

# Staying in state

**Randy Stapilus/Ridenbaugh Press**

The state Department of Labor last week released a statistic that policy makers might want to wrap their minds around, as a significant broad-brush indicator about Idaho and a question to ponder as they consider what sort of state Idaho should be.

Consider the people who graduate from Idaho colleges and universities, one year after graduation. (The study was conducted of graduates from 2010 to 2014.)

Of those former students who were in-state residents, about 77 percent stayed in the state, “working in Idaho jobs.” The report said “The other 23 percent of in-state graduates either left to work in another state, took a federal government job, joined the military or worked in some other kind of self-employment category. In some cases, they may still be looking for work in their field, continuing on to graduate school or to another educational program.”

Five years later, about 67 percent still were in the state.

Of those who were out of state students, just 39 percent stayed in the state after one year, and just 28 percent five years later. (“Out of state” students were those considered non-residents at the time they entered the college or university, whether or not they became Idaho residents during the time of their studies.)

That’s a big gap, about two to one. What would account for it?

As an out of stater when I first came to the University of Idaho, but who stayed in Idaho long afterward, the question and the results hit home.

The department speculated that family or other ties may be part of what keeps many of those in-state students in place. That may be about right. The study added, “Other factors include types of degrees and programs offered. Some degrees and programs are highly marketable all over the country and the world, making those students more mobile and attractive to employers outside Idaho. Geographic location of the institution is another factor. Some colleges and universities are located in college towns, closer to bordering states where students are more likely to take their degrees to other more economically viable cities outside of the state. And, some postsecondary institutions are already located in thriving and growing economic urban hubs, creating local and immediate job opportunities for graduates eager to enter the workforce.”

The fact that Eastern Idaho Technical College and the College of Southern Idaho, both located in areas relatively far from metro areas and where the student population may be especially based from the local area, tends to back up that idea.

What the institutions aren’t doing as much, which probably is happening in other places and might be useful in Idaho, is not only drawing in but retaining talented students from other states.

The students are coming – lower costs at the Idaho institutions may be one reason – but they’re not staying.

Why isn’t Idaho keeping those students? Is it a lack of jobs, or is there some other major consideration?

That might usefully be the subject of a future DOL report: For that large majority of students who come but don’t stay in Idaho, why aren’t they sticking around?

Idaho might benefit from the answer to that question.

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