



## Migration Patterns among New England's College Freshmen

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**D**espite increased competition from other states, New England remains a very popular education destination for both undergraduate and graduate students. As with commerce, New England has a “balance of trade,” with students flowing in and out of the region. Given the size of New England (nearly 14 million people in an area roughly equivalent to Missouri), the region’s plethora of higher education institutions and the approximately 100,000 prospective freshmen who graduate from the six state’s high schools each year, it is no surprise that New England also sees significant *intraregional* migration.

The New England Board of Higher Education’s Office of Policy and Research recently analyzed statistics on New England’s student migration as part of a forthcoming policy report. The data, the most complete and recent available, were drawn from the U.S. Department of Education’s 2000 IPEDS Survey. The data focus on first-time freshmen who graduated from high school in the 12 months prior to the survey and who enrolled in degree-granting institutions that participate in federal financial aid programs.

Admittedly, these statistics tell only part of the total migration story. For example, large numbers of students also migrate to and from New England for graduate study. Significant migration also occurs after students earn their degrees. Yet, the migration patterns of first-time freshmen are important to New England and its institutions. They tell us something about the preferences and decision-making of traditional college-age students and their parents in terms of cost, geography and types of institutions.

This balance of trade has implications beyond the enrollment management concerns of New England’s

colleges and universities. Every in-migrating student brings a significant amount of money in tuition and expenses along with him or her; every out-migrating student takes money out of state and often out of the region. Moreover, studies suggest that students who attend college in the same state where they graduated from high school are far more likely to stay and work in that state after college than those who left the state for college are to come back. So, the extent of migration also has implications for the return on a home state’s investment in primary and secondary education.

### Net migration

As a region, New England enjoys a notable “positive” net migration of first-year college students. That is, far more freshmen travel to New England for college each year than leave the region. The net inflow grew by 14 percent between 1992 and 2000. There are, however, notable differences among the six states, differences that have persisted over time. For example, four New England states—Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont and New Hampshire—have positive net inflows. Maine and Connecticut, in contrast, have negative net migration flows.

States’ net migration rates also vary over time. Connecticut’s region-leading net loss of 3,199 in 2000 reflects a 30 percent improvement over 1992, when 4,625 freshmen left the state. Maine’s net loss of 945 students in 2000 was down from 1,391 two years earlier, but up from 859 in 1992.

### Out-migration

The six New England states rank among the top 12 nationally in terms of the percentage of first-time, first-year freshmen leaving their home state for college. Nationally, on average, 24 percent of first-time freshmen leave their state of residence.

Vermont ranks second in the nation, with 60 percent

of freshmen leaving, up notably from 47 percent in 1992. New Hampshire ranks third in the nation, with 53 percent leaving, up from 44 percent in 1992. Connecticut ranks fifth, with 48 percent leaving. This represents a slight improvement over 1994, when 53 percent of freshmen left the state. Maine ranked 6th, with 43 percent of freshmen leaving. Rhode Island ranked 9th, with 37 percent leaving and Massachusetts ranked 12th with 31 percent leaving. (See Figure 1.)

Another way to depict the outflow of first-time freshmen is by using the ratio of students staying to those leaving. Nationally, an average of 4.5 freshmen attend college in their home states for every one who leaves. By this measure, the New England states rank at the bottom. Vermont ranks 50th (only the District of Columbia is lower) with 0.68 students staying, followed by New Hampshire at 49th, with 0.89 students. Similarly, Connecticut (47th) has 1.08 and Maine (46th) has 1.34, with Rhode Island (43rd) and Massachusetts (40th) slightly higher at 1.71 and 2.20, respectively. (See Figure 2.)

These findings are troublesome for some New England states. The number of Vermont residents, for example, who report they intend to pursue a college education outside Vermont has increased by 15 percent over the past 10 years from 44 percent to nearly 60 percent. A recent survey of Vermont high school seniors by the Vermont Student Assistance Corp. finds the most important reason for leaving was to “experience a different environment.” Anecdotal evidence suggests a similar wanderlust among young people in the relatively rural states of Maine and New Hampshire.

