crafted ... the most well-known is Philadelphia's "Knowledge Industry Partnership." which, today, receives much of the credit for that city's recent rise in popularity as a hot city for young professionals. For more, visit www.collegia.com