



NEWS

The S.C. Commission on Higher Education

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Having a well-educated, highly skilled workforce is critical to South Carolina's competitiveness in today's knowledge economy. The collective contributions of our colleges and universities in providing a talented and educated workforce are central to the state's long-term success and prosperity. The state's ability to retain the graduates of its colleges and universities is one vitally important factor in raising the state's educational levels.

A special report **"Retaining Graduates of South Carolina's Public Colleges and Universities,"** released today at the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education's monthly meeting explores the retention of South Carolina's public college and university graduates. The report provides an initial statewide look at the numbers of graduates who remain in South Carolina, and the results are very encouraging. South Carolina is retaining a significant majority of its college graduates five years after graduation.

To conduct the study, the Commission collaborated with the South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles and matched information on college graduates from academic years 1996-97 and 2001-02 to drivers' license records five years after graduation. Graduates were considered to have remained in South Carolina if matched to an "active" South Carolina license. Also examined were differences by type of college, graduates' state of origin upon initial college enrollment, degree level, gender, race/ethnicity, discipline, and the county of residence of graduates who remained in the state. Because of limitations for the timeframes considered in data collected centrally at the Commission, only graduates of public colleges and universities are included. Data are now being collected that will enable future consideration of graduates of independent colleges and universities, as well.

For both groups of graduates (undergraduate and graduate), 68% of graduates remained in South Carolina five years later. Of those originally from South Carolina, 79% remained. Of those in the 2001-02 cohort of graduates who were initially from South Carolina, 86% of those earning certificate/diploma remained in South Carolina after five years, 83% associate's, 74% bachelor's, 75% master's, 64% doctoral, and 66% first professional.

The state's undergraduate scholarships have been attracting more South Carolinians to the state's colleges and universities. While the timeframe of this study pre-dates significant expansions of the state's undergraduate scholarship programs, information is included on the 2001-02 graduates who had received a merit scholarship. The positive news is that, like all graduates, significant numbers of students who had benefited from these scholarship programs are also remaining after graduation as evidenced by the 67% of the Palmetto Fellows recipients and 77% of LIFE recipients who remained in the state as of 2007.

The data in this new report provide baseline information that can be used in the future to better understand whether initiatives now underway are paying off in increased education levels for South Carolina.

Dr. Garrison Walters, Executive Director of the Commission, commented, "Higher education is the best investment a state can make to improve its economy. Retaining a high proportion of our graduates, as we are now doing, is a huge boost to South Carolinians' quality of life. Although we're proud of this success, we're going to work very hard to improve since the future well-being of the state and its citizens depends on it."

The complete report is available on the Commission's website at www.che.sc.gov.