

Looking For Work: A Look At The Indiana Brain Drain

Written by Ellen Collier

Hoosiers are searching for jobs. Employers are searching for Hoosiers. But In Indiana, these two groups are having a hard time making a match.

An Indiana Business Research Center study found that graduates of Indiana public colleges with degrees in technical fields like engineering are some of the least likely to stay and pursue a job in-state. The study shows that only 43 percent of Indiana engineering majors stay and find work in Indiana one year after graduation, reducing to 37 percent after three years and 35 percent after five years.

This is a problem for employers in Indiana looking to hire those exact people.

“The highest demand we are seeing is for skilled trades and engineering,” said Jennifer Miller, recruiting manager at the hiring company Trillium Staffing. “A lot of the talent in these employment disciplines left the state in 2008-2010 due to the recession. These candidates are working full-time with other companies, and we do not have enough talent in the state to replace the people who left.”

But Indiana public colleges aren't slacking on engineering and technical education.

Purdue University's engineering graduate program is ranked sixth in the country, with its undergraduate program ranked ninth. After graduation in 2013, 67.6 percent of graduates were employed right away. Despite their Indiana education, many of these students found jobs outside the state.

“It doesn't make sense for all of our engineering students to stay in Indiana, and it doesn't make sense for all of them to leave Indiana either,” said David Robledo, director of data analytics and information at Purdue's College of Engineering. “If all of them stayed in Indiana, there simply aren't enough jobs. If they all left, then we are basically educating other states' kids for them.”

According to Purdue's Center For Career Opportunities, the most popular destinations for Purdue engineering majors after graduation outside of Indiana are Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, California, Washington and Texas. Indiana offers an average salary of around \$56,700 for these graduates, while California can offer more than a \$70,000 average, and Texas shows an average salary of more than \$72,000 for engineers.

It's no surprise that these graduates are seeking jobs in states prevalent in the oil industry such as Texas, as 12.4 percent of Purdue engineering graduates pursue a career in energy, oil and gas. With more than 29 percent of these graduates pursuing manufacturing, it's no shock as well that many flock to Michigan, home to Ford Motor Company. Proctor and Gamble, another popular workplace for these majors, is located in Ohio.

Purdue engineers aren't the only ones flocking to other states. Ball State has its own share of fleeing graduates.

Architecture majors are low on the list of most-likely to be employed in-state as well, with 50.9 percent of graduates leaving after graduation day.

Ball State has the only state-supported architecture program, and the program was named among "America's World-Class Schools of Architecture" by Design Intelligence in 2009. Ball State's urban planning and landscape architecture tracks are also nationally-recognized.

Still, that's not enough to keep students from an exodus out of the Hoosier state.

"I don't think it's necessary for architecture students to stay in Indiana," said senior Ball State architecture major Austin Zehr. "Some firms or schools are better suited for particular students, and they may be located outside of this state. Ball State has a good graduate program, but there are many schools in neighboring states that are much better."

According to Design Intelligence, the top five graduate programs for architecture in the midwest in 2015 are at the University of Michigan, Washington University in St. Louis, the University of Cincinnati, Kansas State University and Ohio State University. No Indiana programs made the cut.

Zehr plans on interning in Louisville at TEG Architects this year after he graduates. Aside from the fact that the owner is on the board of the Ball State Architecture Program, Zehr was enticed to move to Louisville because they provide free housing for their interns, and he said that TEG is known for providing their interns with a quality educational experience.

While architecture and engineering are near the bottom of the list when it comes to staying in Indiana, health is near the top.

This is good news for Ball State nursing students, especially after the Indiana Department of Workforce Development put registered nurse at the top of the “Hoosier Hot 50 Jobs” list based on expected demand and wages in 2022 for the state of Indiana.

“For the most part, I believe (nursing) students look in Indy due to the high number of hospitals and other nursing opportunities,” said Cassie Karney, who will be graduating next week and plans to move back to her hometown in northwest Indiana. “Many stay around the Muncie area to work at Ball Memorial Hospital. A few graduates I know have moved to, and found employment in, Fort Wayne as well.”

Karney said she doesn’t see any particular importance for nursing majors to stay in Indiana after graduation, but there is always a demand for nurses in the state.

The demand for jobs, be it nursing or engineering, might not be the only reason people are choosing to stay or leave.

According to Gallup, Indiana has ranked among the lowest 10 states in overall well-being four times between 2008 and 2014. The survey evaluates the state’s overall well-being in the categories of purpose, social, financial, community and physical. In 2014, Indiana ranked as state number 48 for well-being, with only Kentucky and West Virginia behind it.

Despite lower retention, Indiana universities are encouraging their graduates to contribute to the state. Purdue thinks that growing its engineering program as a whole will help drive the Indiana economy.

“The approach that Purdue has taken for some time now, even more underscored under President Daniels, has been to promote industry within Indiana,” said Robledo. “Purdue is very focused on STEM education as a whole.”

Purdue says it’s hiring new faculty and building partnerships with companies like the IU School of Medicine and Indianapolis-based Goodman Campbell Brain and Spine. The school also takes pride in the fact that engineering faculty and students have started 36 businesses and were issued 355 patents since 2010.

This is all done in hopes to aid the Indiana economy and provide more jobs in the state. And in a state where the unemployment rate is slightly below the national average, this consciousness is key.

“In the last few years the consciousness of how we are making an impact on Indiana has bubbled up to the top,” said Robledo. “It’s a common question that we are asking ourselves more and more.”