



Not just any job will keep college grads in Michigan

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Even Lou Glazer admits his view of how to revive Michigan's troubled economy can be tough to wrap your head around.

Glazer, president of Ann Arbor-based think tank Michigan Future Inc., has been saying for some time that retaining and attracting young college graduates is the most important thing Michigan can do to ensure a bright economic future.

Watch where highly educated young people go, Glazer said, and you'll find places, such as Chicago, Minneapolis and Boston, with vibrant economies and buzzing urban scenes.

"For a lot of these kids, place matters," Glazer told me.

Even as much as jobs, according to Glazer's controversial viewpoint.

A new survey by Michigan Future found 46 percent of those who graduated from a Michigan four-year public university last year left the state, even though 35 percent of those who departed had job offers here.

Their top three destinations were Illinois, California and New York. Eleven percent of Michigan college grads surveyed went to Chicago. About half who left the state didn't have job offers where they relocated.

But Glazer's legion of critics, including Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, say he has it backward.

What smart young people really want are jobs, they say. Create them, and we'll retain and attract all the college graduates we need.

Don't tell that to the folks in Iowa who are trying to keep that state's college graduates at home.

Young, college-educated Iowans are leaving the state in droves, even though there are plenty of jobs available, according to a fascinating New York Times story.

The May 31 Times dispatch reported Iowa created 13,000 nonfarm jobs last year, in part because of growth in ethanol and wind energy businesses. Michigan also is seeking new jobs in those sectors.

But some 3,300 Iowans left the work force last year, leaving employers with more jobs than they could fill. Iowa's unemployment rate was 3.5 percent in April, compared with Michigan's jobless rate of 6.9 percent that month.

Government and industries have invested nearly \$2.8 billion into downtown Des Moines to build bars, restaurants, neighborhood shops and lofts in an attempt to retrain and attract young professionals, the Times reported May 31.

One 25-year-old insurance company sales analyst said employers must offer such amenities as free on-site gyms, dry cleaning services and Starbucks coffee bars to keep college grads from leaving the cornfields of Iowa.

Iowa has been able to draw business investment from elsewhere with the lure of some of the lowest wages of any state in the country.

But, ironically, some say lower wages are driving college graduates out of the state because higher student debt loads are prompting them to seek better-paying jobs.

Iowa's dilemma shows Michigan must do more than just create jobs for today's college grads, who want fulfilling careers, cool places to live and free gym memberships.

Contact Rick Haglund at rhaglund@boothmichigan.com

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