Reasons for Connecticut’s significant out-migration may include its proximity to New York and other northeastern states (notably Pennsylvania), where reputable higher education institutions abound, as well as its relatively high number of high school graduates from well-educated, high-income families.

### Where do New Englanders go? Where do New England’s first-time freshmen go?

NEBHE found that 52 percent of the freshmen leaving their states of residence end up in one of the five other New England states, while 48 percent leave the region entirely. Of the nearly 19,000 students who cross into another New England

state for college, 13,511 or 71 percent attend private colleges. This holds true regardless of which New England states one considers: the vast majority leave their home state to attend private institutions. For example, 76 percent of the 5,027 freshmen from Connecticut who enrolled elsewhere in New England attended private institutions. Massachusetts had the lowest percentage, but still 68 percent of the 6,925 freshmen who left the Bay State to enroll elsewhere in New England went to private institutions.

The story is the same for freshmen who leave New England entirely. Nearly half of the 17,500 students leaving New England for college go to either New York (6,191) or Pennsylvania (2,233), followed by Virginia, the District of Columbia, Florida, North Carolina, Maryland and Ohio.

About 13,000 or 73 percent of them enter private institutions. The most popular are Rochester Institute of Technology, Syracuse University, George Washington University, Ithaca College, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, New York University and Cornell University. An interesting exception to the privates-first pattern is Virginia, where nearly three-quarters of in-migrating New England students attend public institutions.

**Figure 1: Migration of First-Time, First-Year Freshmen To and From New England, 2000**

	<b>% Who Leave</b>	<b>% of Total Enrollment Due to Incoming Freshmen</b>
Connecticut	48%	40%
Maine	43%	35%
Massachusetts	31%	42%
New Hampshire	53%	56%
Rhode Island	37%	65%
Vermont	60%	72%
New England	40%	46%
National Average	24%	26%

Note: Includes first-time, first-year students who graduated high school in the previous 12 months who are enrolled in Title IV participating, degree-granting institutions.

Source: New England Board of Higher Education analysis of U.S. Department of Education data.

**Figure 2: First-Time, First-Year Freshmen Staying In and Leaving New England**

	<b>1st-Time Freshmen Staying</b>	<b>1st-Time Freshmen Leaving</b>	<b>Ratio: Freshmen Staying to Leaving</b>
Connecticut	11,824	10,988	1.08
Maine	4,407	3,296	1.34
Massachusetts	29,689	13,518	2.2
New Hampshire	3,805	4,289	0.89
Rhode Island	4,106	2,407	1.71
Vermont	1,455	2,146	0.68
New England	55,286	36,644	1.51
National Average			4.5

Note: Includes first-time, first-year students who graduated high school in the previous 12 months who are enrolled in Title IV participating, degree-granting institutions.

Source: New England Board of Higher Education analysis of U.S. Department of Education data.

## In-migration

Outflow is only half the freshman migration equation. New England remains a popular destination for freshmen from around the United States (and the globe), and posts a net gain in migration of college freshmen.

But levels of in-migration vary from state to state. For example, three of the six New England states rank among the top 15 in the nation in attracting migrating freshmen. Massachusetts ranks third in the nation, with over 21,400 traveling there for college in 2000. Connecticut ranks 12th, receiving 7,800 freshmen, while Rhode Island ranks 13th, receiving 7,700.

In fact, New England depends heavily on this inflow of students. All six states rank in the top 10 nationally in terms of in-migrating students as a percentage of all first-year freshmen. Vermont ranks second in the nation by this measure, with 72 percent of its total freshman enrollment due to in-migration. This reflects a steady increase from 64 percent in 1992. Rhode Island ranks 3rd with 65 percent, while New Hampshire ranks 4th with 56 percent. Massachusetts ranks 6th with 42 percent of freshman enrollment due to in-migration, while Connecticut ranks 7th with 40 percent, and Maine, 10th, with 35 percent.

