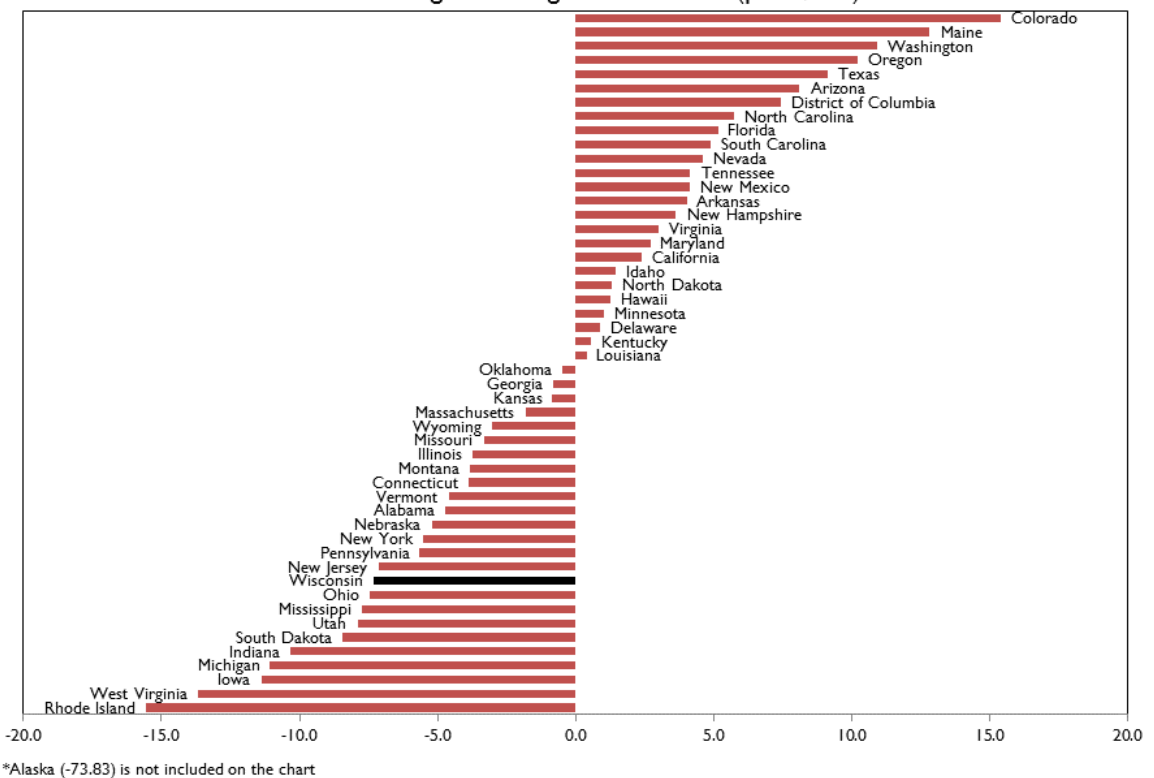


Wisconsin's Education Pipeline: "Is Wisconsin Experiencing a "Brain Drain"?"

In an editorial published in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (June 14, 2014) Bruce Speight argued that "[f]or the past decade, Wisconsin has been experiencing a brain drain, with more college graduates leaving the state than staying." More recently (August 2, 2015) Duey Stroebel also wrote in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel that "[i]n recent years, Wisconsin has seen a large exodus of college graduates seeking opportunities in other states. This "brain drain" stunts entrepreneurial efforts, shrinks the tax base and ultimately hinders the state's overall ability to innovate and grow economically." If Wisconsin is suffering from a "brain drain" this represents not only a slow drain on the state's economy but is a symptom of something fundamentally at risk with Wisconsin: what is it about Wisconsin that repels the most highly educated people?

College graduates, particularly those that are young and single, have higher rates of inter-state migration relative to individuals with lower levels of educational attainment. Some areas receive college graduates on a net basis (i.e. experience a brain gain), while other states lose them (i.e. have a brain drain). Indeed, if we look at net flows of college educated people it becomes clear that states such as Colorado, Washington, Texas and the Carolinas are gaining, while states such as New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, along with Wisconsin, are losing college educated people (Figure 1). The neighboring states of Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan are also losing college graduates, while Minnesota is seeing only a very modest "brain gain".

