

Brain drain slow down? New survey of college seniors has good news for Philadelphia

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As Greater Philadelphia's colleges and universities send their seniors off this month, a new report from Campus Philly shows an increasing majority plan to stick around.

The nonprofit's Ready to Launch report surveyed more than 3,000 students at area schools and found 67 percent of students in the class of 2017 plan to stay in Philadelphia after graduating, a nine percent increase from a similar survey conducted in 2010.



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One of Campus Philly' recent events.

OLIVIA BROSKY

The results of the report, which will be officially unveiled at Campus Philly's annual meeting on June 1, shine light on an issue that often crops up in discussions about how to grow the region's economy and help its many academic institutions fuel more innovation — how do we keep grads here?

The biggest factor is obvious, said Campus Philly President [Deborah Diamond](#): jobs.

More than half of seniors, 52 percent, say there are better job opportunities in the region than elsewhere, and a much higher amount, 88 percent, think there are many or some job opportunities for them here.

"What we see here is there's more optimism about getting a job," Diamond said, "and the more optimism about getting a job in Philadelphia there is, the more excitement there is about staying."

Developments throughout the city in its events and restaurant scene, paired with a low cost of living, also contribute to an increasing quality of life that makes the decision to stay after graduation easier, she said.

"It really is the experience of real life here that is so striking to them," Diamond said. "What they see in Philadelphia is a city that is much more accessible to them than other big cities."

And that's not just due to low cost of living. She said it is often easier for new graduates to set up meetings with influencers and power players here than it would be in other cities.

"That's a very welcoming feature to young people, and it also makes you feel like your ambitions are going to be satisfied, that you're going to be able to build a network of peers who are older than you and more experienced," Diamond said.

Students now aren't just looking at what their first job out of college will be, she said, they are gauging what options are available when they want to move on to their second or third jobs. The most important factor when deciding on job offers wasn't location, salary or even company culture, to the seniors, it was job growth.

Meeting that expectation of being able to climb career ladders is one of the challenges that still remains for the region, Diamond said.

"We have to have not just a broad employment market, but a deep one too," she said.

[Michael Robinson](#), Temple University's director of community outreach and hiring, said he thinks that issue will improve in coming years as more and more baby boomers pass the baton to the next generation.

"What we're finding is that the population is getting younger, but in terms of the workforce itself, you still have people who are elder statesmen, if you will, who aren't moving on quite yet," Robinson said. "Now there's going to be a mass retirement of folks that are in their 50s, 60s. Possibly in the next five to six years, you're going to see probably a lot more middle management or higher opportunities opening up."

Another challenge is making sure every class of students are connected to and made aware of the opportunities that exist in the city — one of Campus Philly's driving missions.

The pursuit is an important one to the region's economy for obvious reasons, Diamond said.

When more graduates stay in the region, employers benefit from the increased talent pool. The need for more tech-based talent was named in [the Brookings Institute's recent study](#) as one of the biggest hurdles the tech industry faces in helping to make Philadelphia a global innovation hub.

"Our feeling is Philadelphia has long been positioned to be a talent hub," Diamond said. "And it's coming to fruition because the city's higher education institutions and corporate communities have recognized the investment it takes to do it."

Michelle Caffrey covers technology and education for the Philadelphia Business Journal.