Synopsis: The migration and geographic mobility of college graduates holds significant implications for a state's economic development prospects. In the decade after graduation, young college students are very mobile geographically. "They are far more mobile than they will be at any time later in their lives" (Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY, April 2003, p. 1). While the number of bachelor's degree holders in South Dakota is on the increase, when measuring the net migration of college freshmen and college graduates, South Dakota loses both freshmen and graduates to other states -- about 1,500 students per year.

Measures of a state's prosperity are determined in large part by the proportion of its workers with college degrees.

**Bachelor Degree Holders**

The stock of bachelor's degree holders in South Dakota is increasing. From 1989 to 2001, the proportion of South Dakota's population with a bachelor's degree went up 5.2 percent, slightly better than the national average of 5.1 percent. South Dakota still has some way to go, however. In 1989, only 18.4 percent of its population age 25 and over had at least a bachelor's degree. In 2001, the percentage had increased to 23.6 percent.

While the state is producing more bachelor's degrees, about a third of those are leaving the state. Although other states in this region—Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, and Nebraska—fare even worse, about 34 percent of the bachelor degree holders produced in South Dakota between 1989-2001 left the state.
Migration of College Freshmen & Graduates

In fact, South Dakota is one of only six states that lose both college freshmen and graduates. Summing the losses as of Fall 2000, South Dakota joined Illinois, Montana, Connecticut, Maine, and New Mexico in reporting a net outflow of both college freshmen and graduates.

The Geographic Mobility of College Graduates

The question is often asked: “If we keep young people here for college, will they be more likely to work here when they graduate?”

A person’s age most impacts the likelihood that person will move. “Young people move at higher rates than do older people, and people between the ages of 20 and 29 are the most mobile of all” (Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY, April 2003, p. 10). Of bachelor degree holders nationwide, about one-third of the 25 to 29 year olds moved between 2001 and 2002. When someone moves at this age, it most likely involves going from one state to another.

An analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data provides other insights into geographic mobility:

- People with more education are more likely to move from one state to another—40 percent of those ages 25-29 with graduate or professional degrees, compared to 27 percent of that same age group who did not finish high school;
- Mobility rates overall are highest in the West, but Midwesterners tend to move out earliest and then settle down with deeper roots by their mid 30s—this holds true for both undergraduate and graduate/professional degree holders;
- One-third of people with a bachelor’s degree or higher who leave their counties cite a new job or job transfer as the reason;
- Overall, men are somewhat more likely to move than women (16.6 percent vs. 15.8 percent);
- Those who have never been married are most likely to move (22.9 percent vs. 12 percent of those married).

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