

College Choice and the Rural Brain Drain: EVIDENCE FROM ONE LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

Rural communities in America must increasingly deal with the effects of youth out-migration because the desire and need to move for educational and economic reasons to more urban areas often requires the brightest young minds to leave the rural areas where they grew up (Carr & Kefalas, 2009).

Education is often the primary way for rural youth to distinguish themselves from their peers (Reid, 1989).

By focusing on degrees in demand in the rural job market and cultivating opportunities for returning, many rural youth are able to return to their rural communities (von Reichert, Cromartie, & Arthun 2011).

METHODS

This study identified relationships between home community (rural or non-rural), college of enrollment, and the type of community (rural or non-rural) where graduates lived six or seven years after graduating from the University of Arkansas.

Using institutional data for 2007 and 2008 graduates, including parental (or guardian) ZIP codes, graduates' current ZIP code, and undergraduate college and major, Chi square goodness-of-fit tests were used to determine if significant ($p < .05$) differences existed between the university as a whole and its six undergraduate colleges.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study support the idea of a rural brain drain, particularly in regard to the nearly half of all rural graduates who did not return to rural communities.

Through focusing on the secondary students in Arkansas who will potentially return to rural communities, the effects of the rural brain drain can possibly be alleviated in the state.

Focusing on rural students who will return to rural communities could include financial support for colleges and high schools in the areas of agriculture and STEM, as well as improving high school students' understanding of careers that are available in rural communities and how that should match a choice of college or major.

RESULTS

Parental and Current Residential Codes by College for 2007 and 2008 University of Arkansas Graduates (N = 6204)

	Agriculture % (n = 653)	Architecture % (n = 190)	Arts & Sciences % (n = 2397)	Business % (n = 1492)	Education % (n = 861)	Engineering % (n = 611)	University % (n = 6204)
Graduates from rural areas	53.4**	38.4	42.1	40.0**	45.4	50.9**	44.0
Graduates living in rural areas	38.0**	25.3	27.0*	26.0**	31.2	34.7**	29.2

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Rural and Non-rural 2007 and 2008 U of A Graduates' Current Residential Codes by College (N = 6204)

	Agriculture	Architecture	Arts & Sciences	Business	Education	Engineering	University
Rural graduates (n)	347	73	1007	593	391	309	2720
Rural graduates returning to rural areas	60.5%**	41.1%	50.0%	51.3%	52.9%	54.7%	52.3%
Non-rural graduates (n)	303	117	1365	893	470	298	3446
Non-rural graduates living in rural areas	12.2%	15.4%	10.1%	9.3%	13.2%	14.1%	11.0%

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Rural University of Arkansas Graduates and Residence after College (N = 2720)

	Agriculture % (n = 347)	Architecture % (n = 73)	Arts & Sciences % (n = 1007)	Business % (n = 593)	Education % (n = 391)	Engineering % (n = 309)	University % (n = 2720)
Rural graduates returning to home community	39.2*	28.8	32.7	29.7	32.5	38.2	66.7
Rural graduates returning to rural areas 50 miles or closer to home	80.0	73.3	78.3	77.6	77.3	85.8*	79.1

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

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