The extent to which the New England states compensate for out-migration with in-migration is illustrated

by the ratio of freshmen coming to freshmen going. Nationally, the average state attracts 1.4 U.S. freshmen for every freshman who leaves. Rhode Island has the 3rd highest ratio in the nation, with 3.21 students migrating in for every one that leaves. Vermont ranks 13th by this measure, with 1.71 students migrating in for every one that leaves. Massachusetts ranks 18th with a 1.58 ratio. (See Figure 3.)

In contrast, New Hampshire's ratio is 1.13, just slightly below the national average. Maine's and Connecticut's are well below the national average, with only 0.71 freshmen coming in for every one that leaves. This underscores the reality faced by both states: significant negative net migration flows.

## Private attraction

Just as private institutions draw freshmen away from New England states, private institutions draw freshmen in. Of the approximately 26,400 freshman students traveling to New England in 2000, about 22,600 or 85 percent of them entered private institutions. New England's top private destinations include: Boston University, Boston College, Harvard, Johnson & Wales, Northeastern, Yale, Brown, Dartmouth and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

There are several reasons for the lopsided attraction to private institutions. First, New England has a relatively large number of private institutions—lots of capacity, if you will, to be filled by students from all over the region and the nation. Second, many New England private colleges and universities are in high demand simply because they are among the most prestigious in the country. Third, public institutions have limits on the number of out-of-state students they accept. Fourth, in some instances, the cost of attending a public institution out of state is somewhat comparable to attending a private institution.

**Figure 3: First-Time, First-Year Freshmen Coming to and Leaving New England**

	<b>First-Time Freshmen Coming In</b>	<b>First-Time Freshmen Going Out</b>	<b>Ratio: Freshmen Coming to Going</b>
Connecticut	7,789	10,988	0.71
Maine	2,351	3,296	0.71
Massachusetts	21,404	13,518	1.58
New Hampshire	4,853	4,289	1.13
Rhode Island	7,717	2,407	3.21
Vermont	3,666	2,146	1.71
New England	47,780	36,644	1.3
National Average			1.4

Note: Includes first-time, first-year students who graduated high school in the previous 12 months who are enrolled in Title IV participating, degree-granting institutions.

Source: New England Board of Higher Education analysis of U.S. Department of Education data.

**Figure 4: Out-Migration and the Cost of Public Higher Education in the New England States**

	<b>U.S. Rank: Percentage of Freshmen Leaving State</b>	<b>U.S. Rank: Average In-State Tuition &amp; Fees at Land-Grant University</b>
Connecticut	5th	9th
Maine	6th	14th
Massachusetts	12th	7th
New Hampshire	3rd	3rd
Rhode Island	9th	10th
Vermont	2nd	1st

Note: Migration data are from 2000 and tuition and fee data are from fall 2002. Both reflect the most current data available.

Source: New England Board of Higher Education analysis of U.S. Department of Education and Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board data.

## Implications

Though the vast majority of New England freshmen who remain in their home states attend public colleges and universities, there appears to be a disturbing similarity between where New England states rank nationally in public college tuition and where they rank nationally in the percentage of freshmen who leave the state. (See Figure 4.) In short, public colleges and universities in New England, while less expensive than their private counterparts, may not

seem like a good enough deal to keep many state residents home.

University of Maine economist Philip Trostel, who authored a study of first-time college students leaving Maine, wrote in the *Maine Policy Review*: "Relatively low public support and hence relatively high tuition, is an important part of the reason why many students evidently feel that higher education in Maine is not a good deal. ... The key issue is the cost and quality of our public higher education compared to the alternatives. As with other things that people buy, what matters is the relative cost compared to the relative quality."

But for the luring capacity of private higher education institutions, some New England states might be at a severe economic and social disadvantage due to the large number of students who leave to attend college elsewhere.

The freshmen who leave their home states or the region are often among the best and brightest, as evidenced by the list of institutions they attend. This raises tough questions, particularly for states like Connecticut and Maine, about "brain drain" and those states' apparent inability to keep their own brightest students at home.

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