Figure 1: Domestic Net Migration Rate of the Population Age 18 to 64 with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher 2010-2014 (per 1,000)*



The flow of highly educated people is a two-way street, with both out-migration rates and in-migration rates influencing the overall net rate. Based on the most recent data available, Wisconsin has one of the lowest rates of out-migration among all states. In fact, Wisconsin's out-migration rate is below that of many states showing a brain gain, such as Colorado, Oregon, Nevada, Virginia and Montana (Figure 2).

In comparison to its out-migration rate, Wisconsin's in-migration rate is even lower. Specifically, only six states have a lower in-migration rate than Wisconsin (Figure 3). These data suggest that it is not a large out-flow of college educated people that is driving Wisconsin's net loss of college graduates, but rather extremely low rates of in-migration. Accordingly, Wisconsin's migration dynamic is characterized less by a "brain drain" and more so by a lack of a "brain gain."

These figures suggest that a singular focus on the retention of college graduates is somewhat misplaced. Wisconsin is already a relatively "sticky state." Approximately 60% of college graduates currently living in Wisconsin were also born in the state of Wisconsin, which places it 8th highest among all states. This percentage is slightly lower than Iowa (61.1%) or Michigan (64.6%) but higher than Illinois (54.3%) or Minnesota (53.6%). While this share of native Wisconsinites may include people that moved after graduation and returned at some point, it nonetheless shows that Wisconsin has one of the lowest shares of non-native college graduates that relocated from other states. Consequently, Wisconsin must instead ask itself is what can be done to attract college educated people from outside Wisconsin?

Figure 2 - Domestic Out-Migration Rate Age 18 to 64 with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher 2010-2014 (per 1,000)

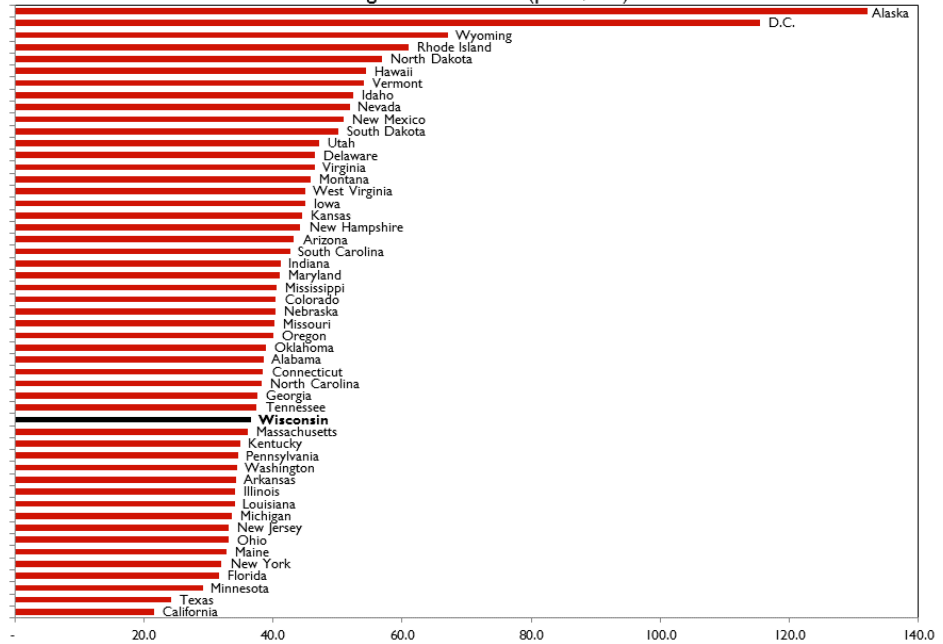


Figure 3 - Domestic In-Migration Rate Age 18 to 64 with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher 2010-2014 (per 1,000)

